Word-Final D Devoicing in Cumbrian

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1 Introduction

The Cumbrian dialect of English is spoken in north-western England, in the area once divided into the ceremonial counties of Cumberland and Westmorland. Its development is relatively well-documented, with specific effort having been made to identify and record Cumbrian vocabulary in the 17th century (Nicholson, 1677), as well as several more such efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries (Ferguson, 1873; Dickinson, 1878; Prevost and Brown, 1905; Brilioth, 1913). This article concerns a comment made by Brilioth regarding the devoicing of word-final /t/ in the variety of Cumbrian spoken in Lorton in 1913. He says:

> Final **d** *[as found in Old English]* appears as **d** or **t** *[in Lorton]*, but the occurrence of these two sounds does not follow any definite laws; final **d** in unaccented syllables and in consonant combinations, however, has become **t** in the majority of cases.

He goes on to remark that word-final devoicing occurs a lot in preterites, the standard English equivalents of which end in /-d/. Without disregarding the possibility that this sound change in Cumbrian is fully or partially grammatically conditioned, which is a possibility (Hill, 2014)), this paper seeks to use textual evidence to determine whether this widespread devoicing is in fact rule-governed, or if it accords to a system of free variation.

This article will largely be written in terms of orthographic <d> and <t>, but the author assumes that these indicate the phonemes /d/ and /t/ respectively.

2 Methodology

Given the prevalence of orthographic word-final <-t> in 19th-century dialect literature, the author presumes that the relevant sound change was complete before any audio recordings of Cumbrian were made, and so none will be analysed here. If 19th-century literature were being analysed in isolation, this would be problematic: dialect authors, whether they are native speakers or not, may consciously or unconsciously take steps to make their orthography more divergent from standard English than it would normally be in everyday speech. A lot of the nuance of particular sound changes and correspondences can be lost through careless over-application.

This problem will hopefully be offset by the fact that both old and more recent texts will be consulted. The more recent texts will consist of the first two stories from Gibson (1869), entitled *Joe and the Geologist and T'reets on't.* These stories were chosen because they are

relatively recent, having been published only a few decades before Brilioth (1913), and may offer some insight into why he found no pattern in the distribution of /-t/ arising from devoiced /-d/. Gibson published several other stories and poems in this volume, but these were chosen as they are particularly long.

On the other end of the spectrum, three 15th-century indentures will be examined, all made in what was then Cumberland. They have been taken from the Middle English Grammar Corpus (MEG-C) compiled by researchers at the University of Stavanger (Stenroos et al., 2011), and are marked with the codes L0107, L0535 and L0117 in the corpus. Some Cumberland texts in the MEG-C contained no evidence of d-devoicing whatsoever. These were deliberately avoided.

The relevant texts will be searched both for words ending in orthographic <d>, and for words ending in orthographic <t> that would normally end in <d> in modern literary English. For instance, the word stopt is included because we find <t> in it, where we would find <d> in standard English *stopped*. However, a word like cat would not be included, because the standard English cognate ends in <t>. Modern literary English is used as a point of comparison here because it is more consistent in terms of its spelling than Middle or Old English. Where a word is given several times with the same spelling, it will only be included once in the data. Where it is included several times with varying spellings, all spelling variants will be included.

In this manner, two separate datasets will be made - one for each time period. They will both be analysed to determine whether there is any pattern in which words take final <t> and which take <d>.

3 19th Century Dataset

The 19th-century dataset, gathered from Gibson (1869), is analysed as follows:

Without apparent devoicing	**With apparent devoicing**
Oald *(old)*; foald *(fold)*; said, sed; wid *(with)*; gud *(good)*; wad *(would)*; m'ead *(made)*; finnd *(find)*; hard; may'd *(might)*; hod *(hold)*; breid *(bread)*; rwoad *(road)*; hed *(had)*; feed; end; he'd; I'd; deid *(dead)*; hoond *(hound, verb)*; dud *(did)*; frind *(friend)*; thu'd *(thou'd)*; bed; stand; cud *(could)*; wurd *(word)*; mad; sud *(should)*; breed *(breed, noun)*; laid; winnd *(wind, noun)*; lead *(load)*; heid *(head)*; asteed *(instead)*; hand; we'd; reed *(red)*; jibed; end.	Wantit *(wanted)*; stopt, stopp't *(stopped)*; drist *(dressed)*; leuk't *(looked)*; turn't; ken't, kent *(knew; kenned)*; nwos't *(nosed)*; cap't *(capped)*; laugh't; promish't *(promised)*; pang't *(panged)*; heidit *(headed)*; toak't *(talked)*; pait *(paid)*; tel't *(told; telled)*; shak't *(shook; shaked)*; stept, snurtit *(snorted)*; woak't *(walked)*; oppen't *(opened)*; co't *(called)*; stacker't *(staggered)*; freeten't, freetn't *(frightened)*; seckint *(second)*; gurn't *(grinned)*; follow't; skipt; stept; doff't; donn't; glentit *(glinted)*; gruntit *(grunted)*; dar't *(dared)*; chow't *(chewed)*; cwoatit *(coated)*; belang't *(belonged)*; cum't *(come(d))*; creukt *(crooked)*; show't; meen't *(meant)*; glower't *(glowered)*; ax't *(asked)*; consaitit *(concieted)*; wantit *(wanted)*; nick't; remember't; squeak't; cockt; jumpt; handit *(handed)*; happen't; startit *(started)*; gedder't *(gathered)*; mindit *(minded)*; stump't; teem't; pick't; pleas't; wipet *(wiped)*; wettit *(wetted)*; pack't; leukt *(looked)*; shak't *(shook; shaked)*; partit *(parted)*; turn't.

