

© Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd 1982

First published 1982 by
Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd
41 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DQ

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Set in 10/11 Times by Huron Valley Graphics, Ann Arbor USA

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Linguistic controversies: essays in linguistic theory and practice in honour of F.R. Palmer.

1. Linguistics—Addresses, essays, lectures
2. Palmer, F.R.
I. Crystal, David II. Palmer, F.R.
410 P125

ISBN 0-7131-6349-6

Printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay
(The Chaucer Press) Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk.

S.D.U.C. LAMPETER
CLASS 410
DOS L/N
ACQ 112902
ILL C.P.D.S.

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Who is really doing dialectology?

K.M. Petyt

Over the history of dialectology, this country appears at some periods among the leaders in the development of the subject—but at others it seems to be behind the times. There are signs in literature going back to the 1300s of a consciousness of regional differences within English, and by the nineteenth century there were a considerable number of publications devoted specifically to dialect. The last 30 years of that century saw a period of intense activity, culminating in the publication in 1905 of the massive *English Dialect Dictionary* and the *English Dialect Grammar*. Skeat (1911) claimed shortly afterwards that: 'The fulness of vocabulary in the Dictionary, and the minuteness of the account of the phonology and the accent in the Grammar, leave nothing to desire. Certainly no other country can give so good an account of its dialects.' British scholars felt they could rest on their laurels, and wound up the English Dialect Society.

But before long it became obvious that Britain was no longer in the forefront of dialect study, and in a paper published in 1946 Dieth drew attention to the fact that Britain was one of the few blanks on a map of Europe showing which countries had published, or even begun work on, a linguistic atlas. The response was the *Survey of English Dialects* and the *Linguistic Survey of Scotland*—large-scale operations investigating the dialect speech at a network of localities throughout their areas, and leading (after 30 years) to the publication of the splendid *Linguistic Atlas of England and Linguistic Atlas of Scotland*.

But dialectology had moved on: several years before these works actually appeared, their whole approach had been challenged—both by linguists and by social scientists. Many scholars felt that the findings of the great dialect surveys, concerned as they were almost exclusively with 'genuine dialect'—to be observed now only among a declining number of elderly rural-dwellers, whose speech showed the development of an earlier system 'uncorrupted' by contact with standard varieties—were hardly relevant to the description of the population at large. A truer picture, it

was claimed, would be obtained by examining a representative sample of the population of the towns, seeking the present-day system rather than developments of a Middle English one, and showing the variation between standard and non-standard forms in various sections of the community. American scholars had led the way in this development; Britain was again behind the times. But in the 1970s a number of such socio-urban studies were undertaken.

While dialectologists of this newer school tend to regard the 'traditionalists' as old-fashioned and virtually irrelevant nowadays, the latter continue to work in the way they always have; and tacitly, or even openly at times, they adopt a view shared by many laymen, namely that the more 'modern' studies are not concerned with 'true dialect'.

Which side is right? Who is really doing dialectology? In this chapter I shall look at an area in Yorkshire, probably the county which has received the greatest amount of attention from British dialectologists, and examine studies of both the traditional and the more modern type, in an attempt to see whether either can fairly claim to be the more important.

Probably the greatest figure in the history of British dialectology was Joseph Wright, who was born in a village near Bradford. He was the editor of the *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898–1905) and *Grammar* (1905), but before being appointed to that position he had published a description of his native dialect: *Grammar of the Dialect of Windhill* (1892). Later described (Dieth, 1946) as 'the first really scientific historical grammar of an English dialect', *Windhill* became the model for a considerable number of dialect monographs over the next half-century. It contains a long section on phonology, which traces the development of the sounds from their Old English (or French) origins, a solid treatment of the morphology, a number of illustrative specimens, and a large index which includes many everyday items rather than those found only in this dialect. I shall take Wright's description as the basis for a picture of the 'traditional' dialect of the Bradford area (it may be noted that it does not differ substantially from what may be deduced from 'the monumental work of the late Dr. A.J.Ellis',¹ published three years earlier; it is of course a fuller account, and can generally be assumed to be the more accurate where there appears to be discrepancy).

Obviously I cannot deal here with every aspect of the 'Bradford dialect'; I shall concentrate on part of the phonology. It is a well established fact that dialects differ more in terms of vowels than they do in consonants, so I shall examine the vowel system. Now of course, Wright was working in the days before the concept of the PHONEME was developed, but he was like many dialectologists of the time before phonetics became such a detailed and technical subject, who tended to act like structuralists in that they recorded only phonemic rather than phonetic differences between sounds: they often knew the dialect very well, and so realized, consciously or unconsciously, that only some differences of sound were significant.

¹ This was Wright's comment on Ellis (1889) in the Preface to the *English Dialect Grammar*.

Wright sets out the vowels of the Windhill dialect², and he is clearly giving something at least very close to the vowel 'phoneme system':

		Short		Long	
		i	u	i:	u:
		e	ə	o	ə:
		a			a:
		Diphthongs		Triphthongs	
ei	ui	iu	iə	uə	iuə
ai	qi	eu	ou	eə	ouə
				əə	aiə
				ā	ā

(Only one aspect of this causes me some doubt: the mid-centering diphthongs /eə/ and /oə/. Ellis shows variation between [e:] and [eə], and between [ɔ:] and [ɔə] in Bradford, and certainly the later evidence shows the existence of [e:] and [ɔ:]. It could be that in Windhill the situation was slightly different from Bradford itself—or, on the other hand, that Wright has gone too far in 'regularizing' and eliminating unimportant differences: he ends up by in effect denying the possibility of a significant difference between words such as *pay* and *pair*.)

