Sound Change, Priming, Salience

Producing and Perceiving Variation in Liverpool English

Marten Juskan

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To Daniela

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1 Introduction

1.1 Intentions — what this study is about

The present dissertation is primarily interested in the impact that sociolinguistic salience can have on the perception of language. As such, it is firmly rooted within sociophonetics, but also inherently inter-disciplinary in nature due to the fact that mental representations, cognitive processing, and the influence of stereotypes are relevant in the context of the research question. A number of studies conducted in recent years have shown that perceivers integrate social information about speakers when processing linguistic material. Niedzielski (1999) and Hay, Nolan, et al. (2006) in particular provide evidence that subjects perceive one and the same acoustic stimulus differently depending on what they sub-consciously believe to know about the speaker they are listening to. Hay & Drager (2010) then went one step further and showed that even cues that are both more subtle and more indirect are capable of biasing the cognitive system towards processing or, more precisely, categorising linguistic input in a particular way. These data are not only extremely relevant for models of how humans cognitively deal with variation in language, but especially the results of Hay & Drager (2010) additionally have the potential of changing the way linguistic experiments are designed and conducted: if even small objects completely unrelated to the task can influence the outcome of an experiment by their mere presence, then it seems necessary to control for the physical surroundings of such experiments much more carefully than most of us probably have done so far.

There is, however, an aspect that has not figured prominently in previous research and that might be able to qualify the conclusions drawn from these studies: salience. In recent years, most sociophoneticians have incorporated some form of episodic memory in their theoretical frameworks, and this is also the model that is best able to explain the results derived from previous priming studies in sociolinguistics. Within this framework, salience should actually play a crucial role for priming effects because salient sensory events are believed to dominate long-term memory due to their prominence in perception (cf. Pierrehumbert 2006). It is only logical that they should then also be more prone to manipulations such

as priming, which leads to the main hypothesis of this study: the strength of an exemplar priming effect is a direct function of the sociolinguistic salience of the test variable. Priming effects of the kind that Niedzielski (1999) and Hay, Nolan, et al. (2006) found would then be restricted to linguistic variables that are highly salient, possibly even to those that have reached the level of conscious awareness in the relevant speech community (*stereotypes* in Labovian terminology).

The testing ground for this hypothesis is Scouse, the variety of English spoken in the city of Liverpool and parts of its immediate surroundings in the north-west of England. There are several points which make Liverpool English a good candidate for the present study: (1) It has a number of phonological features (some more, some less salient according to the literature) that set it apart from the standard and surrounding non-standard varieties; (2) It is one of the most widely known (cf. Trudgill 1999), and (3) most heavily stigmatised varieties in the UK (cf. Montgomery 2007). Scouse is a convenient choice of variety in the context of this thesis because the presence of variants that attract overt commentary is obviously a prerequisite for testing the hypothesis formulated above.

Four phonological variables (two vocalic, two consonantal) have been selected as the focus of this thesis: happy-tensing, velar nasal plus, the NURSE-SQUARE merger, and lenition of /k/. The first two of these are generally thought to carry very low levels of social salience in Liverpool, while the remaining two are considered to be stereotypes by many linguists. However, there are a number of reasons that advise against blindly and exclusively categorising these variables as salient or non-salient on the basis of previous research alone. The most important of these is that, for the present study, it is desirable to have a classification that is more fine-grained than the binary salient vs. non-salient one. Additionally, Liverpool English is reported to go against the general trend of dialect levelling found in many other places (Kerswill 2003). Instead, Watson (2007a: 237) found Scouse to be "getting Scouser", at least with respect to some variables. Especially against the backdrop of this ongoing change, it is therefore necessary to independently ascertain the salience of the four variables under scrutiny here first. This is done by analysing production data (collected in the form of sociolinguistic interviews) and measuring the salience of a variable with respect to the traditional indicator-marker-stereotype hierarchy introduced by Labov.

This approach provides the opportunity to address several additional questions along the way, as it were, such as whether younger Liverpudlians have stronger local accents than older speakers in *every* respect, or how these changes are related to local identity, the internal as well as external image of their city, and attitudes of speakers towards their variety. These issues are, of course, particularly

interesting in the case of Liverpool, because the city has seen such a tremendous amount of physical, economic, and social change in the last 50 years, and this is likely to have at least some impact on the (socio-)linguistic behaviour of speakers. Furthermore, Liverpool English is a variety for which Watson (2007b: 351) stated in 2007 that "modern research [was] lacking", especially in the area of variation along social dimensions such as age, gender, or class. It is true that, in the 11 since Watson's claim, a number of linguistic studies focusing on Liverpool have been published, but I would still argue that we know far more about many other varieties of English than we do about Scouse. As far as I am aware, for instance, there is still no complete descriptive account of Liverpool English except Knowles (1973), which is now quite dated and also clearly and explicitly *not* a truly variationist study of the kind Watson (2007b) refers to. I will try to narrow this gap a bit, but it should be noted that the primary purpose of analysing production data, in the present study, is to provide a sound basis for comparison for the subsequent perception test. The focus is therefore on establishing the salience of the four test variables and on discovering any differences (with respect to salience) between social groups, particularly along the age dimension.

1.2 Restrictions — what this study is not about

An a priori limitation of my thesis is that it is only concerned with Scouse as an accent. Local characteristics in the lexicon, (morpho-)syntax, or discourse pragmatics will remain unaddressed. It is also *not* the aim of this book to be an updated version of Knowles's 1973 study and provide a complete description of the phonological system of Scouse. Rather, it focusses (almost) exclusively on the four variables listed above and largely ignores other segmental and suprasegmental features of Liverpool English. A detailed account of the social stratification of local variants is equally beyond the scope of my thesis. Social differentiations of subjects (for the production data) are therefore comparatively coarse, and the size of the speaker sample does not permit much more fine-grained distinctions. It is, however, more than sufficient for assessing the *social salience* of our variables, which is the purpose it was collected for.

This brings me to the second issue that it might be preferable to clarify from the very beginning of this book. Despite the fact that *salience* is part of the subtitle of this work and notwithstanding that the term will turn up again and again in what is to follow, the present study is *not* a book *about* salience per se (cf. Chapter 2). There is an ongoing debate among researchers about what exactly salience is or what precisely it should refer to. My analysis will not add anything

to this discussion, mostly because I am not interested — in the context of the present thesis — in what *makes* something salient. Instead, I intend to address the question of what salience *does* in perception, particularly when priming is involved. In other words, the spotlight is on the *effects* of salience, not on its *causes*. Essentially, social salience will be the scale used to measure the degree of awareness of, and attention paid to, a particular variable. I will then show that the level of awareness correlates with the strength of the priming effect. How and why awareness came about in the first place is irrelevant for this purpose and will not be discussed any further.

1.3 Structure of the book

Chapter ?? sketches the history of the city of Liverpool and its accent to give the reader an idea about the social changes that have taken place in this city and how they might influence the attitudes of speakers from different generations towards Scouse and questions of local identity. Chapter ?? contains a short overview of the pool of phonetic and phonological features that Liverpool English draws from, and presents the four variables that this book focusses on. Chapter 2, finally, explains how the term *salience* is used in this work, and also how it will be operationalised. Furthermore, it lays out some fundamental principles of exemplar theory and describes how the main hypothesis of this dissertation is motivated by the theoretical framework.

Next is a a comprehensive description (Chapter ??) of how the production data were collected (interview structure, sampling), measured (parameters, semi-automatic processing), and analysed (normalisation, statistical modelling). Chapters ?? (vowels) and ?? (consonants) contain the quantitative analysis of the data gathered from the sociolinguistic interviews, while Chapter 3 presents a recapitulatory qualitative analysis of participants' explicit comments about (specific features of) their accent, local identity, and the like. In Chapter 4, both quantitative and qualitative results are summarised, discussed, and contextualised. While this part dominates in terms of the space devoted to it, this should not be taken to imply that it is also conceptually more important — it just so happens that a detailed analysis of production patterns is rather space and time consuming, even when it is a comparatively restricted one.

In the remaining chapters, this book turns to perception. Stimulus generation, recruitment of participants, presentation of test material and other methodological issues are treated in Chapter ??, while the results of the online perception test are reported in detail in Chapter ??. My interpretation of said results (Chapter

??) takes into account both the production data, on the one hand, and previous research, particularly by Hay, Nolan, et al. (2006) and Hay & Drager (2010), on the other. Chapter ??, finally, rounds off the study with a brief recapitulation of the most relevant findings and conclusions.

Most chapters end with a summary that contains the main points. Exceptions to this rule are the chapters on methodology and the ones presenting the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses. In the former case, a summary was deemed to be rather unnecessary as the whole point of these chapters is to describe the methods employed *in detail* for reasons of replicability. The 'results' chapters, on the other hand, are summarised in the discussions (Chapters 4 and ??), and therefore do not require a résumé of their own.

2 A few words on salience and exemplar theory

This chapter contains some thoughts on the notion of salience and its role within the framework of exemplar theory. Both concepts are of prime importance for this study, and it is therefore vital that some basic assumptions pertaining to these notions be defined before we move on to the empirical results that they will help interpret and explain.

2.1 Salience

In this thesis, the concept of salience has already been brought up several times by now, without, however, having received a definition of any kind. Since the term is omnipresent in sociolinguistic research chances are that most readers will have a pretty good idea of what 'salience' is, but it is not at all unlikely that there will not be just one idea, but several ideas. This is because sociolinguistic salience is a notoriously vague concept that is defined in a number of different ways by different researchers. I do not intend to partake in the discussion as to which of the various definitions of salience is the most useful one, since — as I hope to make clear below — the question of what *makes* a linguistic variable salient is largely irrelevant to the present study. This thesis is rather interested in what salience *does*, primarily in perception. A short review of some relevant literature is nevertheless necessary in order to avoid confusion as to what exactly is meant when the term 'salience' is used in this work. However, this account will deliberately be as brief as possible; more detailed analyses of salience, its history, and use in sociolinguistics can, for example, be found in Kerswill & Williams (2002), Rácz (2013), and Auer (2014) — all three of which are also the primary sources of what is to follow below.

2.1.1 Salience and circularity

Strictly speaking, providing a basic definition of salience that all or at least the majority of researchers can agree on should be a rather straightforward and un-

controversial task. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, salience (in psychology) is the "quality or fact of being more prominent in a person's awareness or in his memory of past experience" — in simpler terms, salience is the quality of 'sticking out' from the rest. Kerswill & Williams (2002: 81) stay very close to this general description when they define (socio-)linguistic salience as "a property of a linguistic item or feature that makes it in some way perceptually and cognitively prominent". While the two definitions are very similar, there is actually a crucial difference, because Kerswill & Williams talk about salience as something that *makes* a feature stick out, not just the simple fact that it *does*. This type of definition can easily lead to what Auer (cf. 2014: 9) criticises as mixing *criteria* that allow us to identify salient features with the *causes* of salience, i.e. the traits that *make* a variable salient in the first place. He does, however, acknowledge that criteria and causes often *are* difficult to distinguish because they can actually be dependent on each other. His example is based on overt corrections, which are not only evidence for the salience of the corrected feature, but which also have their share in *making* the feature salient within the speech community.

A more serious problem ensues when *criteria* and *effects* of salience (on language change) are not strictly kept apart. This issue is addressed by Kerswill & Williams (2002: 82) as well, who argue that when salience is used as "a potential explanatory factor, (…) the concept all too easily lapses into circularity and mere labelling", a point that is illustrated very well by their critique of Trudgill (1986). According to Trudgill, salient markers can be distinguished from non-salient indicators (see 2.1.3) by the fact that, among other things, the former are stigmatised and undergoing change while the latter are not. The problem is that stigmatisation and the change that it often entails (for example, when people start avoiding the stigmatised variant) are not only the prerequisites of marker status, but also its outcome — people are aware of non-standard variants because they are stigmatised, and the variants are stigmatised because people are aware of them. This essentially boils down to saying that a variable is salient because it is salient, which means that 'salience' loses any explanatory potential altogether.

In the present study, this would correspond to (1) hypothesising that only salient variables will create a priming effect, (2) running a perception experiment directly, and then (3) claiming that the presence of a priming effect for some variables but not for others is evidence for their salience, (4) which in turn explains their behaviour in the perception test. To avoid this kind of circularity it is therefore absolutely crucial to establish the salience status of the test variables *independently*, which is why the production data were collected.

Research based on the notion of salience is perhaps particularly prone to fall-

ing victim to the circularity trap because "salience *attempts* to combine both structural (language-internal) factors with sociolinguistic and psychological (extra-linguistic) factors in a single explanatory concept" (Kerswill & Williams 2002: 83, my emphasis), but many researchers actually focus primarily on one particular aspect only. However, if salience is to have any explanatory value (which necessitates avoiding circularity), "it *must* have recourse to extra-linguistic factors, which will be a combination of cognitive, social psychological or pragmatic factors" (Kerswill & Williams 2002: 83, my emphasis).

2.1.2 Cognitive vs. social salience

The way it is commonly used, sociolinguistic salience is thus a concept that combines cognitive and social components. However, as Rácz (cf. 2013: 11) points out, it actually makes sense to distinguish cognitive and social salience. The cognitive aspect is at least implicitly present in the most basic definition of salience: for something to 'stick out' it needs to have some quality that makes it more prominent in perception, and since this is inevitably linked to processing it is part of the cognitive domain. Social salience, according to Auer (cf. 2014: 10), is based on the fact that a particular feature can be linked to a certain (social) type of speaker, who, in turn, is associated with social and emotional evaluations, which are then transferred to the linguistic feature itself. The stronger these negative or positive evaluations are, the more (socially) salient the feature will be. Naturally, a feature has to be noticed first before it can be socially evaluated and judged, so cognitive salience is in fact a prerequisite of social salience. If a feature is *cognitively* salient it can acquire social meaning and thus become *socially* salient, too — crucially, though, it does not have to (cf. Rácz 2013: 11). Cognitive salience is thus a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for social salience.

Distinguishing cognitive from social salience can potentially help in sorting out some of the apparent confusion in salience research, because it allows to separate problems concerned with, for example, the interplay of social salience and language change, from a discussion that is more focussed on the primary causes of salience in the cognitive domain, irrespective of whether or not they result in social salience in a particular context. However, researchers are not really agreed on what makes something *cognitively* salient, either. While he does not claim that this is the only source of salience, Rácz (cf. 2013: 9) largely equates cognitive salience with surprise and operationalises it by means of transitional probabilities: a feature is surprising if it is unexpected in a particular context, i.e. when it has a low probability of occurrence.

Jaeger & Weatherholtz (cf. 2017: 37) embrace the same idea of surprisal as a

function of unexpectedness, or low probability of occurrence, in a given context and equate it with informativeness — the more surprising an input, the more information is gained by processing it. They champion this operationalisation of salience not only because it is relatively easy to quantify, but also because surprisal has been found to play a role in research looking at reading times and implicit learning (cf. Jaeger & Weatherholtz 2017: 37). Crucially, Jaeger & Weatherholtz see surprisal as (one of) the cause(s) of *initial* salience, when the listener first encounters a given variant. Long-term salience, as the result of cumulative exposure, on the other hand, is based on "informativeness about social group membership" (Jaeger & Weatherholtz 2017: 38), i.e. on the association of a feature with a group of speakers, in whose speech it is usually frequent and thus not unexpected any more.

This account may well be able to explain the diverging levels of salience reported in the literature for the four variables analysed in this book. Lenition of /k/ and fronted NURSE are largely limited to Liverpool English, while velar nasal plus and happy-tensing are also found in other accents. From the point of view of the speech community as a whole, the former two have thus a lower probability of occurrence, and are also more informative with respect to their association (only) with Liverpool speakers.

Conceiving of salient features as surprising (and 'informative') ones is thus in line with research in psycholinguistics and the cognitive sciences, and this approach may also go some way to explaining the salience of certain sociolinguistic variables. But at least in sociolinguistics, surprisal is by no means the only option. Many other factors have also been proposed as potential sources of cognitive salience, for example (high) frequency or phoneme status (cf. Auer 2014: 8). Furthermore, it seems quite clear that attention, as a top-down factor, interferes with the bottom-up stimulus property of unexpectedness, for example when subjects are asked to count passes in a basketball video and fail to notice a person in a weird costume (a highly surprising event) crossing the scene (cf. Zarcone et al. 2017: 8). It can thus be said that attention "weights surprisal effects from one level or another, depending on the current goals and on perceived rewards" (Zarcone et al. 2017: 8).

With regard to the effects of salience on linguistic behaviour — usually change, convergence, and divergence are the focus of interest — I agree with Auer (2014: 17) who claims that sociolinguistic salience is "hierarchically organised" in the sense that "cognitive [causes of salience] are subordinate to social ones" (my translation). He argues that cognitive aspects do contribute to the sociolinguistic salience of a variable, but much less so than social ones, and explains that this

is because cognitive factors of salience are 'filtered' by the social layer (cf. Auer 2014: 18). What this means in practical terms is that only certain cognitively salient features are selected for social evaluation (i.e. they receive social attention) while others do not acquire social meaning. In the first case cognitive factors merely 'reinforce' sociolinguistic salience (which is nonetheless dominated by social evaluations), while in the latter (i.e. when cognitively salient features are not used to do social work), the resulting salience of the feature is 'markedly' lower (cf. Auer 2014: 18). Moreover, "from a sociolinguistic perspective, the choice of features which become [sociolinguistically] salient is in large part an arbitrary one" and seems to depend primarily on "community consensus" (Llamas et al. 2017: 56), which is why I would argue that, *for a sociolinguist*, the question of what makes something cognitively salient can be considered secondary to the (descriptive) knowledge about which features the community agreed to pay attention to.

2.1.3 Salience in this study

Since the primary hypothesis of this study is that only variables having a very high degree of *sociolinguistic* salience are capable of creating priming effects in perception experiments (cf. 1.1), it follows that the focus in independently assessing the salience of the variables presented in Chapter **??** should be on social aspects. I will, therefore, only be interested in *if* a variable is sociolinguistically salient for speakers, but not in *why* it is. It is, for instance, quite possible that a variable that is found to be socially salient is so because it is more informative than others with respect to unambiguously indexing a particular speech community. Given the fact that I am interested in the *effects* of salience rather than its *causes*, however, this piece of information, while interesting, is irrelevant to the present study. For this reason, cognitive aspects of salience will largely remain unaddressed in this thesis.