It is immediately obvious why Brilioth made a point about devoicing occurring in preterites. Of the 65 words with apparent devoicing, 64 are either preterites, adjectives derived from preterites, or past participles with the same form as their corresponding preterites. The remaining one is *seckint* (second). On the other hand, of the 40 words without devoicing, only 14 have historically been preterites, and many of those (such as *would*, *should* and *could*) are not actually used as preterites anymore, and don't seem to have been used as preterites in the sample texts. Bear in mind that because of the sampling method, none of these preterites are irregular, which is to say that none of them are formed by changing the vowel of the root; they all end in <d> which, if the author is to be trusted, has failed to devoice.

The idea that there is a grammatical component to the sound change, at least as it applied in the 19th century, requires an explanation for the outliers, which are (excluding those no longer used as preterites) *said, m'ead, hed, dud, laid and jibed.* It might be noteworthy that Brilioth gives *said*, *hed* and *dud* as having short vowels and only one syllable, which does not apply to any of the sample words with devoicing. This might also apply to *m'ead*; the vowel in that lexical set is given by Brilioth as *ia* in his system of transcription, but there is a small amount of evidence from rhymes in contemporary dialect poems (for instance *Bobby Banks' Bodderment*, in which brass 'money' is rhymed with *feàce* 'face') that this was /jɐ/ for some speakers, in which case *m'ead* could be analysed as having a semivowel and then a short vowel.

This leaves *laid* and *jibed.* The former is reflected by *pait* 'payed', a word in which etymological /d/, in almost the same environment, is given as <t>. This can easily be accounted for; the native north-western word for 'lie' was *lig* (Brilioth 1913, 93) and had been since at least the 15th century (MEG-C, L0354). It might be that *lay* and *laid* were later loans from the literary language into Cumbrian, accounting for the exception to what must have been an earlier sound change. If this pattern were seen in substantially more words, it might be enough to bring into question whether *-t* was productive as the preterite suffix in Cumbrian at this time, but that seems too much of an extrapolation under the circumstances.

4 15th Century Dataset

The 15th-century dataset gathered from the MEG-C has a wider range of authors, and a wider range of dates (1435, 1441, 1459). No individual text has a large enough quantity of words to be worth analysing in isolation, but the author has identified no significant difference in pattern between these texts, so they will be analysed together.

Without apparent devoicing	**With apparent devoicing**
Lourd *(lord)*; god; awand *(owing?)*; ded *(deed)*; mynd *(mind, noun)*; hald *(hold)*; descend; eglesfeld *(place name)*; acord; concord; Cumbreland; said; herd *(heard)*; understand.	Payitt *(paid)*; grantitt *(granted)*; chargitt *(charged)*; a-cordyt *(accorded)*; agret *(agreed)*; apoyntyt *(appointed)*; departyt *(departed)*; callet *(called?)*; delyueret, delivert *(delivered)*; claymet *(claimed)*; conceyuet *(concieved).*

The pattern of the 19th century is amplified here, which may partly be on account of the

smaller sample size; all of the words with devoicing are preterites or derived from preterites, and only one of the words without devoicing falls into either of those categories (*said*). However, another conditioning influence may also be at play here; etymological /-d/ is far more likely to be given as <-t> if it is in an unstressed syllable, assuming that vowels are pronounced wherever they are written. This unveils a factor invisible in the 19th century. Compare later *pait* 'paid' with earlier *payitt*; the earlier form appears to have an unstressed syllable that has disappeared by the 19th century, but with the devoicing process complete, the word still ends in <t>.

This does not immediately account for the forms *awand*, *Cumbreland* or (assuming its modern stress pattern, which is not necessarily a given) *eglesfeld*. Each of these words has <d> preceded by a consonant, whereas all but one of the words with devoicing has it preceded by a vowel. The one exception is *delivert*, but the alternative form *delyueret* tells us that this may be an instance of syncope in the language of a particular speaker, and that the underlying historical form may still contain the unstressed vowel. This could be stretched to accommodate *agret* as well, although that may be an over-extrapolation.

5 Conclusions

Given the 15th-century dataset, it seems likely that the sound change started as a devoicing of word-final /d/ where it was preceded by an unstressed vowel, explaining the strong pattern of devoicing in preterite endings of the form /-Vd/. Forms such as *made* and *forsayde* 'forsaid' (not included in the data here because neither ends with <d> in spelling) adhere to this pattern; they retain <d> because it is not preceded by an unstressed vowel (and, taking the spelling at face value, may actually have been followed by an unstressed vowel).

That the original sound change was largely phonologically conditioned does not preclude grammatical factors coming into play later on. A larger dataset might have allowed for further analysis of the development of this preterite ending, and might have provided a more robust answer to the question of whether it was productive in 19th-century Cumbrian. Brilioth's inconclusive assessment was not unjustified, given that he focused largely on Old English phonemes and their Cumbrian reflexes, without delving far into the intermediate processes of change.

Further research on this topic in other northern English and southern Scottish localities might offer some insight as to where it originated. The earliest text from Cumberland in the MEG-C (L1188) contains evidence of d-devoicing as early as 1422. As a point of contrast, 15th and even very early 16th-century Yorkshire texts have either intermittent <d> and <t> spellings, or only <d> spellings (MEG-C L0119, L0381). An origin in early Scots, and a steady diffusion down into northern England, cannot be ruled out.

As these unique features of rurally-spoken dialects of English are gradually levelled, replaced and eroded away, this author suspects that interest in them will become more widespread and their development will become far better-understood.

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