As examples of the incidence of the above vowels, I give here for each (i) instances where this vowel occurs as in RP, and (ii) a number of everyday words where this is not the case:

/i:/	(i) him, it
/e/	(ii) much, such, find, blind; hang (strong vb.); ever, never; week
	(i) egg, tell
/a/	(ii) have, hang (weak vb.); break; among, wrong; wash
	(i) hand, that
/o/	(ii) make, take, game, late; father; settle, very
	(i) John, ox
	(ii) chance, dance; broken, open, over; any, many, yellow; for, always, water
/u/	(i) bull, butcher
/ə/	(ii) butter, husband, some, come, one . . . ; found, ground
	(i) a, of
	(ii) berry, bury, worry; Sunday etc.; yesterday, yet; spirit; borrow, window etc.
/i:/	(i) field, see
/a:/	(ii) bright, night, die, eye, fly, mild; well
	(i) cart, harvest
	(ii) doubt, house, now, town . . . ; room; servant; warm; work(N), worst

² I have not altered Wright's phonetic transcription (apart from indicating length by e.g. [e:] rather than [e]), and in the material from SED below I have continued to use [i, e, u] instead of their [i, e, ə]. I have however adopted [ɔ] both as a pure vowel and in diphthongs, and also [ɛi] and [ɛə]. These transcriptions more accurately reflect the phonetics of these sounds and also the differences between the phonemically distinct pairs /ou/ - /o:/ and /ei/ - /e:/.

Otherwise I have continued to use Wright's symbols except where it is necessary to refer to a sound he does not consider, e.g. [ʌ] or [ɔ:] (which it should be noted does not correspond to Wright's [ɔ:] (now [ɔ:]), but represents a closer long vowel which may contrast with [ɔ:]).

/u:/	(i) —
	(ii) book, cook; pull, wool; shoulder
/ə:/	(i) bird, work (vb.), world (See note 1 below)
/ei/	(i) eight, straight
	(ii) fight, right; eat, speak, teach
/ai/	(i) dry, fine, write
	(ii) pick
/ui/	(i) ruin
	(ii) boot, noon, school . . . ; good, foot; blood
/oi/	(i) boil, voice
	(ii) close, hole, coal, coat; lose; lane
/iu/	(i) new, suit
	(ii) blew, grew, through; hook, look, took; enough
/eu/	(i) —
	(ii) few, strew; shew
/ou/	(i) colt, old, roll, soul . . . ; folk, coke; bowl, flow, grow . . .
	(ii) bought, daughter, thought
/iə/	(i) clear, here
	(ii) beat, meal, sea . . . ; bread, deaf, head; again; heard, learn; swear, there
/eə/	(i) care, share
	(ii) bake, spade, nail, rain, day, way; spoke (vb.), stole; master, rather; weak (See note 2 below)
/oə/	(i) —
	(ii) order, saw, all, bald; either, neither; calf, half; know, slow, throw (See note 3 below)
/uə/	(i) moor, poor
	(ii) door, floor, before, more, board, broad, thorn . . . ; go, home, both, nose, loaf . . . ; who
/āə/	(i) —
	(ii) far, star; dare; sour, tower
/aiə/	(i) fire
	(ii) —
/iuə/	(i) cure, pure
	(ii) sure
/ouə/	(i) —
	(ii) four

Notes:

- 1) A.J. Ellis and many other sources exclude this vowel from the set for this area, giving /a/ in all words where Wright has /ə:/. Such forms are readily observable, but Wright would surely have given them had he believed they were the 'genuine dialect' in Windhill.
- 2) It was noted above that other evidence suggests the existence of both /e:/ and /eə/. All items listed under (ii) here have been observed with the long monophthong.
- 3) Similarly, other evidence suggests the existence of /a:/ items under (ii) here have been observed with the monophthong.

Sixty years after the publication of *Windhill*, in 1952, fieldwork for the *Survey of English Dialects*³ was conducted at Wibsey, which is about two miles southwest of the centre of Bradford and thus about 4½ miles from Windhill, which is three miles to the north of the town. Though both

³ See Orton 1962, and Orton and Halliday (ed.) 1962. By coincidence, Wibsey was investigated by one Peter Wright!

concern areas of Bradford, there is therefore a difference in both time and locality between these two descriptions, either of which may be responsible for any linguistic differences emerging. In fact these turn out to be few; the most noticeable ones concern the long vowels and the centring diphthongs:

<i>Windhill</i>			<i>SED</i>		
i:	u:	iə	uə	i:	u:
ə:	ea	oə	oə	e:	ɔ:
a:	āə			a:	ɛə

At first sight there appears to have been an addition of two long vowels /e:/ and /ɔ:/; a loss of /ə/ and a very considerable reduction in the load of /eə/; /æ/ seems also to have gone, its incidence being taken over partly by /a:/ and partly by a 'new' triphthong /auə/. The following differences of incidence from Wright's list illustrate these 'changes':

/e:/	spade, nail, way; spoke, stole; weak (i.e. items such as those under (ii) above)
/eə/	care, hair
/oə/	bald, corn, wall; know, snow . . . ; calf, half; either, neither (i.e. items listed under (ii) above)
/a:/	dare, far
/auə/	flour

But are these differences due to phonetic change or geographical distance—or are they matters of phonemic interpretation? It was noted above that Ellis recorded both /e:/ and /eə/, and /ɔ:/ and /ɔə/; it seems quite possible that Wright 'standardized' in favour of the diphthong, and that the SED system more accurately shows the phonemic contrasts, including that between /e:/ and /eə/ e.g. *way—ware* (as well as that between /e:/ and /eɪ/ e.g. *way—weigh*).