In very general terms, the question of interest in the present study is thus simply "[w]hether a variable is recognised in any way", which means that this dissertation is in line with many other sociolinguistic studies, where this is "what researchers (…) usually mean when they talk about *salience*" (Rácz 2013: 4, emphasis in original). In contrast to Rácz (2013), who explicitly includes his own work in the above statement, I will not, however, regard a feature as salient if it is recognised in *any* way, but only if it is 'recognised' as socially meaningful. The next question, then, is of course how we know that a variable is socially meaningful for speakers. While Chapter **??** provides a rough distinction into salient and non-salient variables of Liverpool English as they are presented in the literature,

these classifications are (1) primarily based on the observations of experts (dialectologists) or laypersons with a special interest in linguistic phenomena (e.g. the authors of the *Lern Yerself Scouse* series), and/or (2) grounded on databases that are often several decades old (Watson & Clark 2013 and Watson & Clark 2015 are notable exceptions to both points). An additional, up-to-date assessment of salience among the speakers of the variety themselves therefore seems desirable to make sure the conclusions drawn in the literature are still valid, and, if possible, to arrive at a more fine-grained ordering of variables on the salience scale.

Unfortunately, uncovering social attitudes towards a particular phonetic-phonological feature is seldom a straightforward task. This is because "language users are usually very much aware of particular words or intonation patterns *other* people use (…), but are much less attentive to phonetic differences" (Rácz 2013: 3, emphasis in the original). Directly asking subjects about phonetic or phonemic characteristics of an accent is still an option, but one that, for the majority of speakers, will only work in the case of the most heavily stigmatised features. A more indirect measure is required to capture the middle ground of variables that do carry some social meaning, but not enough to attract overt commentary. In this study, as in many others, this indirect measure is based on the *effects* of social salience, the most important of which include *social stratification*, *hypercorrection*, and, above all, *style shifting*.

Social stratification is based on the idea that "the normal workings of society have produced systematic differences between certain (…) people", which can be thought of in terms of status or prestige, and assumes that these social differences are mirrored in linguistic behaviour: when two people can be ranked with respect to a social status criterion, they will be ranked identically with respect to their use of a non-standard feature (Labov 1972: 44–45). What this means in practical terms is that, for instance, middle class speakers will usually have lower frequencies of usage than working class speakers. In this work, the term will also be extended to gender differences, but certainly not because I wish to imply a social ranking between women and men. Rather, this is because, in numerous sociolinguistic studies, women have been shown to be more sensitive to linguistic forms that are socially relevant (cf. Labov 2001: 290–291), so if women use a variant in a different way than men then this suggests that said variant has acquired at least a certain degree of social meaning.

As a general term, hypercorrection refers to the "misapplication of an imperfectly learned rule" (Labov 1972: 126). In sociolinguistics, the term is traditionally used to describe cases where a particular group of speakers (sub-)consciously tries to approximate the linguistic usage of a (prestigious) target speech com-

munity, but fails in their endeavour because the speakers actually 'overshoot the mark' and end up with realisational rates that are beyond the model set by the target group (cf. Labov 1972: 126). In the present study, the term hypercorrection will mostly be used in the more general sense, which extends its scope to any case where a given rule has been learned 'imperfectly', e.g. when speakers use an even more non-standard variant in more formal speech styles (compared to spontaneous speech) or when they correct the 'wrong' member of a merger. Both applications of hypercorrection imply (sub-)conscious awareness of socially meaningful variation, as both the target (in the Labovian definition) or the rule (in the more general reading) have a social component.

Style shifting, finally, is similar to social stratification (in fact, another term that is used by Labov is stylistic stratification). However, in style shifting, use of linguistic features is not correlated with social status of the speakers, but with the degree of formality of the communicative situation. A non-standard variant will thus be used most in very informal (e.g a conversation among friends), less in more formal (e.g. a job interview), and least in the most formal speaking registers (e.g. reading out a written text) — of course, the reverse is true for standard, prestigious variants. The presence of style shifting presupposes (sub-)conscious evaluation of the linguistic feature, which results in it being considered more or less appropriate in a given, socially loaded, communicative situation. In consequence, "social awareness of a given variable corresponds to the slope of style shifting" (Labov 2001: 196).

Based on social stratification, hypercorrection, and style shifting, Labov's 1972 hierarchy of *indicators*, *markers*, and *stereotypes* is a convenient way of categorising linguistic variables according to their sociolinguistic salience. An indicator is a (non-standard) linguistic feature which is shared among a particular group of speakers and can therefore act as a defining characteristic of that speech community (which it indexes, i.e. 'points to'), particularly to outsiders. The speech community itself is, however, completely unaware of the feature and uses it to the same degree in all communicative situations, so there is no style shifting. When a speech community starts to become (sub-consciously) aware of a feature it is increasingly invested with social meaning and associated with a particular degree of (non-)formality. These markers show social stratification (i.e. they are used more by some social groups and less by others) and style shifting: frequencies of non-standard realisations decrease systematically in more formal speaking styles. A *stereotype* finally, does not only exhibit social stratification and style shifting, but has actually crossed the threshold to conscious awareness, and is explicitly commented on by members of the speech community (cf. Labov

1972: 178–180). Speakers are thus completely unaware of *indicators*, only sub-consciously aware of *markers*, and fully conscious of *stereotypes*.

Originally, Labov conceived of this hierarchy as a sort of sociolinguistic life cycle that every linguistic feature invariably went through: starting out as an indicator, acquiring social meaning and turning into a marker, before finally becoming the object of stigmatisation which eventually leads to disappearance. He later on corrected this interpretation, however, after several decades of sociolinguistic research had shown that some indicators do not seem to ever turn into markers and that heavily stigmatised variants can nevertheless survive (Labov 1994), for instance when they enjoy covert prestige as markers (this time in the every day sense of the word) of a local identity. In any case, this question does not affect the usefulness of the indicator-marker-stereotype hierarchy as a means of categorising variables according to how aware speakers are of them.

Based on the work of Silverstein (cf., for instance, Silverstein 2003) Johnstone et al. (cf. 2006: 78) have introduced new terminology centred around *first-*, *second-*, and *third-order indexicality*. There is a large degree of overlap between these terms and Labov's indicator-marker-stereotype distinction, while, of course, the two frameworks are not completely identical. Notable differences can, for example, be found between stereotypes and third-order indexicality: the former is (traditionally, at least) closely linked to stigmatisation and a higher chance of disappearance of the feature, while the latter term focusses on the conscious use of these features in performances of local identity and presumes that the relevant linguistic variants are, at this stage, primarily associated with place, and less with other social categories such as class (cf. Johnstone et al. 2006: 81–84). As we will see later, features of Scouse that can be classified as Labovian stereotypes *are* actually used in accent performances, and do not seem to be disappearing either, so it might seem preferable to use Johnstone et al.'s terminology. However, with respect to a hierarchical ordering of variables according to how conscious speakers are of them, indicator, marker, and stereotype — on the one hand — and first-, second-, and third-order indexicality — on the other hand — can be regarded as synonyms. Since the degree of sociolinguistic awareness is what this study is interested in, I will therefore stick to the more traditional Labovian terminology.

Rácz (2013: 6) criticises the indicator/marker distinction as "impl[ying] a complete absence of gradience" while linguistic awareness should be conceived of as having "many levels, very few categorical". I agree with the second part of this statement, but I do not see why one would have to give up on the convenience of Labov's classification (which is indeed rather categorical in nature) just because one believes that salience is gradient. It seems to me that it is quite possible to

distinguish, for example, different *degrees* of style shifting (How many styles are kept distinct? How significant are the differences?), *in addition to* a simple binary assessment of whether style shifting is present or not, and the same should hold for social stratification or hypercorrection. Such an approach should allow us to arrive at more fine-grained classifications of variables such as, for example, 'solid marker close to stereotype status' or 'indicator showing the beginnings of style-shifting'.

No matter how fine-grained the classification, however, what I intend to do is clearly what Kerswill & Williams (2002) have called using *salience* as a label, which means that it is "no more than another term for the indicator/marker distinction" (Rácz 2013: 32). This statement is certainly true with respect to the present study, but, as I hope to have made clear, the use of salience as a 'mere label' should not constitute a problem against the backdrop of what this thesis is interested in. I do not, in fact, *need* more than a convenient label that describes how much social meaning a particular variable carries for its users. In contrast to the argument presented by Kerswill & Williams (2002) — who mainly talk about research investigating change and contact — salience *will* nevertheless have an explanatory value in the present study when it is linked up to how sociolinguistic variables behave in priming experiments. Salience, in this dissertation, will thus be understood as meaning the amount of (social) awareness speakers have of a sociolinguistic variable. As such, it will be measured by the presence and, if applicable, degree of social stratification, hypercorrection, style shifting, and explicit comments and evaluations.

2.2 Exemplar theory

Any linguistic study that deals with the perception of speech is faced with the theoretical problem of how listeners process the range of intra- and inter-speaker variation that is abundant in naturalistic language data. Sociophonetic studies in particular have largely turned away from traditional accounts which assume that variation in the speech signal is normalised away to make the input fit into highly abstract and idealised mental categories. Most researchers explain their results against the backdrop of exemplar theory, and the present study is no exception in this respect. I will therefore provide a short overview of the assumptions and principles of this theory before addressing the place of salience in this model. Just as in Section 2.1, my account (which is inspired by the one presented in Juskan 2011) must be considered nothing but a brief summary, albeit one that should be more than sufficient for the purposes of the present study. The reader is referred

to Pierrehumbert 2006 for a more detailed discussion.

2.2.1 Basic principles

Exemplar theory has its origins in psychology (cf. Medin & Schaffer 1978), where it was conceived as a general theory to model how information is stored, organised, and accessed in long-term memory. The basic tenet of this model is that every stimulus, or sensory experience, leaves a memory trace in the perceiver's mind. Crucially, now, these traces, or 'exemplars', are specific in nature, so what is remembered is not a (single) abstract and idealised prototype of a category, but rather there will be a whole number of similar, but still slightly different exemplars. The information that is stored for any episodic memory is not restricted to the single feature of an exemplar that is most useful (or maybe even sufficient) to distinguish different mental categories. Instead, the memory trace is poly-dimensional and can include several characteristics (cf. Pierrehumbert 2006: 517). For a visual stimulus, for instance, this might include shape, colour, size, and others, even when only the shape is relevant in that hypothetical context. In fact, exemplars are even 'indexed' with additional information that is not directly linked to physical or sensory properties of the stimulus itself, but which pertains to the situation or the circumstances under which the experience in question was made. It would, for example, be remembered that the hypothetical visual stimulus from above was encountered in an experimental setting as part of a categorisation task — and possibly also whether the stimulus was categorised correctly or not (cf. Medin & Schaffer 1978: 210–212). The outcome in long-term memory of a number of similar sensory experiences will thus be a cloud of specific exemplars which are indexed with all sorts of additional information.

This should not be taken to imply that there are no mental categories, because exemplar theory by no means denies their existence. It assumes, however, that they are created on the basis of — and in addition to — the individual exemplars that are stored in memory in full detail. Categorisation happens via the process of indexation just explained. When perceivers are confronted with stimuli as representatives of a particular category (for example that of 'circle') then the concrete realisations will be remembered as detailed individual exemplars, but each of them will *also* be indexed as being a member of that category. A mental 'bin' in exemplar theory thus consists not of a single idealised prototype, but rather of a cloud of individual instantiations that all share a given label.

Newly encountered input will then be perceived (and categorised) with respect to how similar it is to the traces that have already been acquired. If, for example, a perceiver has remembered a cloud of small blue triangle exemplars, which are

indexed as belonging to category A, and a second cloud of big red circles (indexed as instances of category B), then a newly encountered small blue circle is likely to be categorised as a kind of A because the stimulus is more similar to the A exemplars than it is to the B exemplars (provided shape, colour, and size all have equal weighting) (cf. Medin & Schaffer 1978: 210–212). A stimulus 'activates' all remembered exemplars that are similar to it, which essentially means that they are cognitively foregrounded and therefore more 'accessible' (compared to other exemplars) for help in categorising the new input. Once an exemplar is stored in memory it can also act "as a retrieval cue to access information *stored with* stimuli similar to the probe" (Medin & Schaffer 1978: 210, my emphasis). This means that a stimulus that is similar to one particular exemplar X will not only activate this one memory trace (and possibly a few others that are also extremely similar), but in fact the whole memory cloud of exemplars that share a particular label with X, for example category membership or context in which the exemplar was acquired. It will become clear in the following paragraphs that activation of exemplars via indexed information is a crucial aspect of exemplar theory for any sociolinguistic priming study.

2.2.2 Application in (socio-)linguistics

According to Pierrehumbert (cf. 2006: 517), Goldinger (1996) and Johnson (1997) were the first to interpret linguistic findings (from speech processing) with the help of exemplar theory. In traditional approaches, variation in the speech signal is normalised away to reduce different phones to idealised, essentialist forms which correspond to the abstract phoneme categories in the perceiver's mind. In an exemplar theoretic account, speech sounds enter long-term memory as phonetically detailed exemplars, so "the lowest level of description is a parametric phonetic map rather than a set of discrete categories" (Pierrehumbert 2006: 519). Phonemes do exist as mental categories, but as just explained for episodic approaches more generally, they have to be viewed as "clusters of similar experiences", whose centres of gravity are malleable and can be changed by "incremental updating" of remembered exemplars (cf. Pierrehumbert 2006: 519). A phoneme is thus a collection of phonetic variants (the memory traces) which are all indexed as being realisations of one particular phoneme (cf. Pierrehumbert 2002: 113).

Indexation is, however, not restricted to phoneme assignment, but can also extend to other bits of linguistic information such as the immediate phonetic context. And of course any exemplar can be indexed with information that is somehow related to the wider context the experience was made in (cf. 2.2.1).

Sociophonetic studies usually assume that phonetically detailed exemplars are primarily indexed with social information about the speaker who uttered them, e.g. their regional origin, gender, age, etc. (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 370).

Activation of remembered exemplars is conceived of in the same way as in psychology. When speech sounds are perceived they activate any exemplars stored in long-term memory which are phonetically similar to the new input. The foregrounded memory traces then form the basis the input is processed and classified against. Activation can also be triggered indirectly via social information that the episodic memories are indexed with, a process which is actually very useful in dealing with variation in the speech signal.

Consider, for instance, the perception of vowels. It is a well-known fact that the formant structure of vowel realisations differs between women and men due to differences in vocal tract length. A perceiver who has been exposed to both female and male vowel articulations will therefore have two separate clouds of exemplars in long-term memory: one indexed with 'female', one with 'male'. When this perceiver now engages in conversation with a person they have never met before a non-linguistic perception (such as a visual cue that the interlocutor is female) will activate the memory cloud indexed with the appropriate gender before the other person has uttered a single sound. Thanks to this pre-activation of potentially similar exemplars subsequent perception of new material should be easier and more successful. The two types of activation (via similarity and via indexation) can reinforce each other: In cases where perceived social information about the speaker and the phonetic shape of the input activate the same group of exemplars, full activation will be reached faster (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 370–371). If, however, social cues and the phonetics of the stimulus are at odds (for example when a woman has an unusually deep voice), the 'wrong' exemplars will be activated via indexation and misperception becomes more likely.

Social indexation of phonetically detailed memory traces is not merely a theoretic assumption of exemplar theory but something that has been tested empirically. Strand & Johnson (1996) had participants classify synthesised vowels from a FOOT-STRUT continuum, which were presented together with photos of female and male faces. One and the same audio stimulus was classified differently depending on whether it had been accompanied by a photo of a woman or a man. This non-linguistic bit of information (gender of the speaker) was thus used in perception and biased subjects towards using 'female' or 'male' vowel boundaries when classifying the stimuli. The same effect could be achieved when confronting perceivers with a range of (consonantal) s-ʃ variants. These two fricatives are primarily distinguished by their central frequency, and the boundary

between the two phonemes (i.e. the point where, perceptually, a /ʃ/ becomes a /s/) is typically lower for male than for female realisations. When subjects assumed a speaker to be male (because they had been shown a photo of a male) the threshold for categorising an auditory stimulus as an instantiation of /ʃ/ was lower (cf. Strand & Johnson 1996; Strand 1999).

Of course, the sex/gender distinction is a rather crucial one in language perception, as men have vocal tracts that are physiologically different from those of women, which results in markedly lower resonance frequencies for the former. Since the difference is — at least to a degree — biologically determined and thus phylogenetically precedes other social categories such as class or occupation, it could be that gender of speaker is a piece of information that enjoys a particular status in linguistic processing.

Niedzielski (1999) has shown, however, that effects of social information on the perception of linguistic material are not limited to gender. She tested perception of Canadian Raising in Detroit. Many Canadian speakers have a raised onset in the /aʊ/ diphthong, so that the realisation of this vowel is often [əʊ]. These raised variants can also be found in the speech of Detroiters, but while Canadian Raising is a firm part of the stereotypical believes people from Detroit hold about Canadians, they are completely unaware of raised onsets in their *own* speech, which they consider to be standard US English (cf. Niedzielski 1999: 63). Niedzielski played her participants recordings of a female Detroit speaker, who naturally produced Canadian raising, presented them with 6 resynthesised vowels (ranging from hyper-low to hyper-raised onsets), and asked them to indicate which one sounded most like the one they had heard in the stimulus. All perceivers listened to the same voice, but half of them had 'MICHIGAN' written at the top of their answer sheet, while in the other group the corresponding label was 'CANADIAN'. These labels had a significant effect: although everyone received the same acoustic input, subjects who had been primed for 'Canada' were significantly more likely to perceive Canadian Raising than those who had been primed for 'Michigan' (cf. Niedzielski 1999: 64–68).

While Niedzielski does not do so herself, these results can be interpreted as evidence for the existence of social indexation of phonetically detailed exemplars. When the concept 'Canada' is invoked (via the label on the answer sheet) participants activate memory traces that are marked ('indexed') as having been produced by speakers of Canadian English. These exemplars contain raised onsets of the /aʊ/ diphthong and, since they are cognitively foregrounded, they bias the perceptual system towards hearing these variants in the new input as well. If the prime is 'Michigan', however, perceivers activate exemplars that are indexed

with 'US standard English' (because Detroiters consider themselves to be speakers of standard English). The centre of gravity in this exemplar cloud is, of course, shifted towards lower onsets, so subjects are more likely to perceive non-raised variants of /ɑʊ/ when these memory traces bias perception (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 372).