The following points are worth noting also:

- (i) SED agrees with Ellis rather than Wright in recording /ə/ in most cases where the latter has /ə:/.
- (ii) The /eu/ diphthong looks to be very marginal: it is recorded in *show* and *sew*, but *few* is shown to have the RP-like /iu/.
- (iii) Incidence: in *take*, *make* SED has /e/ as well as /a/ forms; in *look*, *took* SED has /u/ ~ /u:/, Wright /iu/. There is no SED evidence of /iu/ in any -*ook* words; in *shoulder*, SED has /ɔu/, Wright /u:/; in *water*, SED has /a/, Wright /o/; in *ground*, SED has /a:/, Wright /u/.

In these last three examples, both forms can be heard in the Bradford area, but probably there was a geographical difference between the two sides of the town, and the Windhill and Wibsey speakers reflect this.

There is then little substantive difference between the accounts of Wright and the SED, and from such descriptions it is possible to extract a detailed and interesting picture of 'The Bradford Dialect'.

But in what sense is this 'The Bradford Dialect'? On the back streets of Bradford do the natives (i.e. those born in Bradford, rather than in

Pakistan or the West Indies) talk like this among themselves? In fact, very few indeed of them do so—one would have to look pretty hard among inhabitants of the town before one found a speaker of this so-called 'Bradford Dialect'. So do most of the native Bradfordians speak Standard English with an RP accent? Far from it; when compared to the above descriptions the speech of the town does appear to have moved closer to the standard language in many ways, but most natives will admit to having been recognized by their speech as coming from Yorkshire, and some have been pinned down more precisely than that.

There is then still 'Bradford Dialect' of some sort, but it is different in many respects from what can be extracted from the works of Ellis, Wright, the SED, and so on. The dialect they describe *can* still be found occasionally, but their descriptions are by no means *representative* of the speech of the general population of the town. Such 'traditional' dialectologists have searched for speakers of 'genuine' dialect, but they have ended up by presenting a picture heavily biased towards a very small minority among the population, and barely relevant to the general situation in Bradford today. One wonders, indeed, whether the term 'genuine' may not be more appropriately applied to the dialect of the majority.

Such would be one of the main criticisms a 'modern' dialectologist would direct against the 'traditionalist'. Moreover, he would claim that this antiquarian preoccupation with 'pure' dialect has led the traditionalist to miss some equally interesting features to be observed in a more representative sample of the population. Two particular types of criticism may be considered in this connection.

Firstly, traditionalists have shown little interest in the present day *systems* of dialects. For example, in phonology they have been more concerned with tracing the regular developments of sounds known to have existed at some earlier period, rather than with establishing the systems of mutually defining significantly different sound-units which stand in opposition to each other in the speech of today. Joseph Wright discussed the developments in Windhill of the various Old English sounds; the SED designed its questionnaire so as to find the reflexes of Middle English sounds; neither was specifically interested in establishing whether at the date of their investigation [re:t] was unambiguously *rate* and [reit] was unambiguously *right*, or similarly that [reə] was definitely *rare* and [re:] was *ray*, and that there were thus three distinctive sound units in this phonetic area: /e:/, /eɪ/, /eə/. In some cases it is possible to deduce this sort of information from traditional works, but often the most appropriate data have just not been recorded, and sometimes we are left with the feeling that there probably was some significant difference, or alternatively that two different transcriptions do not really represent separate phonemes, but we just cannot be sure (e.g. Wright's [eə] above, where /eə/ vs. /e:/ seems probable, but one is surprised if Wright really missed this).

Secondly, by concentrating on the most 'pure' data, traditionalists have ignored the variation between this and other common forms. And this variation is particularly interesting, for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it often shows correlations with factors such as social class, sex, age, or formality, and thus tells us something about the social significance of the

different variants. On the other hand, this variation is often a sign of linguistic change in progress, and can thus show us how the dialect is developing at the present time.

With these criticisms of traditional dialectology in mind, let us turn now to an example of the more 'modern' approach. The author of this chapter carried out in 1971 a linguistic survey of three industrial towns in West Yorkshire: Bradford, Halifax, and Huddersfield (Petyt 1977, see also 1980: esp. ch. 7). A random sample was drawn from the electoral registers, and just over 100 subjects were interviewed. This number was divided between the three towns in proportion to their sizes with the result that nearly half the informants were in Bradford. A number of people selected in the original sampling could not be contacted or were unwilling to cooperate, so one cannot be sure that the 100 actually interviewed were truly representative of the population at large, but they certainly included a wide variety of speakers: there were roughly equal numbers of males and females, members of all age-groups from 10+ to 80+, and of five social classes (set up for the purposes of this study on the basis of a total 'score' for categories of education, occupation, income, housing, and standard of living). Much of the study was carried out on the lines of Labov's (1966) pioneering work in New York: a structured interview sought to elicit speech of several levels of formality, and a number of particular features were selected for special study. These features or VARIABLES, showed variation between standard and non-standard forms, and the amount of usage of each variant by each different social class, sex, or age-group and in different styles was worked out in an attempt to see whether any interesting patterns emerged. In addition to this examination of variation, the study was also concerned with non-standard features generally, and with the present-day sound systems of the different forms of speech to be heard in the area.

Let us consider first examples of the variation within the town, by concentrating on just three well known 'Northern' features which reveal very different patterns. (Of course, the study investigated a large number of variables, of several different phonological categories as well as some grammatical ones.)

(i) First, the vowel in *but*, *luck*, *love*, *mother*, etc. In RP there is a phoneme /ʌ/ which occurs in these words, and which may contrast with /u/ in *put*, *book*, *good*, *wolf* etc. All the traditional dialect descriptions of this area give the impression that this contrast is not possible in Bradford since the /ʌ/ phoneme does not exist in the north of England; /u/ occurs in both the above sets of words. There is historical evidence that this Northern situation was formerly general in England, and that the 'split' into /ʌ/ and /u/ in the Southern half of the country is a relatively recent phenomenon. There is also ample evidence that many Bradfordians do preserve this older pattern, as traditional dialectologists maintain. But a 'quantitative' study such as I carried out (i.e. one which records what occurs every time the variable in question comes up during the interview with an informant, and then works out various 'scores') makes it clear that many speakers have made some attempt to introduce the /ʌ/ vowel into their speech,

presumably under the influence of RP. And if the scores of those individuals who share certain social characteristics are averaged, it is apparent that this variation is not haphazard but reveals certain patterns. For example, Fig. 1 is a graph showing the percentage of occasions on which speakers in the different social classes used /u/ in words where RP would have /ʌ/, divided into different levels of formality. It is obvious from this that the use of /ʌ/ relates to social class and style in a way which studies of this sort have shown to be quite common: society is stratified in terms of the proportions of standard and non-standard variants employed by different social classes, with the 'highest' class (I) using the greatest proportion of the more prestigious variants, and other classes following in the order of their social status. Moreover, *all* social classes use higher proportions of the more prestigious variants as the style becomes more formal (the stations along the formality continuum which have been somewhat arbitrarily recognized here are 'casual', 'formal', 'reading passage', 'word list', and 'minimal pairs'). The only unexpected point in this graph concerns the scores for minimal pairs (i.e. where the informant was faced directly with the /ʌ/ - /u/ contrast in pairs such as *put* - *luck* - *look*, etc): all classes seem to show a sharp reversal of the trend towards more /ʌ/ in more formal styles. The explanation for this surprising situation is probably as follows: there is no clue in the spelling and no clear pattern of conditioning by the phonological environment to indicate which words have /ʌ/ rather than /u/ in RP; so a Northerner who attempts to acquire /ʌ/ is sometimes unsure which member, if either, of a pair such as *but* - *put*, etc has /ʌ/. The 'deviant' scores in Fig. 14.1 simply reflect the fact that in this very artificial situation more people 'gave up the attempt', than in other contexts where they were not required to concentrate specifically on this problem.

(ii) The lack of /ʌ/ is one of the two Northern features most commonly remarked on by people from other parts of the country. The other is the use of the short /a/ phoneme in a set of a hundred or so words where RP and the Southern half of the country generally has the long /a:/. (This is not, as with /ʌ/, a case of the North and the South differing in the number of phonemes in their *inventory*: both have the short /a/, as in *cat*, and the long /a:/, as in *cart*; but the *incidence* of these two phonemes differs, in that in this particular set of words the South has the same vowel as in *cart*, the North that as in *cat*). As with /ʌ/, it is the North which retains the older situation: in the South the vowel has been lengthened in certain phonological environments. But the situation differs from that of /ʌ/, in that whereas the occurrence of /ʌ/ or /u/ is no longer predictable, with the short or long 'A' the pattern of conditioning is still fairly regular. This being the case, it should be easier for the Bradfordian who wishes to modify his speech in the direction of RP to do so without many errors, by formulating some sort of subconscious rule: lengthen /a/ to /a:/ before /l/, e.g. *laugh*, *raft*; before /θ/, e.g. *bath*, *path*; before /s/, e.g. *class*, *past*; before /n/ or /m/ + Consonant, e.g. *dance*, *branch*, *grant*, *command*, *sample*, and so on.

But whereas the variable involving /ʌ/ presented in Bradford a picture which has been shown to be typical where standard and non-standard

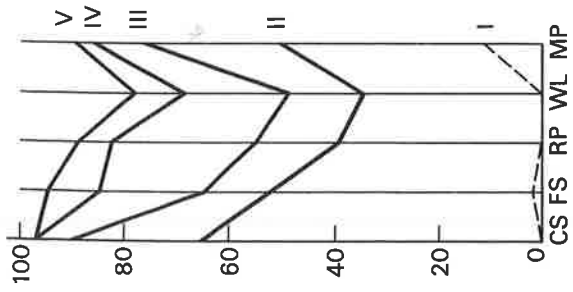


Fig. 14.1 Class and style graph of /ʌ/~/u/ in urban West Yorkshire: percentage scores for nonstandard forms (i.e. use of [ʌ]).

features are in competition—the standard feature being very common among the highest class, and progressively less so lower down the class hierarchy; and all classes using the standard variant more frequently as the style becomes more formal (a pattern which recurred with several other variables in the Bradford study)—the use of the ‘long A’, though probably easier to acquire, does not reveal such a pattern. In fact, very few informants used the long vowel form at all, and most of those who did so produced only one or two examples during the interview, usually in the more formal situations of the reading passage or the word list; hardly any speakers outside the top social class produced a high enough proportion of long to short vowel forms for this to justify the term ‘variable’. This is not the place to speculate about the reasons for this difference among Bradford speakers between these two typically Northern features; it may simply be noted that a traditional type of dialect study would have been unlikely to show it up.