Hay, Nolan, et al. (2006) later successfully replicated Niedzielski's findings. They had an essentially identical methodology, but used the New Zealand-Australia opposition to prime participants, instead of Michigan-Canada as in Niedzielski's study. Their experiment was concerned with the perception of short front vowels, particularly /ɪ/. This phoneme is often realised as a raised [i] by Australians, and as a centralised [ə] by New Zealanders. Speakers in both countries frequently comment on this feature under the label of the 'fish 'n' chips' stereotype, as this is a common phrase that can be used to illustrate the differences in realisation (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 354). Participants were asked to match synthesised vowels to the ones they had heard in recordings of a female New Zealand speaker. The only difference between the experimental groups was once again the label at the top of the answer sheet. Results were comparable to Niedzielski 1999: subjects primed for New Zealand were more likely to perceive centralised tokens, while subjects primed for Australia were more likely to report more Australian percepts (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 359–363). Jannedy et al. (2011) have shown that a perceptual bias can even be generated when the priming categories are (socially and ethnically stratified) districts of one and the same city.

Whether subjects actually *believed* that the speaker was Australian turned out to be irrelevant: once exemplars indexed with 'Australia' had been activated by the prime they biased perception, irrespective of conscious evaluations of the prime (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 374). In a follow-up study Hay & Drager (2010) furthermore demonstrated that such priming effects can be generated by much more subtle and less direct cues. Instead of an explicit label on an answer sheet they used stuffed toys commonly associated with Australia (kangaroo, koala) and New Zealand (kiwi) to prime perceivers. The toys were merely present in the room where the participant was seated, but they were not directly linked to the experiment. All the same, they generated a priming effect that was comparable to the one found in the replication of the Niedzielski study (cf. Hay & Drager 2010: 871–872 and 874–875). Previous research has thus clearly shown that information about the regional origin of speakers is part of long-term phonetic memory, and that exemplars activated on the basis of this type of extra-linguistic information can bias subjects towards perceiving variants that are typically associated with the primed group of speakers.

2.2.3 Frequency and salience in exemplar theory

My hypothesis that exemplar priming in sociolinguistics is a phenomenon that only occurs with (highly) salient variables is not a purely exploratory one. Rather, it is actually directly motivated by the framework of exemplar theory, where salience has been suggested to play a role from the very beginnings.

For one thing, salience is believed to structure long-term memory to a certain degree by 'ranking' different aspects of a given exemplar. With respect to (indexical) information that is stored with a particular memory trace, for instance, Medin & Schaffer (cf. 1978: 210–212) already pointed out that not all bits need to be equally important, but that the different dimensions an exemplar is associated with can, in fact, be weighted. They use the example of a mannequin, a stimulus which, for almost any perceiver, will share many features with remembered exemplars of the category 'human' (e.g. overall shape, size, proportions, number of limbs…). However, the mannequin stimulus differs from the 'human' exemplars in a very 'salient' category, viz. that of animacy. As a consequence, no subject will cognitively include (i.e. 'perceive as') a mannequin among the exemplar cloud of humans, despite the large degree of overlap in features related to physical appearance. In perception, the difference in a salient feature category (animacy) thus overrides more numerous similarities in less salient ones.

While interesting, this is not the effect of salience that is most important for the study at hand, because it can, by definition, only unfold in this way once a stimulus has been remembered. Salience is, however, already a crucial factor during the act of perception *before* the stimulus enters long-term memory as an exemplar. Although humans do seem to be able to store quite an impressive amount of information (cf. Johnson 2005, cited in Rácz 2013: 44) — meaning that our memory *could* theoretically contain all experiences ever made — we do not, in practice, remember every single stimulus we have encountered during our lifetime. Rather, exemplars fade over time if they are not activated, just like any other kind of memory, which results in "[d]ifferent exemplars hav[ing] different strengths" (cf. Pierrehumbert 2002: 115). For this reason, exemplar theory has "frequency effects everywhere" (Pierrehumbert 2006: 524). Variants that are encountered more often than others can be memorised more often, and will dominate memory structure in one of two ways.

Firstly, frequent remembrance of similar stimuli results in denser memory clouds, i.e. mental categories which simply contain more exemplars than others. By their sheer numbers, these exemplars develop a "cumulative force" that biases the processing of new material: subsequent input is likely to be categorised as a member of this dense cloud as well (cf. Pierrehumbert 2006: 524). Secondly,

a new experience can be so similar to an already remembered one that it will not be stored as a separate exemplar. Instead, it will "impact the same [neural] circuits", which "involves updating or strengthening" of the extremely similar exemplar already stored in memory (Pierrehumbert 2006: 525). There is thus not an increase in the number of exemplars in a category, but — at least up to a certain extent — the existing memory traces themselves enjoy a "cumulative effect of exposure" (Pierrehumbert 2006: 525), i.e. they become more prominent or foregrounded due to a higher degree of remnant activation from the last exposure.

A crucial aspect here is that we are talking about *frequency of remembrance*, and not simply *frequency of occurrence*, of a particular variant. It is therefore not sufficient to consider the frequencies of certain tokens in, say, a corpus in order to model the memory structure of subjects who are exposed to these tokens. The reason for this is that long-term memory is not a mirror image of "undifferentiated raw experience" (Pierrehumbert 2006: 525). Instead, "a process of attention, recognition, and coding which is not crudely reflective of frequency" intervenes between the physical, sensory input on the one hand, and the act of actually storing an exemplar on the other (Pierrehumbert 2006: 525). As a general rule of thumb, research in psychology has shown that perceivers seem to pay more attention to 'informative' events (cf. also the discussion in Rácz 2013) and "[e]vents that are attended to are in turn more likely to be remembered" (Pierrehumbert 2006: 525). Pierrehumbert (cf. 2006: 525) stresses the fact that informative events are often infrequent. If one passes a particular shop every day, this event will soon not be informative any more and will (no longer) be attended to, resulting in an inability to remember details like specials of the day even a short time after the experience. If, however, on one occasion, there is a hot-air balloon in the car park next to the store, then this rare event will probably be remembered for a long time and in vivid detail.

Two points need to be mentioned here: (1) the tendency Pierrehumbert describes should not be taken to mean that high frequency and high informativeness are, a priori, mutually exclusive, and (2) even if they were, the general statement that events that attract attention are more likely to be remembered would still hold — and high frequency tokens could very well be attended to by perceivers for reasons other than their informativeness (particularly in terms of surprisal). The bottom line is that which (and how many) exemplars are retained in long-term memory is not simply a matter of raw frequency in the linguistic input a person receives, but rather one of "*effective* exposure", which is "a function of actual exposure as well as cognitive factors such as attention and memory" (Pierrehumbert 2006: 519, my emphasis).

It is not really surprising that Pierrehumbert (2006) discusses the whole issue under the sub-heading *Salience*, because salient features are features that stand out in perception (whatever the exact cause for this may be), which is essentially the same as saying they attract above average degrees of attention. The way salience is understood in the present study (cf. 2.1.3) ties in with this: if speakers are (sub-)consciously aware of a linguistic feature because it carries social meaning, and this awareness shows in production differences (i.e. attention paid to their own speech), then it only makes sense to assume that they also pay more attention to these features in perception[1]. If, in turn, salient variants receive more attention then it follows that they will be remembered more often, meaning that long-term memory will either contain more of these exemplars or it will be biased to a degree by salient memory traces that are cognitively more prominent. In both cases, exemplars containing salient variants should activate considerably faster and more strongly than less- or non-salient ones, and, as a consequence, the resulting priming effects should be more powerful for the former than for the latter.

Existing research in sociophonetics has, in fact, collected some evidence that hints at the possibility that exemplar priming might only work for highly salient variables. Niedzielski (cf. 1999: 69–75), for instance, found that the priming effect discovered in the perception of Canadian Raising was not statistically robust for vowels undergoing the Northern Cities Chain Shift (which served as secondary test variables). The 2006 study of Hay, Nolan, et al., in turn, produced two secondary findings which are also of considerable interest for the present study: (1) the priming effect was particularly strong for stimuli containing the word *fish* (which also occurs in the label commonly used to denote this shibboleth) (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 363), and (2) priming with the two secondary dependent variables /æ/ and /ɛ/ was statistically less robust or even completely non-significant (cf. Hay, Nolan, et al. 2006: 367). Both experiments have thus unearthed priming effects exclusively, or at least primarily, for linguistic variables that can be classified as sociolinguistic stereotypes.

[1] In fact, several studies have produced evidence for a connection between production and perception. Hay, Warren, et al. (2006), for instance, found that New Zealanders' perception of /ɪə/-/ɛə/ pairs depends on whether the listeners merge these two vowels in their own production. In another study using synthesised vowel continua, Kendall & Fridland (2017) showed that perceptual discrimination of /æ/ and /ɑ/ is influenced not by the absolute position of these vowels in US subjects' realisational spaces, but actually by the degree to which they produced a merger of the low back vowels /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ — which suggests that the link between production and perception can also have a more indirect base in the relations between vowels instead of their absolute positions.

While Hay, Nolan, et al. (2006) do hint at a possible connection between exemplar priming and the salience of the test variable, this is clearly not the primary concern of their study. Understandably, their discussion of this issue is therefore very brief and also somewhat speculative. To my knowledge, there is no study to date that has thoroughly and systematically investigated the impact that (social) salience has on the presence and strength of exemplar priming effects. It is the intention of the present thesis to start closing this very gap.

2.3 Summary

Salience is defined in a number of ways by different researchers and there is a particularly high degree of disagreement with respect to what causes a feature to be salient. This thesis does not partake in this discussion, but is merely interested in the *effects* of salience in perception, not its *causes*. Sociolinguistic salience will be understood as a scale of (sub-)conscious awareness. Features will be classified with respect to Labov's indicator-marker-stereotype hierarchy which, in turn, will be based on the presence and extent of social stratification, style shifting, and hypercorrection. For perception, exemplar theory (a model which assumes that long-term memory contains phonetically detailed exemplars indexed with social information) predicts that — thanks to the attention filter — salient features will be stored in memory more often and/or will be more prominent than non-salient ones. As a consequence, activation of salient exemplars should be easier, faster, and stronger. It is therefore to be expected that exemplar priming effects either do not occur at all or are at least considerably weaker when the test variable does not enjoy a high degree of (conscious) awareness among perceivers.

3 Awareness, comments, evaluation

Up to now, the focus of this study has been exclusively on *how* subjects say things. In what is to follow I will present a short summary of *what* the people in my sample have to say *about* Scouse, zooming in on the opinions expressed and the comments made in the interview sections on (local) identity and language. This analysis can only be qualitative in nature due to the fact that the number of interviewees is far too small to permit meaningful quantitative comparisons. It should also be considered recapitulatory, as constraints of time and space do not allow me to provide a comprehensive analysis of all the material that was collected at this point. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 are based on data extracted from all 38 interviews that have been conducted (the 'secondary sample'), but the more detailed description on the following pages focuses on the same 20 participants that provided the data for the quantitative analyses reported in Chapters **??** and **??** (the 'primary sample', cf. **??**). Quotes are attributed to the relevant interviews using the participant codes explained in Section **??**. For reasons of readability, hesitations and repetitions in these quotes have been eliminated.

3.1 Scouse and 'Liverpoolness'

3.1.1 Accent and identity

It is not really surprising that the question of identity is intertwined with the question of language (variety) for many people. Nevertheless, it is interesting how strongly these two concepts are linked up by many subjects in my sample. The most explicit comment on this issue probably stems from a male, middle class speaker who states: "We got our identity, haven't we. We talk different" (01MMC52). A female who is some 30 years younger made a statement whose gist is very similar:

(3.1) I'd call meself a Scouser 'cause I always called meself that. I don't know why. (…) We've got a Scouse accent, we're labelled as Scousers. (37FWC20)

Having a Scouse accent thus seems to be, for her, essentially the same thing as *being* a Scouser. While many subjects consider the terms 'Liverpudlian' and 'Scouser' to be synonyms, broadly speaking, there are still quite a few for who these terms carry somewhat different connotations. The speaker quoted at the beginning of this paragraph, for instance, says that, although he "wouldn't be offended if someone said [he] was a Scouser", he nevertheless prefers the term 'Liverpudlian' to refer to himself, because he "just sound[s] a Liverpudlian" (01MMC52).

While this subject does not go on to explain what distinguishes a Liverpudlian from a Scouser in terms of 'sound', a young female speaker in the sample is more explicit on the issue.

(3.2) I'd never call myself [a Scouser] 'cause I don't sound very Scouse compared to others. So I think it's to do with the sort of, how strong your accent is. (06FMC20)

Another female of the same age group voices essentially the same idea by explaining that "people tend to think of Scousers, you know with the really strong accent" (07FMC23), and that, since she didn't have a strong accent, she was reluctant to refer to herself as a Scouser. It should be noted, however, that the issue is more complicated than that for at least some people from Liverpool. A not insignificant proportion of interviewees explained that the term 'Liverpudlian' was ambiguous for them, because it could either mean (1) 'someone from Liverpool', or (2) 'someone supporting Liverpool Football Club'. Since the football allegiance is quite important for many people in Liverpool, 'Evertonians' (supporters of Everton, the other premier league football club in the city) often rejected the label 'Liverpudlian' and would go for 'Scouser' instead, simply because they wanted to avoid being 'misunderstood'.

3.1.2 Distinctness, geographical spread, and 'plastic' Scousers

Notwithstanding these minor terminological issues, subjects in different age groups express the thought that a Liverpool accent might be particularly closely linked to a Liverpool identity because it is so distinctive. A 20-year old working class male, for instance, claims that Scousers were "instantly recognisable" because of the "distinctive accent" (02MWC20), and a 44-year-old female (talking about people from Manchester in particular) says that "the minute they hear you talk (…) you see a little light go on in there" (13FWC44). Another subject from the middle-aged group hypothesises about whether Liverpool as a city might be stigmatised because "you can pick a Scouser a mile off" thanks to the distinctive accent. He even goes on to compare Scouse as a city accent to that of Lancashire

as a regional one, arguing that Manchester, as a city, does not have its own accent in the same way that Liverpool does:

(3.3) Someone from Manchester may sound as if they were from any number of towns (…) They're gonna be lumped together, (…) but there's a relatively small number of people who are Liverpudlian or sound Liverpudlian and so (…) maybe it's the distinctiveness which is what makes it an easy target. (03MMC33)

The same speaker also claims, that — in his opinion — the accents of places such as London or Newcastle "sound (…) a lot more similar than Liverpudlian does to anything else" (03MMC33). This seems like a rather drastic interpretation of the distinctness of Scouse, and I cannot say whether this idea is embraced by a majority of Liverpudlians, but one of the younger subjects even went one step further and admitted to feeling "a sense of detachment sometimes", supposedly "'cause the accent's so different from the rest of England" (02MWC20).

While many speakers in my sample are quite happy about, and take some pride in, the fact that their accent is (considered as) rather distinct, both the 33-year-old middle class speaker and the 20-year-old working class interviewee just quoted also see this distinctness as somewhat ambivalent. The older one refers to potentially negative effects indirectly when he says that the distinctness of the accent makes Liverpool "an easy target". The younger speaker, on the other hand, explicitly laments that "sometimes" outsiders linked the accent to "the negative stereotype[s]" about Liverpool, a fact which he considers as somewhat unfair because the city has "kind of evolved over the last (…), like, 20 years" and was "certainly a modern place now" (02MWC20).

Notwithstanding that most speakers in the sample consider Scouse to be so characteristic of the city, Liverpudlians of all age groups are also aware of the fact that speakers of Scouse can be found outside of the city limits. However, these people are often thought of as 'fake', or 'plastic' Scousers in the local terminology (cf. *crossing* as defined by Rampton 1995). Definitions vary as to where exactly plastic Scousers are to be found. For some people they "live in Birkenhead and Wallasey" (06FMC20), i.e. on the Wirral peninsula to the west of Liverpool. A person from there might have a way of speaking that is "classed [as] a Scouse accent", but they are still "not a real Scouser" because they live "over the water" (06FMC20). For many Liverpudlians this is true even though many of the plastic Scousers actually have rather strong Liverpudlian accents as one speaker explained, who first talked about a (Liverpudlian) acquaintance with "a really thick accent" and then went on to explain that "you find people of the other

side of the river talk like him" (01MMC52). Also frequently labelled as plastic Scousers are people who live to the north or east of Liverpool 'proper': they are not separated from the city by the natural border of the Mersey estuary, but they nevertheless live outside the administrative boundaries of the city itself. Sometimes this even refers to people who live within the contiguously built-up area of the Liverpool city region (such as in Halewood or Huyton). For most subjects, however, plastic Scousers are to be found a bit further away from the centre. For instance, a 38-year-old woman in my sample included people from "St. Helens or Skelmersdale or (…) Warrington" (around 22km, 41km, and 28km from Liverpool, respectively) in this category and gave "Mel C of the Spice Girls" and the comedian John Bishop as celebrity examples (33FMC38). Incidentally, she also thinks that the latter's accent is "the worst", which serves to illustrate another aspect often connected with the term plastic Scouser, namely the idea that "they put it on too much", i.e. that they perform an inauthentic and exaggerated Scouse accent (33FMC38).

3.1.3 In the north, but not of it?

There is thus wide-spread awareness both of the distinctness of Scouse and its close connection with the city of Liverpool. All the same, neither the ideas about the distinctness of Scouse, nor the views expressed about so-called plastic Scousers should be taken to mean that Liverpudlians across the board necessarily think that their city is absolutely unique and not part of any larger cultural region. To assess subjects' attitudes and opinions in this respect they were asked whether they would describe themselves as northerners and they were confronted with the phrase Liverpool is "in the north but not of it" (Belchem 2006: xxx). Reactions were quite diverse.

Older speakers in my sample seem to be most willing to embrace the idea that Liverpool is separate and not really part of northern England in the same way that other cities such as Manchester, Leeds, or Sheffield are. One of the older males, for instance, does concede that he "[is] northern", but then adds that it was really "too broad a term for someone from Liverpool" and that it might better "suit someone from Lancashire or Yorkshire", whereas people from Liverpool were (primarily) Scousers (08MMC62). To be fair, this person also points out that, in his opinion, the claim that Liverpool is separate from the rest of the north was "less true" today, but that "it certainly was very true at one point, 'cause Liverpool just had a different attitude to the rest of the country". Now, however, he would not strongly object to Liverpool being called a "northern" city anymore (08MMC62). Another male speaker of about the same age is more categorical and

insists that Liverpool is "distinct", "not like, say, Manchester", and "nothing like Birmingham", even though the former is "just a hop, skip, and a jump down the road" (05MWC66). Interestingly, he even provides some historical justification for his opinion, arguing that Liverpool is characterised by (1) a "mix of Welsh, Irish, some Scottish, and (…) Lancashire", (2) its peripheral geographical position in the country ("it's physically just that big way out"), and (3) "that seafaring thing", i.e. the tradition as an important port which meant that the orientation of Liverpool was "always outwards" (05MWC66).