(iii) The third example of variation we shall examine presents an unusual graph, and is perhaps the most interesting of the three. It concerns words such as *book*, *cook*, *look*, *took* etc, where RP has /ʊk/ but in Bradford the /u:k/ pronunciation (see above) can still be heard quite commonly. Fig. 14.2 indicates that the occurrence of this nonstandard variant actually increased with increasing formality. The very marked increase in the minimal pairs situation might be explained in part by the fact that other evidence shows that in this very artificial situation where attention is focused on possible differences, many informants will try to produce a distinction even if they would rarely do so in natural speech (i.e. the

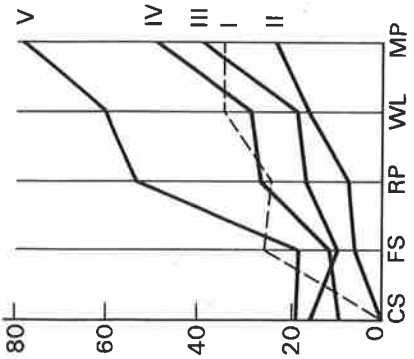


Fig. 14.2 Class and style graph of -ook in urban West Yorkshire: percentage scores for nonstandard forms (i.e. use of /u:k/).

performance in respect of /ʌ/ discussed above is untypical). In this case, with the pair *luck*—*look* many speakers without /ʌ/ will have a homophonous pronunciation as [lʊk], and so it is not surprising that in the minimal pairs situation they should ‘recall’ the obsolescent form [lu:k] for the second member. But it was found that even some speakers who pronounced *luck* as [lʌk], and so ‘already’ had a distinction between the two words, created an extra difference by using the long vowel in *look* (though in conversation they had said [lʊk]). Moreover, the non-standard variant also increased in the reading passage and the word list, where informants would not be concentrating on finding a difference.

Besides this unusual style pattern, the graph also reveals a disruption of the usual pattern of social class, in that Class I cuts across an otherwise fairly regular array. This class was the smallest in the sample, and certainly was too small to be considered representative (which is why it is indicated by a broken line in these graphs), but with most variables this does not result in irregularities such as we see here. Now many findings of surveys such as this have suggested that unusual patterns of style and/or class differentiation result when a linguistic change is in progress; and two facts lead to the conclusion that such is the case here. Firstly, all the examples of /u:k/ in Class I came from one speaker, who was in his seventies; with the small number of informants in this group this was sufficient to bias the results for the class. Secondly, a graph for the total usage of /u:k/ in all styles by speakers in different age-groups (Fig. 14.3) indicates that below the age of 40 this variant is rare, but then it ‘rises’ fairly steeply. (The 80+ group is too small and class-biased to be considered representative, but the rise certainly continues.) We may conclude that a change from the regional variant /u:k/ is in progress, and indeed is well advanced, since in everyday speech /ʊk/ is virtually universal among speakers under 40, and even older speakers show a fairly extensive use of it. But the evidence from the style graph (and also some other types of evidence not discussed here) suggests

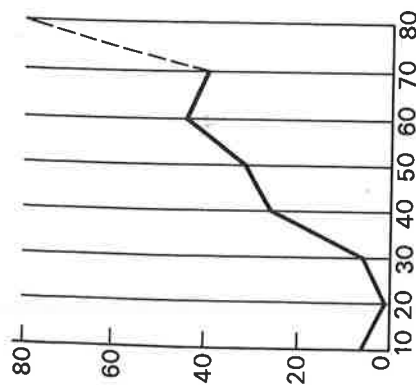


Fig. 14.3 Age-group graph of -ook.

that there is as yet no strong feeling of 'inferiority' about the non-standard variant.

This detailed examination of the variation between different forms has shown up facts about the Bradford dialect that a traditionalist, concentrating on hand-picked speakers of 'pure' dialect, would have missed or ignored. The picture of the vowel system which emerges from this study also shows interesting differences from that deduced from the work of Wright and the SED.

The short vowel system shows few differences from the above 'traditional' picture:

i	e	ə	ʊ
	(ʌ)		
	(ʌ)	ɔ	
	a		

Only two are indicated here: (1) /ʌ/ is beginning to appear in certain sections of the population; (2) /a/ is now for many people of more restricted distribution, being confined to unstressed positions, as in RP; the most persistent stressed environment is before /r/ e.g. *very, derelict, terrible, América* etc. But it should be noted that very many changes of incidence have also affected this system, so that the differences from Wright's list exemplified above are now very considerable: in fact, we could say that vowel incidence (with the exception of 'short A', and allowing of course for differences of inventory, such as the absence of /ʌ/), is now very much as in RP.

The long vowel and diphthong systems now appear as:

i:	u:	(ɛi)	(ui)	ɪə	uə
e:	ə:	ai	ɔi	ɔu	ɔə
a:					

Among the long vowels, /ə:/ is now quite common, its incidence being much as in RP. Most interesting is the 'new' vowel /o:/, which, though not appearing in traditional descriptions, is quite common. It occurs in words where the traditional dialect had /uə/ e.g. *go, home, road, loaf*; /ɔ/ e.g. *broken, over*; /ɔi/ e.g. *coal, coat*; and /ɔ:/ e.g. *know, throw* (in all of which RP has [əu]), to which this [o:] could be considered an approximation). One result of this development is a greater 'symmetry' in the system, since there is now a possible phonemic contrast /o:/—/ɔu/ e.g. *groan—grown* on the back axis, to parallel /e:/—/ɛi/ e.g. *wait—weight* on the front. However, it should be noted that this is not a stable situation, for several reasons: (a) the incidence of /ɛi/ is considerably reduced from the traditional situation: it is now common only in words spelled -*ght*, and for many but not all users, in those ending in -*ation*; (b) /ɔu/ is also of reduced incidence: it is common only before /l/ e.g. *old, soldier*, and in words spelled -*ow* e.g. *flow, grow* (but not in unstressed position, e.g. *window*, where /ə/ ~ /o:/); (c) there is some confusion evident over the incidence of /ɔu/ and /o:/; in many words, especially in those spelled -*ow*, and particularly those which in traditional dialect have /ɔ:/ e.g. *know, throw, blow, crow, mow, own, sow, slow, snow*, etc, variation can be observed between the use of /o:/ and /ɔu/; (d) these /e:/—/ɛi/ and /o:/—/ɔu/ contrasts do not occur in RP, and there seems to be a tendency among some speakers to lose them, with both /e:/ and /ɛi/ sets and /o:/ and /ɔu/ sets being pronounced [e:] and [o:] respectively (or, higher on the social scale, [ei] and [ou ~ əu]).

Of the diphthongs, /ɛi/ and /ui/ are much reduced in incidence compared to the traditional descriptions; so too are /ɔi/, /iə/, /uə/; /ə/ and /eu/ do not exist for the great majority of people. On the other hand, /ai/ and /au/ are much commoner. These differences are due to the fact that for the majority of the population phoneme incidence is now very close to that of RP.

The system given above appears to be commonest among Bradford speakers today, but there are signs of change in progress. The most interesting concerns the monophthongisation of /ɔə/ e.g. *door, floor, board*⁴ to /ɔ:/ (a development well advanced in RP, of course), and also of the parallel phoneme on the front axis, (ɛə/ to /ɛ:/ (also to be observed among younger speakers in some other parts of Britain). The result of this, which was observed among some of the youngest informants, is a system of eight long vowels at four 'heights':

i:	ɛ:	ə:	o:	u:
	ɛ:		ɔ:	
				a:

This can be demonstrated in the /b—/ environment: *bee, bay, bare, bar, bore, bow, boo, burr*.

Some traditionalists have felt that this sort of study is 'not real dialectology'; and indeed a number of informants expressed surprise that I

⁴ /ɔə/ is a relatively 'new' diphthong, which some people use in an RP-like incidence; in the traditional dialect, as was seen above, all these words would have /uə/.

was bothering with 'all them ordinary words' when they had expected me to be interested in 'real Yorkshire'. Some of them insisted that much of 'what was heard in Bradford nowadays was just 'sloppy speech' and certainly not 'real Yorkshire'. But the 'modern' dialectologist would maintain that a study such as this, involving detailed examination of every variant which occurs among a representative sample of the population, and with attention both to phonetic detail and to systems of opposing phonemes, produces a picture of the 'Bradford dialect' that is not only truer but also more interesting to a wider range of social scientists, structural linguists, and historical linguists (since variation is clearly closely related to linguistic change in progress) than the traditionalist's description of some allegedly 'genuine' dialect.

But sometimes the modern dialectologist too, with his interest in systems and variation, may be guilty of making claims about his view of a particular dialect which are of dubious validity. As one example of this, let us examine some suggestions made by scholars such as Labov and Trudgill about a 'speech community'. Labov (1966, 500), on the basis of evidence from various 'evaluation tests' (a method of investigation also employed in Bradford, but not discussed here), concluded that New York speakers, in spite of differences in performance, were in fact aiming at the same ideal; and that 'New York is a single speech community, united by a common set of evaluative norms'. Trudgill (1974, 133) went somewhat further than this, and claimed that 'speakers of Norwich English belong to a particular speech community which has very many common linguistic features. . . . not shared by any other speech community'; and he went on to set up a common framework, a DIASYSTEM of rules which are supposed to generate all types of Norwich English, and stated his belief that 'members of the Norwich speech community can be said to have internalised this diasystem The diasystem can be said in some sense "to exist" Trudgill's evidence appears to be that all Norwich speakers can, for any variety of Norwich English, 'faultlessly imitate it for humorous or other reasons', and 'assign fine sociological meanings to different types of pronunciation'; i.e. his claims are based on (a) imitative ability, and (b) evaluative norms (as were Labov's). He admits that one could, as 'an intellectual exercise', write a diasystem for *any* two varieties of English, say Yorkshire and Australian, but insists that his Norwich diasystem is essentially different from this: the differences between Yorkshire and Australian are so considerable that a common underlying system would be too abstract to be 'meaningful', and speakers could not perform faultless imitations of each other; but the Norwich system is claimed to have psychological reality, as part of 'the native speaker's linguistic competence'.