The two women in the old group seem to have somewhat more 'moderate' views in this respect, but since the sample is so small it is unclear whether this is a true gender difference that could be generalised to the majority of Liverpudlians. The working class subject, for instance, claims that she has "always been northern" in addition to her Liverpool identity. She does not deny that the "Liverpudlian bit [comes] first", and that the northern identity is secondary, but she does think that Liverpool is "part of northern England" (18FWC67). The other older female in the sample, like many others, does attribute a "bit of a stand alone quality maybe to Liverpool", but she is also very aware of "that north-south divide" and explains that, on a recent trip to Oxfordshire, she had "really felt very northern" (28FMC59). While she also feels "there is a difference" between Liverpool and other places in the north of England, this does not keep her from including Liverpool in the north. Interestingly, she also suggests that the idea of uniqueness is an important aspect of Liverpool's identity:

(3.4) No, I don't think Liverpool's separate. I think Liverpool likes to *think* it's separate to the (…) rest of the north (…). I don't feel it is. (28FMC59, emphasis in the original)

In the middle age group, one also finds people who believe that Liverpool is "more unique" than other places in northern England, but they usually put this into perspective by saying something like "but I wouldn't necessarily say it was separate" (33FMC38): Liverpool is thus considered somewhat special, but special *within* the group of northern English cities and towns. Other speakers even consider Liverpool to be a prototypical northern city which "absolutely shows what (…) a northerner should be" (13FWC44). A male interviewee states he knows people who consider their city to be separate from everything else, but he adds it would be "such a shame if Liverpool wasn't able to relate to the rest of Lancashire" and "other places in northern England", and explains that he himself is "happy being of the north" (03MMC33).

The youngest speakers are again slightly more homogeneous when it comes to the issue of northernness. One of them limits Liverpool's association with the

north to a purely geographical one ("we are in the north") and does not see any cultural similarities between Liverpudlians and northerners who "dress different" and "walk different" (37FWC20). Liverpool is considered to be "different from northern cities" and "sort of unique", with its own "different way of life, really" (37FWC20). A male working class speaker of the same age group reverses the argument presented by one of the older speakers, and explains that "in the 80s and such [Liverpool] was definitely a part of the north, like a solid part of the north", whereas nowadays the city was "so detached from northern places" that he had "never thought of [himself] as [a] northerner" (02MWC20). The accent issue is brought up again by one of the young women, who believes that typical "northern people" are thought of as having "quite broad northern accent[s]", which are more likely to be found in places "like Leeds or Yorkshire, or somewhere like that maybe" (07FMC23). The intermediate position is also found, where Liverpool is special, but not too different from other places to be included in the 'northern' category, especially against the backdrop of the north-south divide:

(3.5) Our culture isn't the same as a lot of the other northern cities, but it's not exactly the same as the south. It's a very unique city, I suppose (…). I think it is northern, but in a rather distinct way. (04MWC19)

Generally speaking, though, most younger Liverpudlians in my sample are quite happy with a secondary identity as a northerner — especially those that have travelled more, or have family in other parts of the country (north and south). One working class female, for example, does not even see a "drastic difference between Liverpool and Manchester", the two historical 'arch-enemies' in the north-west, whereas the difference "between the north and south" is much more important to her (36FWC20). She explains that she has been to "other places" in northern England that just "remind[ed] [her] of Liverpool" instead of making her feel like she was "miles and miles away from home because the culture's so different" (36FWC20). Other subjects in this age group express similar thoughts, explicitly rejecting the idea of Liverpool's separateness as "false" and "just silly", and adding that they would most certainly "call [themselves] a northerner" (06FMC20). Context does play a crucial role here. A male middle-class Liverpudlian can serve as a typical example when he specifies that "in Liverpool" he would naturally call himself "a Scouser", but if he was "talking to (…) someone from the south of (…) England, [he]'d call [himself] a northerner" (25MMC19). 'Northerner' is thus clearly a *secondary* identity, but nonetheless one that is still acceptable to (and often even readily embraced by) the youngest Liverpool speakers in the sample as a means of distancing themselves from the southern part of the country and associating with the northern one at the same time.

3.2 Features of Scouse

3.2.1 Geographical variation

Upon being asked for typical features of the Scouse accent, many subjects in my sample start out by stressing a point which an older working class male makes very concisely when he says:

(3.6) There's no such thing as a single Scouse accent. There're several Scouse accents. (05MWC66)

Most interviewees simply refer to the fact that 'stronger' and 'lighter' accents can be heard in the city, without necessarily being aware of any system that might be distinguishable with respect to who uses one or the other. The speaker who provided the last quote, however, goes on to specify that Scouse "varies from age to age, and area to area" and that "some people say there's a (…) very general division north and south", with the accent arguably being "softer in the south of the city rather than the north" (05MWC66). Another male speaker from the same age group also thinks that he is often able to distinguish whether someone comes "from North Liverpool or South Liverpool" (08MMC62). He adds that this was particularly true "if they're older, because South Liverpool had a much softer accent" (08MMC62). This conditional and the past tense that follows it suggest that he believes this distinction is less important or pronounced these days. It still plays a role in some people's minds, however, as a quote from an older female shows. She explains that "if you listen to (…) the boys and girls from the north end of the city, there's a real difference how they (…) speak compared to here" (28FMC59), where 'here' refers to Aigburth, a middle class suburb in the south of Liverpool. Some speakers seem to hold very similar beliefs without actually verbalising them in such a direct manner. As an example, consider the following quote:

(3.7) The guy behind the bar, he's got a really strong accent. I think he's from Anfield. (01MMC52)

This speaker does not explicitly talk about different accents in different parts of Liverpool during his interview, but he nevertheless clearly makes a connection between a strong accent and a particular (northern) district of the city, Anfield, which is evidence that he does, in fact, believe that certain districts of Liverpool can be linked to stronger accents (at least in some cases).

As an aside, it should be mentioned that my subjects are probably right when they assume stronger accents to be more prevalent in northern parts of (inner-city) Liverpool. Contrary to what many of my subjects probably think, however,

this is little to do with pure geography. Rather, many northern districts of the city are traditional working class neighbourhoods (Vauxhall, Everton, Anfield), whereas the 'south end' is dominated by more middle class areas (Aigburth, Mossley Hill, Allerton). This reasoning was already behind Knowles's choice of Vauxhall and Aigburth as two electoral wards that would provide "a fairly good cross-section of Liverpool society"(Knowles 1973: 2). Recent figures confirm that the most deprived districts of Liverpool are still mostly concentrated in the northern part of the city (cf. Liverpool City Council 2010: iii). The linguistic north-south divide, if it exists, is thus likely to be a *social* distinction that just happens to coincide with a geographical split, due to the fact that social segregation has been present in Liverpool for a long time already.

3.2.2 Suprasegmentals

3.2.2.1 Voice quality

There are some more comments in the data which can be classified as rather general and unspecific statements. One subject, for example, says that "the main (…) aspect of the actual accent is just the tinge" (02MWC20), but it remains entirely unclear what this 'tinge' consists of. Essentially, the speaker is just saying that Scouse somehow sounds different from other accents. This *could* also be the case for two other interviewees, who talk about "a sort of (…) twang" (04MWC19) "in our voice" (13FWC44). It is possible that *twang* in this context is a synonym for *tinge*, and that people are just referring to the fact that there is a distinct overall sound to Scouse. It should be remembered, however, that there is also the received idea of Scouse having a nasal quality to it, which is traditionally (and erroneously) linked to air pollution and the alleged omnipresence of catarrh in Liverpool in the early 20th century. While this is an opinion generated among laypersons, rather than a scientific finding based on a sound database of linguistic material, the quotes reported above might be considered as evidence that the idea is still around.

3.2.2.2 Intonation

A suprasegmental linguistic feature that *is* mentioned explicitly and unambiguously is intonation. Speakers in the middle-aged and the young group talk about this subject in similar ways. A male in his thirties mentions that there is "a lilt" in Liverpool English which makes it a bit "sing-songish" (03MMC33). Another one, who is about twenty years older, says that, at least "in the 70's", Scouse

was "quite lyrical" and "singy-songy" (01MMC52). This is echoed by a 20-year-old female who describes Liverpool English as "quite melodic", and specifies that Scouse intonation is characterised by "rises and falls" which are "just on a scale of [their] own" due to "the way the melodies are in people's [Scouse] accents" compared to other varieties of English (06FMC20). It is striking that intonation seems to be such an important aspect of Scouse for at least some Liverpudlians. Together with the fact that Knowles (1973) already found it necessary to devise a 'phonology' of Scouse intonation, this clearly indicates that the prosodic features of Liverpool English would merit a detailed and up-to-date analysis which could not be embarked upon in the context of the present study.

With respect to intonation, two young women in the sample also mention another aspect, namely that of supposedly "high pitch as well sometimes" (07FMC23) in Liverpool English. It should be noted, however, that the interviewee does not phrase this issue in very general terms, but provides just a single example as anecdotal evidence, arguing that the footballer Jamie Carragher was "very high pitched" (07FMC23). The second subject to bring up this feature is more categorical in this respect and mentions "high pitchness, for men" generally as a characteristic of (male) Scouse (36FWC20). A caveat is in order all the same, because she further explains that she herself might just be "oblivious to it" because she "hear[s] it every day", but she argues that "there's a very high pitch" when Scousers are "being impersonated" (36FWC20). As an example she names 'The Scousers' from *Harry Enfield's Television Programme*, a 90's BBC comedy show, where a group of three stereotype working class Liverpudlians with "black curly wigs" say "calm down, calm down" and are "like, really high pitched" (36FWC20). Despite the fact that she considers this one of the "main (…) characteristics of the accent" (36FWC20), it is therefore an open question whether high pitch is something that the subject has really experienced as a typical feature of Scouse herself, or whether she is just reiterating external stereotypes that might or might not be appropriate. Again, future research would be necessary to assess whether there is an empirical base to such claims.

3.2.3 Phonological variables

Conscious awareness of phonological features of Scouse is very limited, which is not too surprising. One older female speaker who is a retired teacher and has received elocution lessons earlier in her life mentions that "[Liverpudlians] often drop the aitch" and that there was "the broad 'o', (…) we would never say [pʌb], or [kʌp]" (28FMC59). Neither h-dropping (which is a non-regional feature of colloquial, urban British English, and is found in bigger cities all over the UK),

nor the FOOT-STRUT merger (which is presumably what the subject refers to as 'broad 'o") are distinctive traits of Scouse. Possibly, this subject also hinted at lenition of alveolar plosives, but this is highly speculative as she did mention contexts where "there's a double 't', as in *motto* [or] (…) *matter*" (28FMC59), but then she failed to explain what happened in these contexts and went on to talk about something else. Apart from the NURSE-SQUARE merger and lenition of /k/ (which are both discussed below in more detail), no other phonetic or phonological features were listed as characteristic of Scouse in the 20 interviews that provided the data for the quantitative analyses in Chapters **??** and **??**. Neither velar nasal plus, nor happy-tensing were mentioned even once by any of the 38 participants that were originally interviewed for this study.

3.2.3.1 NURSE-SQUARE merger

The NURSE-SQUARE merger is occasionally singled out as a characteristic feature of Liverpool English by speakers of all three age groups investigated. Naturally, the descriptions that are given are often somewhat lacking in precision. For example, an older woman mentioned that (in her opinion mostly younger) Liverpudlians "keep [their] teeth together" in words like *square* (18FWC67). While it is not clear what exactly she means by 'keeping their teeth together', we do at least know that she is aware of something going on with that particular vowel. Other descriptions are quite exact. A case in point is the female speaker cited in the preceding paragraph. She says about "that ur sound" that "Liverpool people have always had (…) a difficulty with pronouncing words like *church*, *care*, *air*" and that words such as "*bird* and *bear*" were "often the same thing, really" (28FMC59). In the middle-aged group, comments are not quite as precise, but there are quite a few instances of people explaining that one can tell someone is a Scouser by how they say words like "church, you know" (03MMC33); and they do so using a vowel which is much closer to [ɛ] than the typical realisation they have been using in the rest of the spontaneous speech part of their interview.

The youngest subjects in the sample rarely comment on the NURSE-SQUARE merger. Some speakers might actually be trying to refer to this variable, but their explanations are so vague that they just cannot be reliably linked to this vowel. For instance, a 19-year-old working class male said that it was a typical feature of Scouse to "stress the (…) 'u' sound" (04MWC19). NURSE is often represented by <ur> in the orthography, so he *might* be talking about this vowel, but since he does not give an example he could just as well be trying to refer to something completely different (e.g. an actual 'u'-like vowel, such as the /ʊ/ in *book*, which is — in traditional Scouse, at least — often realised as [u:]). However, we do occa-

sionally find rather precise descriptions of the merger in this age group as well, although it has to be said that they are comparatively rare. As an example, consider this quote taken from a 20-year-old male who explains how to identify a Scouse accent:

(3.8) Especially on certain words you'll notice it a lot more than others: like *church* (...) and *nurse* as well. Like, I say [nɛːs] (...) where it's actually [nɜːs]. (02MWC20)

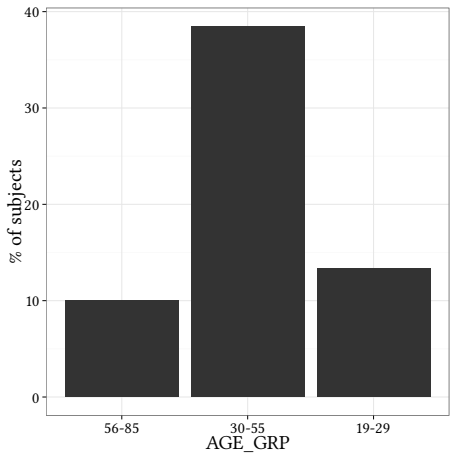

Figure 3.1: Awareness of NURSE by age

Figure 3.1 summarises awareness of the NURSE-SQUARE merger in the three age groups under scrutiny in this thesis. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, the database for this bar plot is not restricted to the 20 interviews used for the quantitative analyses, but includes information extracted from all 38 interviews that have been conducted by the author. The height of the bars represent the percentages of subjects in the relevant age groups who showed some sort of conscious awareness of the NURSE-SQUARE merger, i.e. they either gave an explicit explanation of the feature or they at least provided relevant examples. As is obvious from the left-most bar, only 10% of the speakers in the oldest group mentioned this feature, so we can say that the variable is virtually unknown in this age group. In the middle-aged group (bar in the middle), 38.46% mentioned the feature. While this means that people who are not consciously aware of this variable are still in the majority, awareness *has* increased considerably and the feature does seem to have acquired a certain degree of salience within this group.

When we look at the youngest speakers, however, this trend has apparently not been maintained: the percentage of subjects who explicitly commented on the NURSE-SQUARE merger has not increased further, but actually dropped again to 13.33%, a value which is comparable to that of the oldest Liverpudlians in the sample. With respect to this vowel, therefore, salience seems to have decreased in the 19–29 year olds, only a small minority knows that fronted NURSE variants are a characteristic feature of Liverpool English.

3.2.3.2 Lenition of /k/

As far as lenition is concerned, it is first of all interesting to note that none of the 4 old speakers in the primary sample of this study talk about this feature at all. The retired teacher quoted at the beginning of Section 3.2.3 *might* constitute an exception, but even if one is willing to accept her statement as referring to lenition, it would clearly relate to lenition of *alveolar* plosives, not *velar* ones, which are the focus of this research.

In the group of subjects aged between 30 and 55, however, we do find a number of quotes that directly and explicitly refer to the way Scousers realise the phoneme /k/. Just as with the NURSE-SQUARE merger, some of these comments are comparatively vague and essentially just consist of an example word containing the relevant variable. A female working class speaker in this sub-sample, for instance, explained that one could identify someone from Liverpool based on "how people say *chicken* and all that" (13FWC44). Other speakers explicitly generalise and talk about the variable instead of just single words ("we pronounce 'k's quite strongly at the end of words, (…) or within words" — 33FMC38), although these more general descriptions are also often backed up with concrete examples ("people used to always ask me to say *chicken*" — 33FMC38). What is more, people often additionally single out the relevant variable ("it's like /x/" — 33FMC38) and describe the place of articulation, phonetically correctly, as "like, (quite) guttural, isn't it" (33FMC38 and 01MMC52).

If we focus on the youngest Liverpudlians that have been interviewed, explicit comments on lenition of /k/ actually abound — each of the 8 subjects in this age group that were included in the quantitative analysis mentioned this variable. Again, there are some rather vague explanations, such as one 19-year-old middle class male referring to lenition of velar plosives as Liverpudlians "put[ting] an emphasis on 'k's" (31MMC19). Most other comments in this age group, however, are very much to the point. One speaker mentions the variable ("definitely the "k"), provides examples ("if I was to say (…) *cook* [kʊ̈x], *back* [bax]"), contrasts the standard realisation with the Scouse one, and even talks about his difficulties

in producing the former:

(3.9) It's really hard for me to say [tʊ̈k] rather than [tʊ̈x]. (02MWC20)

These speakers are also aware of the fact that the "/x/ at the back of your throat" is particularly frequent in "some of the strong accents" and "quite distinctive" as well (04MWC19). Another subject in this age group even declares lenition of velar plosives to be a shibboleth. When asked to name sounds that distinguish Liverpool English from other accents he says:

(3.10) Of course you can tell (…) if people have the /x/ sound (…) when they speak. So it's easy to tell who's a Scouser, and who's not a Scouser. (25MMC19)

Other Liverpudlians between the ages of 19 and 29 also count "the /x/ sound" among the "main, like, characteristics of the accent" (36FWC20). This does not necessarily mean that they like this feature, though. For example, a middle-class female who talks about the "throaty /x/" in words like *chicken* and *bucket* also explains that she finds this pronunciation "really annoying" (06FMC20).

It is not unlikely that younger Scousers are particularly aware of this variable because it is not just a shibboleth for Liverpudlians, but also for outsiders. Two speakers in the sample mention lenition of /k/ as a typical feature of Scouse and reveal that their judgement is not exclusively influenced by their own observations, but, at least in part, by external perceptions of Liverpool English as well. Both are working class women and 20 years old. The first one names "the /x/ sound" as a typical Scouse pronunciation variant and adds that this statement is "based on what [she's] been skitted on in the past" (36FWC20), so she is especially conscious of the feature because other people (who are, presumably, not from Liverpool) have used it to make fun of her. The second speaker also provides a personal mini-narrative when she recounts that "people say 'say chicken', 'cause we say [t͡ʃɪxən]", and that ever since she entered university she had frequently been asked "do you want some chicken?" by people who wanted to "imitate [her]" (37FWC20). It is well possible that many other Liverpudlians have made rather similar experiences when interacting with speakers from other areas. After all, lenition is not only classified as a highly characteristic feature of Scouse by linguists, but, impressionistically at least, it also seems to be omnipresent in all imitations of Scouse by stand-up comedians and the like.