Before discussing this viewpoint, let us briefly refer to one or two of its consequences. Trudgill says that because some Norwich speakers distinguish between the vowels of *nose* and *knows*, and because there is a continuum from those who always distinguish them to those who never do so (some Middle-Class speakers), it is unreasonable to set up two separate systems, one with two vowels, the other with only one; rather, the deep-down system has two vowels, but it just happens that some speakers always apply the rules which merge them. He would presumably claim that

the latter are able to 'make this distinction . . . without error, if they wish to for humorous or other purposes'. A similar case is made out in respect of the vowels of *boat* and *boot*: 'two underlying phonological elements are "kept apart" in the subconscious linguistic knowledge of speakers because a small phonetic distinction is sometimes made between sets of items which they perceive as phonetically "the same", and because the elements are involved in two distinct sets of stylistic alternation: *boat* /u:/~[u]/, *boot* /u:/~[u/]. An important difference however is that this time it is the lower classes who apparently perform the feat of applying more rules so that these separate underlying elements are usually realized alike.

How tenable is this notion of a 'speech community'? It seems dubious, on two sets of grounds:

(i) THE EVIDENCE ON WHICH IT IS SAID TO BE BASED. This we have seen to be of two main types:

(a) *The imitative abilities of members of the community*: Members of the community are said to be capable of faultlessly imitating various subvarieties, which outsiders presumably could not do. But the evidence for this appears to be anecdotal. Trudgill, for instance, does not seem to have tested this ability systematically with all his informants.⁵ And anecdotal evidence can be countered by experiences tending to the opposite conclusion: in Bradford, a number of informants said they could not imitate a 'broad Yorkshire' accent, and others who attempted to do so did not do it 'faultlessly'—and surely the finding that the /o:/ and /ou/ sets are not clearly distinguished now could be claimed to indicate that it would be artificial to set them up as distinct in some common diasystem. On the other hand, I have come across people from other parts of the, English-speaking world who could imitate a broad Yorkshire accent better than some of the more RP-like informants in my sample—which of these would be said to belong to the 'Bradford speech community'?

(b) *A common set of value-judgements*: The evaluations by informants of different variants are said to indicate that they are united in their norms. However, none of the evaluation data, whether directly-expressed opinions, self-evaluations, or subjective evaluations of tape-recorded examples, has ever produced 100 per cent agreement on which variants are preferred or aimed at; this is clear in Labov's and Trudgill's work as well as the Bradford survey. Certainly the evidence of the latter does not seem to support the idea of a united speech community: some informants seemed to prefer RP-like forms (e.g. [ʌ]), others seemed to have a regional norm (e.g. [u]). Moreover, there were signs that not all the evaluation tests pointed the same way: it was clear, for example, that the great majority had an [a] standard in words of the *grass*, *laugh*, *bath* group (many of them said they disliked the 'long A' variant, and that it was in fact incorrect), but there were clear indications from the subjective evaluations that the [a] form tended to command prestige. What is the evaluative norm in such cases?

(ii) THE PROBLEM OF DELIMITING A SPEECH COMMUNITY. This delimitation problem has two aspects, as it were 'horizontal' and 'vertical': in terms of both geographical area and the social scale.

⁵ See further, Chapter 13 of the present volume. [Ed.]

(a) *Geographical delimitation.* Whereas Norwich, where Trudgill worked, is in a sense an isolated large town, Bradford is part of the West Yorkshire conurbation, which also includes Leeds, Halifax, Huddersfield, Wakefield, and numerous smaller towns. In the past these towns were more physically discrete, and there were probably some noticeable differences of speech between them. But nowadays they merge into one another geographically, and such differences as I found between Bradford, Halifax, and Huddersfield were largely of a 'quantitative' nature: in other words, it is not usually the case that feature *x* occurs in Bradford but not at all in Halifax, or Huddersfield, but rather that it is commoner *on average* in say Bradford than in the others (though *some* Bradford speakers may not have it at all, and some Halifax speakers may have it quite frequently).

In such a situation, what are the 'speech communities'? Hardly Bradford, Leeds, Halifax, etc. Are they smaller than these? Surely not—this would be even more difficult to maintain. Then perhaps industrial West Yorkshire as a whole is a speech community? Certainly it shares many features; but (i) there are probably also some well-marked differences between the ends of this geographical continuum; (ii) some places on the Western edge of the area may in fact be more similar in many respects to neighbouring Lancashire towns than to Eastern or Southern parts; (iii) though there are some markedly different forms in rural areas, there is no sharp urban/rural difference, and it would be difficult to decide just who belonged to the 'industrial speech community'.

(b) *Social delimitation.* We noted that Trudgill set up separate vowels in *nose* and *knows*, claiming that all speakers distinguish these deep down, though some members of the Middle Class never do so in performance. Now to produce a similar diasystem for Bradford it would be necessary to set up /o:/ and /ou/, which many speakers distinguish at times—but some RP-speakers in the city never do so, and would probably be *incapable* of doing so. On the other hand, just as Trudgill claimed that all speakers really have distinct vowels in *boot* and *boat* but that the lower classes usually merge them, in Bradford the diasystem would have to contain /a/ and /u/ because even lower-class speakers may occasionally produce [a], and anyway their evaluations show that some of them recognise its significance. However, [a] is a minority phenomenon, and many speakers produce some 'hypercorrect' forms; why should this be, if they really have the distinction in their internalized system? Perhaps it would be more reasonable to have only /u/ in the diasystem, and to have rules for phonemic split which are more likely to be correctly applied higher up the social scale. But this would mean that RP-speakers who consistently and correctly distinguish /a/ and /u/ only do so at a relatively superficial level. Then perhaps the answer is that the RP-speakers in Bradford are not really part of the local speech community; after all, they are often not as good at faultlessly imitating a broad accent. But is it realistic to exclude them? In many respects they are only the end of a continuum, and they understand the local speech perfectly well; *some* of them may even be able to imitate it.