If we again zoom out a bit further and take into account all 38 interviews, the picture sketched above solidifies. Just as for the NURSE-SQUARE merger, Figure 3.2 shows the percentage of speakers in the relevant age group that explicitly

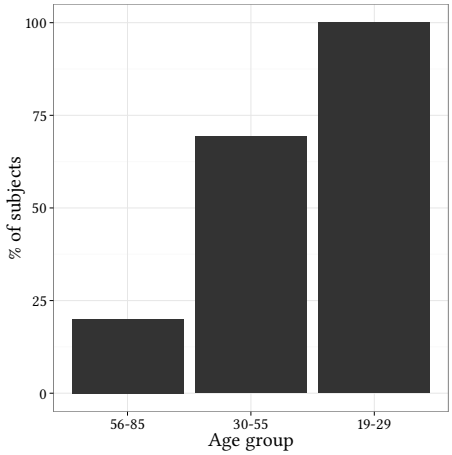

Figure 3.2: Awareness of /k/ lenition by age

mentioned lenition of /k/ as a typical feature of Scouse. As can be seen quite clearly, the rate is, at 20%, quite low in the oldest group of speakers, which is represented by the bar on the left of the graph. Only one in five speakers aged 56 and older commented on lenition. In the middle-aged group, this rate has risen quite considerably: almost three out of four subjects (69.23%) are now aware of lenited /k/ variants. When we finally get to the youngest speakers investigated in this thesis, the bar (on the right) in the plot actually reaches the 100% threshold, which means that *every single* participant under 30 explicitly mentioned lenition of velar plosives as a typical feature of Scouse and commented on it. Awareness of lenition thus increases in a near-linear fashion from the oldest to the youngest participants: it starts out as a feature which only a handful of Liverpudlians are aware of, gains dramatically in prominence in the middle group, and finally reaches a state of full conscious awareness in the youngest generation of speakers interviewed.

Having said all that, it should be noted that it is quite possible that Scousers are *generally* aware of the variable but not, for some reason, of its presence *in their own speech*. There is some anecdotal evidence in my data that supports this idea. One subject (female, working class, 20 years old) explicitly said that she didn't like lenition and therefore didn't use it:

(3.11) I can't even do it because I've spent that long, trying to, like, train me

mouth not to do it. (36FWC20)

However, she has a mean PDF of 81.87%. So in actual fact, she *can* do it quite well, and uses the fricative realisation almost categorically. Very similar things could probably be said about a number of other subjects who proclaimed not to have a strong Scouse accent or who said they did not like lenited /k/ variants, but who nevertheless quite frequently *use* these variants.

3.3 Evolution and evaluation of Scouse

3.3.1 Old speakers

3.3.1.1 Increase of 'slovenly Scouse'

All four older subjects in the primary sample in one way or another express the idea that Scouse has "really changed in the younger generation" (28FMC59). Two of them make reference to the Beatles, whose "Liverpool accent" was allegedly "different (…) because (…) it's become very guttural now" (08MMC62). One might be tempted to interpret this statement as referring to increased usage of the 'guttural' /k/ lenition (cf. **??**), and this might very well be what the speaker is talking about. However, the same term is also used by a female subject of about the same age when she says that "it used to be (…) quite guttural, the way *we* spoke" (28FMC59, my emphasis). It follows that, for her, Scouse has thus become *less* 'guttural'. This could either mean she has not noticed that younger Liverpudlians use more lenition, or that she thinks of something completely different when she says 'guttural'. In any case, she seems to think that Liverpool English has become more distinct from the surrounding area in her life time, because she explains that in the accent she "grew up with in the sixties, that everybody recognised through the Beatles", one encountered "Lancashire expressions very often" (28FMC59). She believes "the older accent" can still be heard in "[her] generation and the older people", whereas her sons could "perfectly mimic young Scouse men talking now" which apparently sounds "just bizarre" and "strange" because the accent has "really, really changed" (28FMC59).

Another speaker has the impression that "the percentage of people that speak really slovenly Scouse has increased" (05MWC66). This change is, in his opinion, primarily driven by "the poorer people", but he also finds that "it's mostly young people that talk like that", presumably because "as they get older (…) [their accent] gets a bit rounded off (05MWC66). If we follow this line of argumentation, the increase of 'slovenly Scouse' would only be temporary on the level of the

individual and restricted to speakers of a certain age (the same at any point in time!) at the level of the speech community. In opposition to this, another speaker states that the present generation"has got it's own language" in much the same way as "[her] generation had a language that was different from our parents"', so she seems to find it quite natural that "each generation just create[s] their own language completely" (18FWC67) — without suggesting that this is something that people necessarily do away with later in their life.

While this is a rather liberal stance on language change, it does not completely keep her from seeing something special in the most recent changes that she does not seem to be too happy about. According to her, "there are youngsters that will (…) not say the words properly and they will put (…) the Scouse accent on" (18FWC67). While it is not quite clear what exactly she means by 'not saying the words properly', it is probably uncontroversial to assume she is referring to non-standard pronunciation, coupled with the fact that this seems to happen in a non-natural, inauthentic way, as the second part of the quote suggests. This 'putting it on' is something she observes in her own family ("grandson can do it very well"), and which, apparently, can start with children that are "only nine" (18FWC67). Not only does she believe that the variety that younger Liverpudlians use is "totally different from the language [she] had, and [her] daughter had", but she even maintains that her two grandsons differed in linguistic behaviour, despite the fact that "there's only two years between the two of them" (18FWC67). Both, however, seem to be using varieties of English that are considerably different from her own because she reports frequently having to ask both of them to repeat utterances she did not understand.

This subject and the other woman in the group of older speakers hint at a possible reason why the accents of young Liverpudlians seem particularly strong to this generation. When (presumably) talking about the NURSE-SQUARE merger (cf. Section 3.2.3) she does not only mention that younger Scousers 'keep their teeth together' but she also adds that speakers of her generation "weren't allowed to do that" and that they "got told off" if they spoke with a markedly non-standard accent (18FWC67). The newly-retired teacher gives a slightly more detailed account and explains that her accent is now "modified (…), probably 'cause we had elocution at school" (28FMC59). Further research would be required to analyse if this is an experience that is rather particular to this individual speaker because she was "educated by nuns" and later became a teacher, or whether a sizeable proportion of Liverpudlians in this generation "learned to speak a more received pronunciation" (28FMC59) during their time at school.

3.3.1.2 From 'amiable' to 'grating'

When it comes to the evaluation of this change, the older speakers in my sample are relatively unanimous. The male working class subject links stronger accents up not just with youth, but also with social deprivation when he says that "it's not all young people that talk like that", but especially "the poorer [ones]" among them; a fact which he does not "decry[]" but which he attributes to the influence of their peers (05MWC66). He adds that he knows he himself speaks with a Scouse accent, but — crucially — "people can understand [him]" (05MWC66). The value judgement is not explicit here, but nevertheless not too difficult to unearth: he does not object to Scouse accents in general, as long as they do not hinder communication. A mild accent that expresses where one is from is fine, a strong one which makes it difficult (for outsiders) to understand the speaker, is not. His middle class counterpart essentially voices the same belief, but does so in a more direct way. In his opinion, the accent has "got a lot coarser" and "harder (…) amongst younger people" (08MMC62). His choice of vocabulary already clearly suggests that he considers this to be "not so good", but his main criticism is that the supposed coarseness can "make [younger Scousers] unintelligible, (…) and they don't have to be" (08MMC62). It does not take too much interpretation to arrive at the conclusion that he probably also thinks they *should* not be.

Unintelligibility is, however, not the only potential problem that this age group sees in pronounced Liverpool accents. The working class male explains that, for him, strong Scouse accents are "normal" because he has grown up in the city, but he also finds it understandable that "the way some [Scousers] (…) talk (…) can be intimidating" to *outsiders* (05MWC66). According to him, the "very, very few" Liverpudlians who use these strong accents do not "do good for us" (05MWC66), i.e. they have a detrimental influence on the national image of Liverpool because, with their strong and 'intimidating' accents, they give an impression of the city which people from outside find rather unpleasant. This speaker is not exclusively worried about external perceptions, though, but also states that he himself is not a fan of 'slovenly Scouse' — as he calls it —, when he reflects about people's motivation for using these varieties:

(3.12) I don't think they've consciously gone out to say 'we'll speak this way so to get on everybody's nerves'. The fact that it does is a bonus. (05MWC66)

So, while he does not assume that young Scousers *primarily* employ strong accents to annoy other people, he does believe that they like the idea ('a bonus') and he also acknowledges that they have this effect on him personally ('the fact that it does').

The two women in this age group seem to largely agree with this evaluation. One of them states that "the ordinary Scouse is quite amiable", but "the really (…) guttural one that they used in *Bread* (…) grates on your nerves" (18FWC67). Strong accents, such as the one that is heard in the BBC sitcom from the 80s, 'grate', in her opinion, "because there's only a certain community that talks like that" (18FWC67) — presumably very deprived and poor people like the fictitious lower working class family which *Bread* revolves around. While she does not claim that these kinds of accents are *exclusively* found among younger Liverpudlians, she does stress that particularly "some youngsters" use a kind of "plucking chicken language" (18FWC67), an attribute which can hardly be considered positive. The other older female speaker gives a very similar verdict when she says that, to her, modern Scouse accents seem "more staccato" than they used to be (28FMC59). She is not really happy about this and finds the resulting sound "not gentle" and "much more aggressive" (28FMC59) than the one she considers typical of her own youth.

3.3.2 Middle-aged speakers

3.3.2.1 Kids so Scouse it's unbelievable

In the middle-aged group, fewer subjects explicitly talk about change in Liverpool English, but when they do their gist is similar to that of the oldest speakers in the sample. A male, middle class speaker, for instance, argues there is 'no doubt about it" that Scouse "definitely has changed" and he even provides a quite precise estimate that this is something that has happened in the "last sort of 10 years" (01MMC52). He also says that "when [he] was young" the accent was allegedly more "lyrical" and "singy songy", something which, he explains, can also still be heard in the speech of "some of the older people", so this is further evidence for the fact that he believes change in Scouse to be a rather new development, "something that's recently cracked in" (01MMC52). The same speaker also brings up the issue of unintelligibility, although he does not directly link it to younger Liverpudlians. He refers to an acquaintance who has "a really thick accent" and who, on a particular occasion, spoke in a way which made it impossible for a friend from Staffordshire to "understand him at all" (01MMC52). He goes on to explain that this was, in his opinion, mostly due to lenition of velar plosives ("he does /x/") and that he also believes that "he embellishes [his accent]" and "lay[s] it on a lot" (01MMC52), so a very strong accent that is unintelligible (to outsiders) is once more associated with inauthenticity.

Other speakers in this age group connect these kinds of accents more directly

and explicitly with young Scousers. A 49-year-old working class male[1], for instance, claimed that the accent was getting stronger and 'rougher' with younger speakers, while not bringing up the subject of unintelligibility. One of his female counterparts, however, does just that in the following statement:

(3.13) The kids, you know, they're so Scouse it's unbelievable. (…) I have difficulty understanding some of them. (13FWC44)

Here, the matter of change and unintelligibility is taken one step further. For this particular speaker, it is no longer just an issue of young Scousers being unintelligible to people who are not familiar with Liverpool accents. When she says that she herself sometimes has to "ask [her nieces and nephews] twice what they're saying" (13FWC44) she acknowledges that even middle-aged insiders occasionally run into difficulties when talking to young Liverpudlians with pronounced local accents. Interestingly, she also hypothesises about whether this might be a temporary issue, i.e. whether younger speakers might change their pronunciation to a more standard-like (or at least less local) accent later in their life (cf. Section 3.3.1). Her argument for this idea is based on pragmatic and presumably also economic and social reasons, because she explains that "as you get older and you're getting to work (…), you have to tone [the accent] down", and adds that this is particularly true "when you're dealing with the public" (13FWC44) — in cases where the speaker is in an exposed position where both intelligibility and social appropriateness are an issue.

3.3.2.2 From 'down-to earth' to 'thick'

Middle-aged speakers evaluate Scouse and the perceived change in the accent in a very similar way as the oldest subjects do (cf. Section 3.3.1.2). There is only one speaker in this age group who has exclusively positive things to say about Scouse. This woman explains that "[she] quite like[s] the accent", because for her "it sounds friendly" and "down to earth" (33FMC38). She also says that it does not sound "stuck up" (33FMC38), thereby implying that other varieties do, but without specifying which ones precisely she is comparing Scouse to. Other speakers focus more on negative aspects: the working class male who classified the accents of younger Scousers as being 'rougher', for instance, also explained that he found these accents 'unpleasant' (17MWC49), a judgement which is already implicit in a term like 'rough'.

[1]During the interview of this subject the recording equipment failed. As a result, the last 2 minutes or so of his interview were not recorded. The above reproduction of his relevant statements is based on notes taken directly after the interview.

This speaker, and some others likewise, only explicitly talk about aspects of Scouse that they find disagreeable, but by expressly limiting their statements to particular sub-variants of Scouse (i.e. 'strong' ones) they also imply that they evaluate other ('lighter') accents differently. For instance, the 52-year-old male in the sample is only talking about particularly strong Scouse accents as they are, in his opinion often found in younger speakers when he says: "I don't like it, no. I just kind of think it's a bit put on" (01MMC52). It should be noted that the dislike is, once more, connected with the fact that these accents are perceived as inauthentic and "false" (01MMC52).

Some subjects in this age group do, however, explicitly contrast different varieties of Scouse and make clear that they also judge them differently. One working class woman, for example, says that she "[doesn't] like the *broad* Scouse" because "it can sound thick, like somebody's not all together there", whereas speaking "with a little twang is alright" (13FWC44, my emphasis). In this particular case, 'sounding thick' seems to be somewhat intermingled with communicative problems, because the subject immediately follows up the above statement with (another) short narrative of her nephew who apparently often talks in a way that "you just can't understand a word he's saying", so "he certainly couldn't communicate with an adult" but only "with his mates" and should therefore "tone it down a bit" (13FWC44). It is possible that this line of thought is limited to this one individual, but it would not be surprising if 'being unintelligible' and 'sounding unintelligent' turned out to be related concepts for many other speakers as well.

The following quote from a 33-year-old middle class male probably quite nicely sums up attitudes towards Scouse in this age group:

(3.14) I think a natural sounding Liverpool accent that's not affected in any way sounds very nice, you know. I think, unfortunately, these days, there is an element of affectation. I think, again, probably that's just young people generally, you know. (…) I like the lilt, too [of the unaffected accent]. I like the (…) character that it brings. I don't like the over-emphasis of certain traits within the accent. (03MMC33)

Softer accents bring character and are perceived as nice, pleasant, and agreeable. Very pronounced accents, however, are not. The distinction into stronger and lighter accents is not expressly made in this quote, but it is paraphrased as 'over-emphasis', on the one hand, and 'unaffected' and 'natural', on the other. It seems to me that this is a mental connection which is real for most speakers in this age group, and the old subjects as well. Strong Scouse accents are not

only less acceptable because they can make a speaker unintelligible (although this does seem to be an important aspect), but also (and maybe even primarily) because middle-aged speakers perceive them as artificial, 'affected', and 'false'. From the point of view of my subjects, these accents do make use of features that are recognised as being "to an extent a part of the accent" but, crucially, they are "overplayed" (03MMC33), which results in something that is perceived as a stereotypical accent performance and therefore rejected. While not limited to young Liverpudlians, this group of speakers seems to be the one that my middle-aged subjects primarily associate these 'false' accents with.

3.3.3 Young speakers

3.3.3.1 A matter of personal experience

The speakers aged between 19 and 29 are considerably less homogeneous as a group when it comes to the question of whether Scouse has changed or is currently changing. Some of them, like a 19-year-old working class male, claim that they have "not noticed any change" and/or have "never heard anyone comment the fact the accent's changing at all", but acknowledge that this might simply be due to their young age and that, for instance, their parents "might notice differences" that they themselves do not (04MWC19). Interestingly however, this speaker then goes on to explain that he would be reluctant to say his own parents "speak with a Liverpool accent in actual fact", and that his mother in particular uses "a softer (…) [and] slightly more refined" accent (04MWC19). His personal experience would thus seem to contradict his statement that he has not noticed any change in the accent, but apparently he is unwilling to extrapolate the differences within his family to a larger part of the population, for some reason.

The two young middle class women in the primary sample are very similar in this respect. When directly asked whether she believes Scouse is changing the first one flatly rejects this idea with the words: "no, it's about the same" (06FMC20). Earlier in her interview, however, when the subject of (local) identity was discussed, she explained that she would not use the label 'Scouser' for herself, but that she would "call [her] mum and dad Scousers, 'cause their accent is significantly stronger than what [hers] is" (06FMC20). We have thus, again, a young speaker who has personal experience of apparent time change (though in the opposite direction of what most older subjects report), but does not seem to consider it representative of the more general situation in Liverpool.

The other female middle class speaker likewise says that she has not "noticed [Scouse] changing", but then immediately goes on to talk about her parents, who

"don't really have a strong Liverpool accent *anymore*" (my emphasis), despite the fact that they have grown up in the Dingle and Toxteth, respectively, which are both traditional working class districts that the subject herself describes as "quite rough areas of Liverpool", at least when her parents were young (07FMC23). Her explanation for the 'softer' accents of her parents is that they later moved "out of the centre" to a northern suburb and "lost their accent, if they had one" (07FMC23). To be fair, the second part of this statement ("if they had one") indicates that she is aware of the fact that her parents might never have had such a strong accent as is nowadays typical for speakers from these districts (which would be evidence for accent change), but she does not know and apparently prefers the hypothesis that her parents changed, instead of the accent itself. It is possible that this focus on the individual is due to the fact that she has observed changes in her own use of language in her recent past. She speculates that she might have had "a stronger accent" before she went to university where she "lived with quite a lot of people from down south (…) and [her] accent just became really weird", whereas now that she has been living and working in Liverpool again for a number of years, friends and acquaintances from outside the city tell her that she has "got more Scouse" again, though she herself "can't tell" (07FMC23).

Most of the subjects that do believe Scouse is changing or has changed also base their opinion on evidence collected in their family context. There is one male middle class speaker in my sample who believes, and explicitly verbalises, that Liverpool English is "getting less distinguished", based on the evidence that in the generation of his grand parents "they've got really strong accents" (25MMC19), although it is unclear whether he is primarily referring to his own grand parents or to this age group more generally. The remainder of the young Scousers, however, agree with the majority of the old and middle-aged speakers in saying that (a) "the accent itself has changed, definitely" (02MWC20), and that (b) the "Scouse accent's become stronger" (31MMC19). Younger speakers apparently often realise this first when they compare their own speech with that of other family members, like the middle class male just quoted, who explains:

(3.15) I talk a bit different to me mum or the rest of me family, but me and me brother talk the same, like, as each other or me mates. (31MMC19)

Some speakers are also conscious of the fact that there is probably an interaction of age and other social factors like the socioeconomic background of speakers in certain areas of the city. One interviewee, for instance, says that, in general, Scouse has "become thicker in a lot of terms" and adds that this is particularly

true in "deprived areas" of Liverpool, "to the point where people (…) have actually asked (…): 'Are you from Liverpool?"', despite the fact that he himself has "a much more heavier accent" than both his parents (02MWC20). Another participant provides examples for this claim when she says that "if you grew up in Anfield or Kensington [inner city working class districts], you're gonna sound Scouser than someone who grew up in Childwall [a more affluent suburb]" (36FWC20). She does, however, also believe that Liverpool English, as a whole, is different today than it was "a few decades ago" when it was presumably "closer to the Manchester accent" (36FWC20). Her point of reference seems to be the 60s because she mentions that in "clips of the Beatles, if you listen to John Lennon speak, he doesn't sound Scouse" although he was, which is evidence for her that the accent has "definitely changed since then, it's obviously evolved" (36FWC20).

3.3.3.2 'Unpleasant but friendly'

With respect to evaluating the perceived change of Scouse and its current form, there is again a wide range of different comments and attitudes among the youngest speakers in my sample. Few people directly comment the change itself, and when they do they do not express very strong opinions about it. A male working class speaker, for instance, says that he "wouldn't really have a bad or positive comment on the change, to be honest" because for him it is just something that "happens" (02MWC20). A female of the same age explains that she is not sure "if [she] prefer[s], like, John Lennon's accent to [the modern one]" or the other way round (36FWC20). In general, subjects are much more willing to provide evaluations of (varieties of) modern Scouse, rather than on the process of accent change. Often, these judgements are similarly ambiguous as the ones expressed by the old and the middle-aged speakers. For instance, Scouse can be described as "unpleasant but (…) friendly at the same time" because Scousers are both "so loud and confident" (31MMC19). Another speaker explains that, to him as an insider, "it sounds friendly, but [he doesn't] know what it sounds, like, from outside looking in" and he can well imagine that, in the latter case, "it could be a bit intimidating sometimes" (25MMC19) — which is particularly interesting because it is an almost word-by-word repetition of something another Liverpudlians said who is more than 45 years older and from a different social class (cf. Section 3.3.1.2).

Just like speakers of their parents' and grand parents' generation, the youngest subjects in my sample also often evaluate Scouse differently depending on whether it is considered to be a stronger or a lighter variant. This is exempli-

fied by statements such as "if it's a soft Scouse accent (…) I haven't got a problem with it", provided people "speak correctly" and "as long as I can understand them" (06FMC20), which is evidence for the fact that (un)intelligibility is as much of an issue and a relevant factor for evaluation among the youngest Scousers as it is in the middle-aged and the old group. Not every kind of Scouse accent is seen as somewhat problematic, but "the really, really thick accent where you can't understand what they're saying" is very frequently, albeit not always, considered as "very annoying" (04MWC19). The same holds true for the whole matter of authenticity. Consider the following quote:

(3.16) [Scouse] does sound quite friendly and I quite like it, unless it's incredibly thick. I mean, I like the light accent, and my accent, most Liverpudlian accent[s]. But when you get over the top with it then it's just plain ridiculous. I mean, there's no reason to go /x/ all the time. (04MWC19)

'Thick' accents are judged just as negatively as inauthentic ones where people 'go over the top with it'. The 'plain ridiculous' accent of this kind is interpreted as the result of a (perhaps semi-)conscious process, not as something that is just naturally there from the start: The speaker believes there is no compelling "reason" to use the stigmatised fricative realisation of the velar plosive "all the time"; it is a decision people make instead of something they cannot help.

A different male working class speaker talks about the same issue — 'plastic' Scouse accents — in the context of the media (where conscious accent performances are much more likely to occur than in 'real life'). He mentions that he "cannot stand [Scouse]" on television because it "sounds either really harsh or really blunt", and that "there's nothing worse than a person who has a really weird thick Scouse accent" (02MWC20). Why those accents are not just "thick", but also "weird" is also explained by this interviewee: "You know, like, most of us don't speak like what you actually see on the TV" (02MWC20). He feels he can tell "if someone's really putting it on", i.e. if they are a plastic Scouser, and finds this kind of thing "very annoying" (02MWC20). This speaker is also rather explicit on the fact that a 'thick' accent is not *necessarily* also a 'plastic' one, so the two concepts have to be kept separate. He stresses that there are "Scousers that (…) have a perfectly reasonable (…) tinge and (…) perfectly fine TV accent"; one of his examples is the comedian John Bishop who, as the participant notes himself "has quite a strong Liverpudlian accent", but nevertheless one that appears to be acceptable because it is not perceived as inauthentic (02MWC20). Interestingly (but probably not too surprisingly), a speaker from the middle-aged group used John Bishop as a prime example of a plastic Scouser, so it is presumably controversial among Liverpudlians where exactly the 'plastic' line is to be drawn.

Negative comments and evaluations are, however, not exclusively limited to 'plastic' accents, as has been shown above. In particular, three female subjects in my sample can be said to be primarily critical of Scouse, as is obvious from the fact that they almost exclusively express negative feelings towards their accent. For example, they describe the perceived change in the accent as Scouse having "gone more common" (36FWC20) or "harsher" (37FWC20), although it has to be said that this does not keep Liverpool English from also carrying connotations of home and familiarity for these speakers (e.g. when hearing Scouse accents on holiday — 37FWC20). Nevertheless, they remark that Scouse is "not [their] favourite accent", an attitude which is likely to be influenced by the awareness that, from an external point of view, the Liverpool accent is among "the most hated in England" (07FMC23). In a very similar vein, a different speaker mentions that she sometimes asks her brother to "speak properly" because his natural accent is "stronger than ours" and "sounds scallyish" (36FWC20) — *scally* being a term commonly used to refer to the stereotype of the self-assured, boisterous, and criminal (male) working class Scouser.

The subject acknowledges that many speakers are not able to consciously control their pronunciation very well when she says that "most of the time people can't help the way they speak". All the same she insists that "just because you're from Liverpool, you don't need to speak like you were drugged", which is a rather harsh judgement, especially when considered against the backdrop that this is apparently also "how [her own] voice sounds when [she's] not thinking about the way words come out" (36FWC20). As has been reported earlier this speaker has apparently indeed tried hard to eliminate stereotyped features like lenition from her speech, but while she believes to have succeeded, the data collected for this study tell a different story (cf. Section 3.2.3). The fact alone that she tries, however, says a lot about her attitudes towards Scouse. Her motivation lies in the fact that she has internalised some of the negative stereotypes about Scouse, although this causes her some distress because it is her 'home' accent, after all. She seems to be rather aware of this whole process and provides a comparatively detailed description:

(3.17) If I thought it was a beautiful sound, if I thought it was educated, and a proper way to speak — then (…) I wouldn't try and think about the way I'm saying things. (…) No, I do think it can sound uneducated and I wish it didn't, but…(36FWC20)

It should be noted, however, that these extreme attitudes (which border on dissociation) are clearly the exception — most younger subjects express much more

moderate views, especially when they voice negative thoughts about Liverpool English.

4 Discussion (production)

This chapter will provide a summary and interpretation of the (most important) results reported in Chapters ??, ??, and 3. In line with the primary interest of this thesis, the focus will be on what patterns of usage, distributions across social groups, and explicit comments and attitudes tell us about the status of the variables under scrutiny here: That is to say whether they can best be classified as indicators, markers, or stereotypes.

4.1 happy: Indicator (of northernness)

4.1.1 Overall age differences

F1-F2 plots of happy have shown that this vowel is not stable across the three generations of speakers investigated in this study, neither in terms of height nor with respect to frontness (though change in the latter is only significant in the raw data, but not once the random effects of individuals and carrier words have been eliminated by a mixed linear effects model). Rather, realisations of this vowel become simultaneously lower and more central from the old to the middle-aged, and from the middle-aged to the young speakers in my sample. Nevertheless, Pillai scores show that happy and fleece are completely merged for *all* speakers. Given that the vowels could only be compared in the two (formal) reading tasks this might be expected, because, in such contexts, happy is more likely to be tense due to phonetic factors such as duration. It turns out, however, that happy and fleece are actually moving together: *both* vowels are more central in the middle and the young group. At the same time, though, the distance between mean realisations of fleece and happy is increasing in the younger participants, which means that the two vowels are actually becoming more distinct due to happy being more strongly centralised than fleece — thus, while both vowels are moving, it does appear to be primarily happy that is changing. A general caveat is still in order, because all the differences between age groups are in fact very subtle. Impressionistically at least, almost all happy realisations are still acoustically tense, even in the youngest speakers.

Nonetheless, there is a measurable and statistically robust trend for younger speakers to have laxer and therefore less Scouse realisations of happy. Since these speakers were actually expected to have more *local* pronunciation, an explanation is warranted. Flynn (2010) found young speakers from Nottingham to employ ultra-lax variants of happy in an attempt to further distance themselves from the south of England and to emphasise their identities as (working class) northerners. I suspect that young Scousers use laxer happy variants for the same reason. Qualitative analysis of comments about identity (cf. 3.1.3) revealed that older subjects often consider Liverpool to be 'unique' or 'distinct' from the rest of England, both north and south. In the middle and particularly the young group, however, having a secondary identity as a northerner seems perfectly acceptable and even normal to the majority of subjects. Younger Scousers often readily embrace a northern identity as a means of setting themselves apart from the south and, at the same time, associating with other northern cities that they perceive as (more) similar to Liverpool.

As mentioned above, change in happy is subtle, but it *is* a movement *away* from both the traditional local norm and the modern standard pronunciation (both of which are tense), and *towards* the variant that is typical for the majority of speakers in the linguistic north of England (the only exceptions being Liverpool and Newcastle). Centralising happy can be seen as a way of linguistically expressing solidarity with other northern cities and keeping one's distance from 'the south', a region that many Liverpudlians consider to be both geographically and culturally distant.

4.1.2 Gender and class

The more detailed analysis of happy in Sections ?? and ?? showed that both gender and social class also play a role in how this vowel is realised. For instance, it turns out that the age difference discussed above is exclusively driven by female speakers. The men in my sample actually all have comparatively low happy variants, regardless of their age. Women seem to have been adapting to the men in this respect for quite a while and have now done so to the point that there is no significant gender difference in the youngest generation of speakers any more, which could actually indicate that this variable is slightly more salient in the older two generations.

With respect to the front-back dimension women only have happy variants that are statistically different from those of men when they speak freely and when they imitate a particularly strong Scouse accent. In the former case, women's realisations are fronter, in the latter they are more retracted. It is not

really surprising for women to have fronter happy variants than men in spontaneous speech, because these fronter realisations are actually closer to the (modern) standard, and numerous sociolinguistic studies have shown that women generally tend to use more standard variants than men. It does seem strange, however, that they would use more retracted vowels than male speakers when performing Liverpool English, given that stereotypical Scouse should have *tense* happy. This could be a hint that women are at least sub-consciously aware of the fact that men actually have more central variants than they themselves in spontaneous speech. If we assume that the typical Scouser people think of when they are asked to perform the accent is male (which does not seem too far-fetched, given the negative stereotypes associated with Liverpool), then one can interpret women's happy realisation during accent imitation as more 'realistic' than 'stereotypical'. This argument is rather speculative, but it is striking that women's mean and median F2 during accent performance are virtually identical to the values that men have in spontaneous speech (cf. Figure ?? on page ??).

Providing a coherent and unifying interpretation of social class is even more difficult, because it interacts with gender when trying to predict F1, and age when the focus is on F2. Women actually use higher happy variants than men in both the working and the middle class, but in the former the difference is more pronounced than in the latter. In fact, it is mostly working-class women that stick out. Middle-class women, middle-class men, and working-class men all have comparatively similar mean F1 values, whereas happy realisations of working-class women are considerably higher and thus more Scouse (cf. Figure ?? on page ??). This result is diametrically opposed to Flynn (2010)'s finding, because in his study (young) working-class women were the ones that drove the change towards ultra-lax happy variants, whereas in my data, these speakers seem to be the ones that have the most tense variants. The impact of social class on F2, as mentioned above, depends on the age of the participant: in the old and the middle-aged group, working-class speakers have fronter vowels, but among the youngest speakers the effect is reversed and working-class Scousers actually have more central variants.

Women having more standard-like realisations is in line with what many sociolinguists have found in many different contexts, but it is unclear why working-class women in particular would have more standard realisations than their middle-class counterparts — unless they were hypercorrecting, which is not particularly likely for a largely non-salient (see below) variable. What is more, being working class favours tenser pronunciations with respect to F1 for all age groups, but as far as F2 is concerned, this is only true for old and middle-aged speakers. For the

youngest speakers, however, the effect is reversed, and working-class speakers now *dis*favour tense happy realisations. The evidence regarding gender and class thus presents itself as rather inconclusive and difficult to interpret.

4.1.3 Style shifting and awareness

When it comes to style shifting the three generations of speakers do not show any significant differences: All speakers use higher and fronter variants of happy when they read out a word list and also when they perform a stereotypical Scouse accent (for F2 style differences are statistically less robust). This is not the pattern that is commonly associated with Labovian style shifting, but register does have an impact on how happy is realised, so an explanation is called for.

The lower F1 and higher F2 values in the word list readings could be explained phonetically (slower and clearer articulation, resulting in more peripheral vowels generally), but this is difficult for accent performance, where the same trend (of more peripheral realisations) was observed. People seem to believe, as explicit comments revealed, that speaking *fast* is a typical feature of Scouse, so provided they incorporate this aspect into their stereotype performance it would rather favour *laxer* realisations of happy instead of tenser ones. In fact, vowel durations were somewhat shorter during imitation only for the youngest speakers in the sample, the rest had happy pronunciations of similar length in text reading, spontaneous speech, and accent imitation (cf. Table ??). In none of the three age groups can vowel duration thus be part of the explanation why happy realisations are tenser during performance of a strong Scouse accent — for the youngest speakers durations would even pull in the opposite direction.

Another interpretation of the U-shaped line in the two relevant graphs is that two different and, in a way, conflicting, speech norms are at work here. When people read through the list, they converge towards the standard pronunciation, which is /i/, nowadays, whereas when they do the hyper-Scouse pronunciations, they tend to use more /i/-like vowels because that is what distinguishes Scouse from the directly surrounding accents. In the 'reading' and 'free' styles, articulation is a bit more relaxed (with respect to *both* norms) and happy tends to be lower, possibly simply for reasons of economy. The approach of two conflicting norms that pull in the same direction might seem slightly unsatisfying, but some sort of very vague sub-conscious awareness of happy as a feature of Liverpool English must be assumed if the increase in height and frontness in the imitation register is to be explained.

Interestingly, Newbrook (1999: 102) also found "anomalous stylistic patterning" in West Wirral and adds that (a) "there was a major issue in respect to *norms*" (my

emphasis), and that (b) "[t]his applie[d] in particular to happy" (Newbrook 1999: 102). Part of the problem is certainly that "the dialectological facts are complex and the interpretation of responses is often debatable", and also that many subjects seemed to be confused "as to what the RP form might actually be", which is his explanation for the fact that the majority of his participants endorsed [i] despite the fact that this was still a non-standard variant in 1980 when he collected his data (Newbrook 1999: 101). On the basis of my data at least, *conscious* awareness is out of the question: Not a single participant mentioned happy-tensing as a typical feature of Liverpool English, or otherwise commented on it.

4.1.4 Classification

The analysis of happy realisations has unearthed a number of features which hint at a certain degree of salience: there is some very basic social stratification, and there is a certain impact of register. However, both are less robust for F2, the vowel dimension that usually does most of the sociolinguistic work (cf. Labov 2006: 502). Furthermore, social factors are clearly much less important as predictors of formant values (irrespective of whether we are talking about F1 or F2) than they are for NURSE (cf. 4.2), which indicates lower relative salience and strongly suggests that the centralisation of happy is a change from below (cf. Labov 1994: 78). No prototypical style shifting is found for happy, but style differences are clearly not random either. Since the (somewhat confusing) impact of style is the same in all age groups and can be interpreted as showing at least the beginnings of some sort of awareness, it seems therefore justified to conclude that happy is somewhere in between an indicator and a marker for all speakers investigated — with the aside that it might actually be on its way to returning firmly to the status of an indicator with the youngest speakers, given that gender no longer plays a role.

4.2 NURSE: Marker to stereotype and back again

4.2.1 Overall age differences

Traditional vowel plots of mean NURSE and SQUARE realisations (pooled across different speaking styles) revealed that the former is (still) more central than the latter for all speakers investigated. Both vowels do however become higher and fronter from the youngest to the oldest subjects (which means that NURSE, in particular, is becoming more Scouse, but only with respect to F2). At the same

time the distance between the means decreases, which means that for young Liverpudlians NURSE and SQUARE are considerably less distinct than for middle-aged and old Scousers. Just as for happy and FLEECE, a caveat is in order here, because, once again, the differences between the two vowels are minute in absolute terms (especially as far as the F1 dimension is concerned), even for the oldest speakers where the distance is greatest. This idea is corroborated by Pillai scores that are universally near 0 and show NURSE and SQUARE to be almost perfectly merged in any age group and for any style.

All the same, differences between the age groups could be found, even if they were rather subtle in nature. For one thing, realisations in the old group mostly vary with respect to F1, whereas middle-aged speakers show more variation in F2. This alone can already hint at a slight increase in salience from the old to the middle-aged speakers, because a wider range of F2 values (as the sociolinguistically more important dimension) suggests a potentially higher functional load when it comes to the social meaning of the variables. Generally speaking, there is less variation in the most formal and the most informal (stereotyped) styles, which shows that speakers seem to be more agreed on the target realisations of the two vowels in these registers. Crucially, the difference between the styles decreases across the generations, particularly from the middle-aged to the young generation. The youngest speakers in the sample not only show few differences in-between speaking styles, but they also exhibit a very small degree of variation across the board, even in spontaneous speech. Both points serve as evidence for the fact that the realisations of NURSE and SQUARE seem to have largely stabilised in speakers aged between 19 and 29, which speaks for a decrease in salience, in particular from the middle to the young generation.