At the other end of the social scale we have a more serious problem. We noted that Trudgill said it would be difficult to set up a 'meaningful'

diasystem for two very different varieties (e.g. Yorkshire and Australian). Consider these two very different varieties:

light	fight	like	find	either	beat	feet	eat	me
A.	/i:/	/ai/	/ai/	/ai/	/i:/	/i:/	/i:/	/i:/
B.	/i:/	/ei/	/ai/	/i/	/ɔ:/	/iə/	/i/	/i:/

With sufficient 'diasystemic incidence rules' such as Trudgill employs for 'phoneme swapping', it would probably be possible to set up a diasystem which will incorporate both the above—but I agree that it would hardly be 'meaningful'; it would indeed be more in the nature of an 'intellectual exercise'. If we take system B as basic, this would mean that the majority of Bradford speakers (who have A) have a deep phonemic incidence that has to undergo considerable changes; but if we take the system of the majority as basic, then the Bradford working-class informant who had system B must have been applying an awful lot of rules to produce his output (and he seemed to do it so easily!).

Perhaps then the answer is that the Bradford speech community does not really include this eccentric individual. But he in fact was the only member of the Bradford sample who spoke the traditional dialect described by Wright and the SED—could we really maintain that he is not a member of 'the Bradford speech community'?! Even a sample of the size usually selected by modern dialectologists could have failed to pick up a single speaker of traditional dialect,⁶ but if they then constructed a diasystem for an alleged speech community which excluded such speakers, this would surely be no less a distortion than the description produced by a traditional dialectologist which is based on an unrepresentative selection of 'pure dialect' speakers.

So who is really doing dialectology? The traditionalist gives us a glimpse of a variety which is rapidly becoming obsolete, whereas the modernist is concerned with the systems that may be deduced from the speech of a sample which is more representative of the majority of the inhabitants today. But the modernist frequently makes use of the findings of the traditionalist, and by discussing the notion of a *SPEECH COMMUNITY* I have tried to suggest some reasons why he cannot afford to ignore them. Apart from the danger of producing a meaningless abstract system, because either too many or too few speakers are included in the 'community', another major problem with this notion is that boundaries (whether linguistic, social, or geographical) are generally imprecise—as the traditionalist has certainly known for a long time, and as the study of variation has brought home clearly to modern dialectologists too; but the notion of the *SPEECH COMMUNITY*—postulating one community with one set of internalized norms, another with a different set, and so on—makes them precise.

A further reason why modern dialectologists continue to use traditional-

⁶ See Heath (1980: 8), where he notes that not one 'pure' dialect speaker appeared in the random sample of 80 informants interviewed during his investigation of the speech of the Cannock Urban District.

ists' findings relates to the development (not discussed here) by which many linguists have come to feel that the Saussonian SYNCHRONIC/DIACHRONIC dichotomy is artificial and should be abandoned: synchronic variation in all its aspects, which modern dialectology sees as its proper province, is believed to be intimately related to diachronic change, which has always been a major concern of traditional scholars who trace the development of forms from an earlier stage of the language. The modern dialectologist is often concerned with developments in 'apparent time': speakers of different age-groups are held to provide evidence of linguistic change in progress; the traditionalist has long been concerned with changes in 'real time', and has important material to offer.

It is a fundamental tenet of linguistics that all varieties are equally worthy of study. There is surely a place for both approaches to the study of dialect.

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15

Change and decay in language

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There has generally been resistance within linguistics towards serious appraisal of the notions of death and decay in language. And this despite the considerable concern with the opposite process, with what may be viewed as language 'birth'—the emergence of pidgin and its consequent development into creole. There are, however, a number of questions about languages which are nearing a terminal stage which have no obvious answers. They may focus on the kind of change which they undergo: is it distinctive and of itself diagnostic of impending language death? And is linguistic interference from the dominant language a significant determinant of the nature of such change? Again, as the range of styles available to a speaker of the dying language shrinks, does he simply redistribute his two (or more) languages over functional domains, or does he fill out the deficiencies by code-switching? And, finally, to what extent is language loss to be seen in terms of group or individual behaviour? Little has been done as yet in the way of extensive investigation, though work on Breton (Dressler 1972; Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter 1977) and Scottish Gaelic (Dorian 1973; 1977) is highly suggestive of fruitful lines to follow, certainly in regard to the Celtic languages. An investigation of a dialect of North Welsh is now being prepared, aimed to make a wide-ranging survey of day-to-day use of Welsh in an urban community which will also search out evidence of decay and death. This chapter is in part a review of existing work in the field, and in part a programmatic statement of intention for the coming survey of Welsh.

The scenario for language death as a social phenomenon is a community in the stage of transitional bilingualism, as are all those in which a Celtic language is spoken. Its most salient demographic feature is the rapid decline in the numbers of speakers of the receding language, and in the disparity between the number of speakers amongst older and younger generations. The numbers of Welsh speakers has declined by roughly 5 per cent in every decade since 1901, to its 1971 level of c.19 per cent of the