Plots of mean vowel realisations also unearthed interesting differences between the age groups in how NURSE and SQUARE change along the style continuum. Among the oldest speakers that were interviewed both vowels move to the front during accent performance, which is the expected behaviour, particularly for NURSE[1]. In the remaining three styles, however, NURSE is remarkably stable and it is mostly SQUARE that moves — crucially, this movement is *towards* NURSE rather than away from it, which means that the two vowels are actually more instead of less merged the more formal the register. This is thus a mild case of hypercorrection, because by centralising SQUARE (which makes it *less* standard) instead of NURSE (which would become *more* standard), people are actually moving the

[1] This also indicates that even for these speakers the target for a Scouse NURSE is a front vowel, not a central one as some people might suspect given the history of the merger in Liverpool; cf. ??.

'wrong' vowel.

Speakers of Scouse aged between 30 and 55 also behave as expected when they are asked to perform a stereotypical Scouse accent: both NURSE and SQUARE are fronter than in spontaneous speech. For the reading passage, middle-aged Liverpudlians adjust the vowels in the same way as the old generation. NURSE hardly moves at all, while SQUARE is centralised and thus approaches NURSE. When these speakers read out a word list, finally, SQUARE is even further back, while NURSE actually gets *fronted*. As a result, NURSE ends up fronter than SQUARE in this particular speech style. We have thus a situation that is characterised not only by the fact that the two vowels are more instead of less merged in more formal contexts, but also by a reversal of their relative positioning to each other. Speakers of the middle generation can therefore be said to present a textbook case of hypercorrection, because their behaviour results in the opposite of what they are presumably trying to achieve: NURSE and SQUARE pronunciations are even more non-standard in formal registers than they already are in spontaneous speech. This suggests both heightened awareness of the social meaning of this merger (hence the urge to modify usage according to communicative situation) and also a certain degree of linguistic insecurity with respect to this variable.

Among the youngest speakers style seems to be much less important. NURSE and SQUARE are about equally stable across different registers. This is true both in terms of how big the realisational space is (i.e. the range of occurring variants) and where the centres of gravity of the vowel clouds are to be found. Variation between styles is negligible, the position of both vowels largely constant. Young speakers have completely merged distributions and almost identical mean realisations in all speech styles, which strongly suggests that salience of the NURSE-SQUARE merger is very low at best in this group.

It was also shown that the (age) group Pillai scores hide a considerable degree of inter-speaker variation, at least as far as the old and the middle-aged participants are concerned. These two samples of speakers divide rather neatly into two separate sub-groups: (1) Completely merged speakers with Pillai scores near 0, and (2) speakers with comparatively high Pillai scores, who keep NURSE and SQUARE distinct. The crucial finding here is that, for the oldest speakers, higher Pillai scores correlate with higher social status, because it is the middle class speakers who maintain a distinction and the working class participants who are (more) merged — just as one would expect in the early phases of the social life cycle of a linguistic variable. In the middle-aged group there are both middle *and* working class speakers among the merged and the distinct subjects, which shows that awareness has spread to at least some working class speakers (who

then try to keep the two vowels more distinct) and also that, in the middle class, speakers have started hypercorrecting, possibly because social awareness (and stigmatisation) of this variable has increased for them as well. When one looks at the young speakers class is no longer an issue at all, because everybody has merged distributions: this echoes the non-impact of style and provides further support to the idea that the merger has reached completion and simultaneously dropped completely below the radar again (at least in production).

4.2.2 Gender and social class

Zooming in on NURSE realisations in particular revealed that gender and social class interact with age of the participant (and with each other) in a number of ways. For instance, the mixed linear effects model showed that women had NURSE vowels which were significantly higher and fronter than those of men. As far as F1 is concerned, however, this effect decreases from the old to the young speakers, and is no longer significant for the latter, which is additional evidence for the claim made above that the social salience of this variable is lower in the youngest speakers. Women use higher, i.e. more standard, realisations of NURSE in all three age groups, which is what one would expect to find for a socially meaningful variable. Their values are rather stable across the generations as well, which means that the apparent time change in F1 is almost exclusively driven by men, who have raised their NURSE to converge with the women in the young group of speakers.

When we look at the front-back dimension, there is no significant gender difference, neither in the oldest nor the youngest speakers. For the middle group, however, the difference between men and women is not only highly significant, but women actually have NURSE realisations that are so much fronter (more Scouse) than those of men that the regression model still returns gender as a significant effect although it is only so in this one sub-group. It would appear strange that women should use more Scouse variants of a salient variable, but if we remember that it is precisely the middle age group that was found to hypercorrect, then this actually makes sense. If a group of speakers is aware of a non-standard feature and so eager to avoid it that they develop a tendency to modify it in the 'wrong' direction then it should come as no surprise that that tendency is actually more pronounced for women, given that female speakers are generally held to be more sensitive to linguistic differences that carry social meaning.

Social class has an effect on F2 that is somewhat similar to the one that gender has on F1, albeit in a more moderate way. Middle-class speakers have more cent-

ral (standard) NURSE variants across all three generations, which is in line with most previous research in sociolinguistics. However, this difference gets progressively smaller from the oldest to the youngest speakers, which can be seen as further evidence that NURSE is decreasing in salience, although it has to be said that the class difference is still statistically significant even in the youngest group. Working class speakers have thus always (within the time frame that is the focus of this study) had very front NURSE variants, while middle class speakers have been adapting to this model in the last 50 years or so.

Class and gender of participant interact for both F1 and F2 of NURSE, but only in terms of degree, not direction, of effects. That is to say that, for F1 for instance, the gender effect is more pronounced in the middle class (which is to say the distance between the means is greater), but it is highly significant both among middle- *and* working-class subjects. Interestingly, middle-class speakers of both genders seem to have lower, more Scouse, vowels than working-class Liverpudlians. This is unexpected, but it is not the first time this issue has come up. After all, one might ask more generally why NURSE is consistently shifted upwards throughout each generation (which makes it *less* Scouse) while simultaneously being fronted (which makes it *more* Scouse). What might be happening is that fronting of NURSE is at least a semi-conscious process due to the social importance of the F2 dimension of English vowels, whereas the raising is a change from below that is completely subconscious. If raising of NURSE was a change from below it would not be surprising, but actually *expected* to see (working-class) women in the vanguard (cf. Labov 2001: 292–293), as is the case in my sample, where NURSE realisations become lower and thus more Scouse from working-class women to working-class men, followed by middle-class women and finally middle-class men. For the front-back dimension of NURSE the gender difference is actually somewhat clearer in the working class, but again it should be noted that men and women differ significantly in *both* classes. Women's higher F2 values have been linked to hypercorrection above, and it would not be surprising if this was primarily a feature of the (upper) working class, given that their realisations are, on average, fronter to start with, which could mean that working-class females feel a greater need to 'correct' their pronunciation. As a general note of caution, however, I would like to repeat that the results summarised in this paragraph pertain to rather subtle differences of degree and should not be overinterpreted.

4.2.3 Style shifting and awareness

When it comes to style shifting there are also some differences between F1 and F2. In the height dimension, there is little to no style shifting that reaches statistical significance. If anything, it can be found for the oldest speakers in the sample, but the trend is in the unexpected direction: NURSE becomes lower (more Scouse) instead of higher in the more formal styles. When style shifting is investigated for the two genders separately, it turns out that this unexpected trend is actually driven by women of *all* age groups, whereas men exhibit next to no register differences. A similarly clear distinction is found with social class: The downward trend towards less Scouse variants the more informal the communicative context is more pronounced for middle class subjects, particularly for the middle age group. This is again in line with previous research: Female and middle-class speakers exhibiting more style shifting is just what is to be expected for a salient variable. It is true that the shift is in the unexpected direction but this issue has already been discussed above: If raising of NURSE is a change from below it *should* actually manifest itself first (and in a more pronounced way) in more informal registers.

Age groups also differ with regard to the impact of style on frontness of NURSE. The oldest speakers exhibit almost no style shifting, NURSE realisations are only significantly fronter when people imitate a strong Scouse accent — in the other three styles pronunciations are identical from a statistical point of view. In principle, this holds for both social classes, the differences in style shifting (which is to say the changes between styles, not the absolute values!) are only marginal. Both points support, once more, the idea that salience of this feature is rather low for these speakers.

In the middle-aged group, NURSE is significantly less front in free speech than in all the other three styles, which means that the vowel does not only become more Scouse during performance of a strong accent, but also when people read out a text or a word list. Again, working- and middle-class speakers behave in a rather similar fashion. If one only looked at this result in isolation it would be tempting to conclude that there is little style shifting and therefore hardly any awareness of the variable. However, we know from looking at NURSE realisations in relation to SQUARE that the middle-age group is actually very prone to hypercorrection: they do manipulate *both* vowels in a consistent way, which is just not the expected one; NURSE is progressively fronted the more formal the register. It is this process that is responsible for pronunciations that are comparable in the most formal and the most informal styles, not a lack of salience. The fact that both middle *and* working class speakers hypercorrect underlines this by showing

that awareness of, and linguistic insecurity relating to this merger seem to be universal in this age group.

The youngest speakers, finally, have steadily increasing (and significantly different) F2 values from reading out a text to free speech and accent imitation. The only part of their graph which does not look like prototypical style shifting is that NURSE is also significantly more front (and thus more Scouse) when these speakers read out a word list. It seems thus as if younger Scousers actually style-shift more consistently than older Liverpudlians, which would be in stark contrast with the evidence discussed in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, where I argued that salience was *de*creasing for the youngest Scousers. The contradiction is only apparent, however. For one thing, the shifting pattern just described is not representative of all speakers in this age group. Middle- and working-class Scousers aged 29 and younger behave differently, and this difference is not just one of degree. Rather, working-class speakers contribute the (hypercorrect) fronting in the word list style, while the middle-class subjects are responsible for the steep rise of F2 during accent performance. The remaining three styles are not significantly different from each other in both social classes, so taken separately none of them are great style shifters. In fact, young middle-class Scousers have the flattest line in the sample, i.e. they have a smaller amount of style shifting than any other group (plus there is no significant drop of F2 in free speech due to hypercorrection in 'reading' and 'list').

The other aspect worth considering is that it was shown in Section **??** (and discussed in 4.2.1) that young Scousers have the most merged distributions and show the fewest style differences when NURSE and SQUARE are analysed *together*. It is true that NURSE is somewhat more centralised when these speakers read out a text, but so is SQUARE, which means that vowel distributions are just as merged (and therefore non-standard) as in the other registers. We can therefore say that the salience of this variable is not gone completely: Young middle-class Liverpudlians still have at least some sub-conscious awareness of fronter NURSE variants as a typical feature of Scouse (which explains the fronting during performance), while young-working class speakers still hypercorrect a bit in the most formal styles (which accounts for the fronting in the word list). All in all, however, style shifting (and therefore salience) is a lot less pronounced in this age group than the relevant line plots suggest, and the impact of style is certainly less than in the middle-aged group.

Explicit comments made by my subjects fit in rather well with people's linguistic behaviour as it has been described and interpreted in this section so far. Generally speaking, the NURSE-SQUARE merger is not very often commented on

(much more rarely than lenition of /k/, for instance), but even so there are pronounced differences between speakers of different age groups. Among the oldest speakers there is hardly any conscious awareness of the feature (10% of speakers comment on it, so only 1 in 10). In the middle group the percentage of people who explicitly mention the merger rises considerably to 38.46%, only to drop to 13.33% again in the youngest speakers, a level which is comparable to that of the oldest interviewees. In contrast to lenition, no one, irrespective of their age, singled out the NURSE-SQUARE merger as being a particularly disagreeable or 'annoying' feature of Scouse.

4.2.4 Classification

Realisations of NURSE are governed by a number of social factors, and particularly their interactions. The impact of these predictors is statistically more robust than for happy, which is evidenced by the fact that even differences which are very subtle in absolute terms are found to be significant. This is true even though there are many more observations of happy than of NURSE (and SQUARE) in my sample. All of this suggests a generally higher level of salience for NURSE in comparison with happy.

Data on style shifting (particularly when SQUARE realisations are also considered) and conscious awareness clearly show that the merger is not equally salient in the three age groups of speakers. For the oldest speakers it is a marker, awareness of which is only just beginning. In the middle generations, not only style shifting but also hypercorrection is widespread. Together with a steep increase in conscious awareness this shows that the feature is now, for many at least, a stereotype that speakers actively (though rather unsuccessfully) try to avoid producing. Apparently, this boost in salience seems to have been only temporary. Data collected from the youngest speakers in my sample have shown that the NURSE-SQUARE merger has been 'reduced' (in terms of social salience) to a marker again in the current generation of young adults, possibly even one that might be on its way to becoming an indicator.

4.3 Velar nasal plus: Indicator with prestige option

4.3.1 Age, class, and gender

Based on accounts in the literature, velar nasal plus was assumed to be one of the less salient features of Scouse, but realisations were nevertheless found to be influenced by at least some extra-linguistic, i.e. social, factors in interesting ways.

The analysis of age, for instance, revealed that there is a significant increase in the use of velar nasal plus from the old to the middle-aged speakers, which is in line with the idea that Liverpool English is getting stronger or more local. From the middle to the young group, however, there is no further increase. Rather, PDF rates actually drop again. Compared to the oldest speakers in the sample, Scousers aged between 19 and 29 still use velar nasal plus significantly more often, but if they are judged against the generation of their parents, they cannot be said to have more local realisations of this particular consonant as their rates are actually significantly lower.

A closer look at statistical interactions showed that this age difference is actually restricted to middle class subjects. Only for this socioeconomic class is there a statistically robust rise and subsequent decline of PDF from the old to the middle-aged to the young speakers. For the remaining subjects, on the other hand, the age differences collapse, so in the working class /ŋ(g)/ realisations are actually stable across the timespan investigated in this study. From the old (where working class and middle class are not significantly different) to the middle age group speakers with higher social status seem to have taken up this variable (i.e. they seem to have become somewhat more aware of it) and increased their usage to a value which is then significantly higher than that of their working class counterparts before subsequently lowering it again a bit so that the classes are, again, no longer statistically distinct among younger Scousers.

Not only social class, but also the gender of participant has an impact on how velar nasal plus is used. The mixed linear effects regression revealed that female speakers have a higher PDF (10.85%), and thus more Scouse realisations, of /ŋ(g)/ than men (8.22%). With female speakers using more local variants than male ones, we have thus another result which does not seem to resonate very well with previous work in sociolinguistics, but I would like to argue further below that this is only apparently so (see 4.3.2).

Investigation of the significant gender X style interaction also showed that women and men differ with respect to the role style has to play. Females have a comparatively high PDF in the formal styles 'word list' and 'reading' as well as in 'imitation', and only reduce this value somewhat in spontaneous speech. Males, on the other hand, have comparatively low (and statistically identical) values for text reading, free speech, and accent performance (although there is a slight rise from 'free' to 'imitation' which is close to significance), and only change their pronunciation (in the same direction as women, i.e. towards more Scouse variants) when they are asked to read out a word list. If one takes spontaneous speech (where there is no significant gender difference) as the baseline it can

therefore be said that females seem to be more sensitive to this feature, because (a) they change velar nasal plus pronunciations earlier (reading passage) on the way to the formal end of the style spectrum (whereas men need to reach the most formal register before there is any linguistic reaction), and (b) they react more extremely at the other, most informal, end of the continuum (i.e. accent performance), where the rise in PDF is much less pronounced for male speakers. Both points suggest that women are rather more aware of velar nasal plus than men.

4.3.2 Style shifting and awareness

If the data are pooled across gender and social class, no difference between age groups can be found with respect to style shifting. All speakers, irrespective of their age, have relatively high PDF values (Scouse realisations containing a plosive) when they read out a word list. There is then a decrease towards 'normal' reading style, and a further drop towards spontaneous speech, so from the word list to free speech realisations of velar nasal plus actually become linearly more standard. From free speech /ŋ(g)/ pronunciations then become considerably more Scouse again when subjects are asked to perform a particularly strong Liverpool accent (PDF is on about the same level as for text reading). With one negligible exception, all these differences are statistically robust.

While the linear rise from spontaneous speech to text reading to the word list is evidence for some sort of at least subconscious awareness, this is not awareness of velar nasal plus as a *local feature of Liverpool English*, because in this case the slope would be wrong. PDF should go *down* in more formal registers, because this would translate to more standard realisations. The pattern we do actually find therefore rather shows that speakers consider velar nasal plus a characteristic of *careful* speech. This is unexpected, but actually ties in nicely with the fact that, from a purely synchronic point of view, velar nasal plus is a spelling pronunciation. Due to its presence in the orthography, it would not be too surprising if speakers considered realising the plosive the 'proper' way to talk, while not doing so would be a sign of informality. As outlined above, my data provide further evidence for this interpretation because they show that women have a (very slightly but nevertheless significantly) higher PDF than men, which incidentally also echoes Knowles (1973)'s finding that females used velar nasal plus more frequently than males in his sample (cf. **??**). These results are only compatible with many other sociolinguistic studies if we assume that people consider velar nasal plus primarily a feature of careful speech, because then it would actually be expected that women are more prone to using it. Some additional support for this interpretation can be found in Newbrook (cf. 1999: 101): In West Wirral a

not insignificant number of speakers endorsed realisations containing a plosive in both word-final and particularly in intervocalic position, probably because of "sheer ignorance or confusion as to what the RP form might actually be".

If velar nasal plus is careful speech, why does its use go up when speakers are asked to perform a strong local accent? This task was designed to elicit markedly local speech and the evidence pertaining to the other variables (particularly /k/ lenition, cf. **??** and 4.4.3) suggests it succeeded. But of course the accent imitation task was still a highly artificial context and speakers presumably paid a lot of attention to their speech, albeit not in the traditional Labovian sense of the phrase. All the same, getting the stereotype 'right' required them to focus on how they were articulating because this stereotypical accent was not their natural one (as is evidenced by the many comments about 'falseness', cf. 3.3). It is possible that the increased use of velar nasal plus during accent performance is nothing but an artefact of a setting that required subjects to focus very intensely on their pronunciation. I consider it more likely, however, that in addition to the spelling pronunciation aspect Liverpudlians have at least some awareness of velar nasal plus as a local feature as well. In this case, the style shifting pattern would again be a result of two conflicting evaluations, or norms, that just happen to pull realisations in the same direction (cf. 4.1.3).

This account involves a certain amount of speculation and, just as for happy, the issue deserves a much more detailed discussion than the present study can deliver. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that whatever awareness there is must definitely be subconscious: Not a single subject in the extended secondary dataset (all 38 interviews) mentioned velar nasal plus as a typical feature of Liverpool English.

4.3.3 Classification

Velar nasal plus was originally assumed to be a feature with a rather low amount of salience attached to it. However, its realisations are clearly influenced by social characteristics of the users. The style dimension, too, is particularly intriguing, and forbids the classification of /ŋ(g)/ as an indicator, since there are clear differences between registers. At the same time, velar nasal plus is definitely less salient than the NURSE-SQUARE merger, which shows both in the lower statistical importance of social predictors (both quantitatively and qualitatively) and the lack of overt commentary. In light of consistent, if somewhat difficult to interpret style-shifting, I conclude, then, that velar nasal plus is a marker for all three age groups investigated and that younger speakers do neither provide evidence for changing salience of the feature nor do they, in fact, use the local variant

more than their parents' generation.

4.4 Lenition: From indicator to stereotype

4.4.1 Age

Among the features investigated in this dissertation, lenition of /k/ is the one that generated statistically robust differences for the widest range of social predictors and their combinations. In fact only frequency of the carrier word was eliminated from the mixed effects regression model; all the other main effects, as well as all interactions that had been entered into the model, turned out to be significant factors in predicting PDF values of /k/ (which is why only the most important and relevant results will be discussed here). Perhaps surprisingly, age of speaker was not among the significant main effects in the regression model, while t-tests on the raw data did find significant age differences, at least between the young speakers and each of the other two groups. Scousers aged between 56 and 85 have mean PDF values comparable to speakers who are between 30 and 55 years old, so from a statistical point of view, and in this particular context, the two groups can actually be considered as one. Younger Liverpudlians exhibit a significantly higher mean PDF than both speakers of their parents' or grandparents' generation. The apparent contradiction between the raw data and the mixed effects regression has been shown to be mostly due to *like* (as a discourse marker and quotative particle), because, among the youngest speakers, this word is both considerably more frequent and also realised with a higher average PDF than in the other two groups.

This special behaviour of *like* in the young group was filtered out by the mixed effects model since it had a random intercept for carrier word. While this makes sense in a way (we do not necessarily want a single lexical item to dominate the data in such a way), it also seems somewhat unfortunate. After all, the fact that young Liverpudlians frequently say [laɪç] (or any other words that they are more likely to realise with a fricative than older speakers) probably does contribute considerably to many laypersons' impression that Scouse is getting stronger since lenition is not only one of the best known but also most stigmatised features (cf. 4.4.4). Interestingly, the same differences (non-significant between old and middle, but significant between middle and young group) also surface when observations pertaining to *like* are removed from the dataset altogether, so *like* is clearly not the only factor, and young Liverpudlians really do seem to be Scouser than those of the middle-aged and old group.

Zooming in a bit reveals that this change has not happened in quite the same way in the two genders. For women, the increase in PDF actually already happens from the old to the middle generation. From the middle-aged to the young speakers there is then only a slight (and non-significant) further increase of PDF, so that young female Scousers do not use lenition more than their parents' generation already did. Male speakers, on the other hand, start out with very high values of lenition in the old generation, drop to a considerably and significantly lower level in the middle group, and then increase their usage of Scouse variants again from the middle-aged to the young speakers. With respect to /k/ lenition, young men in Liverpool have thus completed a sort of revival or 'back-to-the-roots' process.

4.4.2 Gender and class

Note also that the gender difference is not quite the same within the respective age groups. It should be noted that the differences are subtle, though: /k/ realisations of women and men are statistically distinct in all three generations of speakers. However, the difference is slightly less robust in the middle group, and, what is more, women have actually higher PDF values than men in this generation. Generally speaking though, females have *lower* PDF means than males, so women use less lenition than men, which is just what one would expect for a salient and stigmatised variable. The fact that women are more Scouse than men in the middle group might therefore suggest that the variable has lost salience in this generation, but additional evidence refutes this hypothesis (see 4.4.4). Women just seem to have been in the vanguard of this change (remember that their PDF has risen systematically from the old to the youngest speakers, whereas the changes in male PDF are non-linear), despite the fact that lenition is a salient non-standard feature, which one would usually rather expect women to shun. This is indeed a strange result that does not lend itself to straightforward interpretation. It would be interesting to see whether it is something that just shows up in my sample due to the particular individuals that were recruited or whether it could be replicated and really needs an explanation.

On a different note, it is interesting that the gender difference is not significant when subjects perform a strong Scouse accent (where PDF is very high in both genders), which can be seen as evidence that both women and men (subconsciously?) consider lenition as part of the Scouse stereotype. This result is very neatly mirrored when the data are divided according to social class of the speaker. The mixed linear effects regression showed that, all other things being equal, middle class subjects have lower PDF rates and thus more standard real-

isations of /k/ than working class Liverpudlians, which is the expected outcome for a salient variable. Just as with gender, the class difference is highly significant in all speaking styles except accent imitation (where PDF means are again highest), which shows that the strong association of /k/ lenition with a stereotypical Scouse accent is not only shared among Liverpudlians of both genders, but also across different socioeconomic classes.

However, looking at how the class difference develops across the three generations of speakers investigated here is even more fascinating. For the oldest speakers, there is actually *no* significant difference in the use of lenition between working class and middle class Liverpudlians. In the middle group the difference is already highly significant, and for the youngest speakers this is even more true. The reason for this is that, if we take the oldest speakers as the baseline, middle class PDF values *de*crease linearly in apparent time, whereas working class PDF actually *in*creases with the same regularity. As far as /k/ lenition is concerned, the claim that Scouse is getting Scouser is thus only true for working-class speakers; middle-class realisations of /k/ have actually become more standard in the last few decades. This final point indicates that the salience of this variable has increased among middle-class speakers: they are more aware of lenition (and its non-standardness) and therefore try to avoid it. To explain the opposite trend in the working class one could assume that salience in this group has simultaneously decreased, but this is not what is happening (cf. 4.4.4). Rather, /k/ lenition must have acquired covert prestige as a marker of local identity. For Scousers of lower socioeconomic classes this covert prestige seems to be more important than the social stigma attached to it, whereas for middle-class speakers priorities are reversed.

4.4.3 Style shifting

Style shifting pertaining to /k/ lenition reveals highly interesting differences between the age groups, even more so than for NURSE. Old and middle-aged speakers not only have PDF values that add up to roughly the same grand mean (cf. 4.4.1), they also end up with /k/ pronunciations that are virtually identical in (almost) all individual speech styles analysed in this study. Neither group has any differences between the registers word list, text reading, and spontaneous speech. In all three styles /k/ is realised in a comparatively standard-like way. Only when it comes to accent imitation is there a steep rise of PDF towards more fricative-like local variants. These two groups of speakers thus have, at best, a two-way style distinction (stereotypical accent vs. everything else), so their awareness of the variable, while not nonexistent, seems to be limited. Young Scousers, how-

ever, presents a textbook case of style shifting as we would expect it for a socially meaningful variable: There is a steady, statistically significant, and almost perfectly linear increase of PDF from the most formal to the least formal register. Compared to the other two groups, the youngest speakers in my sample manipulate lenition in a much more fine-grained way, which shows that awareness has reached a level in this group that is considerably higher than for older Liverpudlians.

It has already been pointed out above that women show more awareness of lenition than men do. This higher degree of sensitivity also shows in (slightly) different style shifting patterns. Female speakers exhibit more systematic and more pronounced style differences than those that are observed for male subjects, so they are not only more sensitive to /k/ lenition in general (which would just translate to lower absolute PDF values, but not necessarily different style shifting patterns). With respect to lenited variants of /k/ women also are more susceptible to the style dimension. An additional relevant point here is that when the data are split up along the gender dimension, the youngest speakers are still the ones that show the most systematic style shifting pattern, and this is true for both women *and* men, which shows that the increase in awareness along the age dimension is not limited to just one of the two genders, but is really primarily a question of age. The fact that style shifting patterns are least different in the young group is further evidence for the idea that awareness of lenition is more universal in this generation than in the other two.

The interaction of style, age, and social class is somewhat less straightforward to interpret. First of all, old middle and middle-aged working class subjects have a significant drop in PDF from list/reading to spontaneous speech, which means that they use more Scouse variants in the more formal registers than in free speech. This looks very much like the hypercorrection that was observed for NURSE (cf. 4.3.2), but it is difficult to see why it would affect these two subgroups in particular. Generally speaking though, there is a class difference in that middle-class speakers mostly distinguish performance of a strong accent from everything else (in the young group, too), while working-class speakers show more pronounced (and, for the youngest speakers, also more systematic and fine-grained) style differences.

Such a result is unexpected because it could be taken to imply that middle class speakers pay less attention than their working-class counterparts to how often they use stigmatised variants in a particular register. I believe, however, that this is not the case. It has to be taken into account that the mean PDF values of middle class speakers, especially in the middle and the young generation, are relatively

low across the board (accent imitation excepted), and considerably lower than even the most standard-like values measured for the working class. I believe that middle class Liverpudlians just try to avoid lenited /k/ variants altogether, even in spontaneous speech, and that they just cannot get much more standard than they already are, even if they wanted to. They *can* produce lenited variants, but they only do so when being asked to reproduce the stereotype. In more natural speech their normal realisation is already so close to their lower (i.e. 'standard') limit that there is just no room left for any further style shifting away from the local variant.

4.4.4 Awareness and attitudes

Lenition of /k/ attracts, by far, the largest number of explicit comments and evaluations in my sample, which is clear evidence for the fact that it is considerably more salient than the other three variables investigated in this thesis. There are, however, pronounced differences between the three generations. Among the oldest speakers, lenition is hardly mentioned at all, less than one in four subjects mention this feature. In the middle-aged group this rate has already risen considerably to around 70%, and when it comes to the youngest Scousers in the sample, each and every one of them expresses conscious awareness of lenition in velar plosives, so the variable has reached full and universal stereotype status. Many speakers (particularly in the youngest generation) are able to provide comparatively detailed accounts of the phenomenon that include fairly accurate descriptions of the place of articulation and the systematic nature of the variable (as opposed to isolated examples of individual lexical items).

It is not quite clear *why* awareness has increased in the way that it has. This might be due to the fact that, impressionistically at least, contemporary comedians frequently — and primarily — use this particular feature to imitate or make fun of the Liverpool accent. One could assume that younger speakers are more exposed to these recent performances than people in, say, their 60s, but at this point this idea is mere speculation. Furthermore, a separate study would first have to investigate whether performances in the media and on stage really *have* changed in the last decades as to which features they focus on. After all, it is in principle quite possible that /k/ lenition was already part of the external stereotype of Scouse in the 50s and 60s (it is, for instance, mentioned in the introduction to the first *Lern Yerself Scouse* volume). We could also argue that increasing awareness in younger speakers is based on the changing usage of the variable. For instance, people's awareness of non-standard variants might go up when they realise that middle-class speakers increasingly start to avoid them. How-

ever, this would lead to the chicken and egg problem commonly encountered in salience research (cf. 2.1.1): if awareness goes up because usage changes, then what triggers change in usage in the first place? Whatever the reason for the increase in conscious awareness is, explicit comments clearly show that lenition of /k/ is even more of a stereotype for younger Liverpudlians than it is for the older generations.

Why, then, do younger Liverpudlians use this feature more than their parents or grandparents despite the fact that they know about it? A different attitude towards lenition would be an option, but this is not what we find. The majority of younger and older speakers alike explained that they themselves often found very strong Scouse accents harsh, unpleasant, or intimidating. Lenition of velar plosives is strongly associated with these pronounced Liverpool accents and considered one of its most distinctive features. Across all three generations, subjects judge it rather negatively ('annoying', 'makes you unintelligible'), possibly because at least some of them have personal experience of outsiders using this variable to make fun of Liverpudlians. Higher proportions of lenited variants among younger Scousers can thus *not* be explained by a different (overt) attitude towards the feature.

Another explanation could be that young speakers just cannot help using lenition. The regular style-shifting that was found, however, rather suggests that particularly younger speakers can at least sub-consciously control their usage of the local variant quite well. It is possible that some Scousers are *generally* aware of the variable but not, for some reason, of its presence *in their own speech*. There is some anecdotal evidence in my data that supports this idea, like the young female working class speaker who reports not using lenition at all when in fact she uses fricative variants almost categorically. It has to be noted, though, that this type of linguistic insecurity, while not restricted to this one speaker, does not seem to be the rule (especially with respect to the male speakers). Just as outlined above for the class differences (cf. 4.4.2), I would therefore argue that the higher use of lenition among the younger speakers is primarily due to the covert prestige that lenited variants appear to have acquired.

4.4.5 Classification

Lenition of /k/ shows precisely the kind of social stratification that one would expect a sociolinguistically salient variable to produce. In particular, non-standard realisations are significantly less common among female and middle-class speakers. Inter-group differences in style shifting suggest that for the old and the middle-aged speakers (sub-conscious) awareness is lower than in the young group

because the former show only limited style awareness, while the latter present a textbook case of Labovian style shifting, with non-standard variants getting consistently and linearly more likely the more informal the communicative context.

Data on explicit comments and judgements further showed that conscious awareness increases in a linear fashion from the oldest to the youngest Scousers. My data thus suggest that lenition of /k/ has developed from a (beginning) marker in the old group (where only a minority is consciously aware of the variable), to a consolidated marker (for the minority) or stereotype (for about three out of four speakers) in the middle generation, and then finally to a fully-fledged and universal stereotype in the young group of speakers, where not only *every* speaker knows about the feature but where style shifting is also most consistent and regular. Liverpudlians aged 29 and younger are therefore not only 'more Scouse' than their parents and grandparents with respect to this variable, but they are also the ones that are most aware of this feature of Liverpool English.

4.5 Summary

People of all age groups closely link Scouse to their local identity. Generally speaking, they are both aware and proud of its distinctness as an accent, although some subjects also see this as something that can be problematic, because they know about the negative connotations that a Scouse accent can carry, particularly for outsiders. To a degree, some of these external stereotypes (and their evaluation!) seem to have been internalised, as when Liverpudlians base their list of typical features of their own accent on stereotypical performances by outsiders. On the whole, inside evaluations are often ambivalent: 'Light' accents are seen as adding an acceptable amount of local flavour and carrying positive connotations such as down-to-earthness, while extremely 'strong' Scouse accents receive much less favourable judgements (this aspect is also reported in De Lyon 1981: 33, often because they appear as exaggerated, false, and inauthentic. Old and middle-aged Liverpudlians believe these 'exaggerated' accents to be more common among younger speakers, but this verdict is not shared by young Scousers who appear to reject 'plastic' accents just as much as the older subjects (interestingly, one subject interviewed by De Lyon in 1979 claimed already that some Liverpudlians deliberately 'exaggerated' the accent, cf. De Lyon 1981: 30).

Norms and attitudes towards Scouse therefore seem to have remained largely stable across the three generations of speakers investigated in this dissertation. All the same, there is some evidence that middle-aged speakers seem to be particularly sensitive to the negative image of Scouse, which shows in the hypercor-

rection that these speakers exhibit for the two salient variables NURSE and /k/. Arguably, this is because the formative years of these speakers (the 70s and 80s) coincided with the period when the economic situation and the national image of Liverpool as a city was at its historic low. For the youngest speakers, quite the opposite is true. While the city is still among the most deprived in the country, the participants in the young group have only ever seen things improving a bit every year. They know about the negative image of their city and their accent, but at least to a certain degree they consider these attitudes to be outdated and unjustified. Pride in their city and the will to express their local identity linguistically seem to be strong enough that the covert prestige of variables such as the NURSE-SQUARE merger and /k/ lenition is at least as (and possibly more) important than the social stigma attached to them.

However, young Scousers are not more Scouse in every respect. Rather, they use (highly) salient markers and stereotypes (NURSE and /k/ lenition in my sample) more often and extensively than their parents or grandparents, because that alone is already enough to convey a strong local identity (though it has to be said that intonation - impressionistically at least - also plays a crucial role here and deserves a study of its own). Non-salient features, on the other hand, are either neglected or even sub-consciously used for other purposes: Their non-salience allows speakers to use them as a means of expression of a regional identity without noticeably deviating from their more local accent. Thus, they enable speakers "to appear outward-looking or more cosmopolitan" without signalling "disloyalty to local norms" or, in particular, "'snobishness'" (Foulkes & Docherty 1999: 13–14). In my sample, this is precisely what seems to be happening to happy, which is becoming less instead of more Scouse (and thus more 'northern') in apparent time.

While the four variables analysed in this thesis do not carry identical amounts of social salience in the three age groups, their relative ordering is the same, irrespective of speaker age: (1) happy is the least salient one in the set, parts of the style differences can be explained phonetically although some sub-conscious shifting must also be involved. (2) Velar nasal plus is very similar to happy, but the style differences are more pronounced, phonetic reasons are less available as explanatory factors, and some subtle gender differences can be detected, all of which indicates slightly higher social salience than for happy. (3) NURSE shows a more detailed and more robust social distribution than both happy and /ŋ(g)/, more consistent style shifting, and, most importantly, it attracts at least a small amount of explicit commentary, which is clear evidence for a considerably higher degree of sociolinguistic salience. (4) /k/ lenition, finally, is the variable which

not only generates the most significant differences in usage among social groups and the most systematic style shifting patterns, but it is also the one that most subjects consciously know about (in every generation). As the feature that is clearly a stereotype and even a shibboleth for many, or even most, Liverpudlians it is without a doubt the most socially salient variable investigated in the context of this thesis.


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Sound Change, Priming, Salience

This volume investigates the realisation and perception of four phonological variables in Liverpool English (Scouse), with a special focus on their sociolinguistic salience. Younger speakers' speech is found to be more local, but only for the two salient variables in the sample (NURSE-SQUARE and /k/ lenition), which appear to carry considerable amounts of covert prestige. Local variants of non-salient happy-tensing and velar nasal plus, on the other hand, are actually found to be receding, so at least to a certain extent Scouse also seems to be participating in regional dialect levelling.

The importance of salience is also obvious in the perception data, with only the two highly salient stereotypes generating robust effects in a social priming experiment (albeit in the unexpected direction). These results indicate that the investigated variables differ measurably not only in their use in production, but also in terms of how central they are to mental sociolinguistic representations of Scouse. They also tell us more about the way we process, store, and (re-)use sociolinguistic variation in perception. By defining likely contexts for significant priming effects they might finally even help in coming up with a more elaborate 'theory of priming' in the realm of sociophonetics.