

3 Phonological variation in England

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... though the people of London are erroneous in the pronunciation of many words, the inhabitants of every other place are erroneous in many more

John Walker (1791)

Introduction

The long history of English dialectology has furnished a wealth of information on variation in the language. The most extensive record concerns the geographical distribution of segmental variables. More recently, the pioneering work of investigators such as Labov (1966, 1994, 2001), L. Milroy (1987), J. Milroy (1992) and Eckert (2000) has revealed the social constraints on variation. Instrumental methods have further enhanced our understanding of the fine-grained and gradient nature of variation.

It is not possible in the space available in this chapter to provide a comprehensive descriptive survey of phonological variation in English. Instead, our aim is to provide a critical summary of work from the last twenty years or so, since the first edition of this book was in preparation. While our focus is on the English of England, we also draw comparisons with other varieties of English, and indeed other languages, where it is pertinent to do so.

We begin by outlining key developments in methodology and analysis. We then summarise the findings of descriptive work at the segmental and suprasegmental levels, drawing attention to theoretical issues which have emerged from this work.

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Recent advances in methods and analysis

Research into phonological variation in English underwent something of a revolution during the latter half of the twentieth century. The principal interest from the nineteenth century to the late 1960s was in the geographical distribution of lexical forms and pronunciations. The main products of such work were dialect dictionaries and grammars (e.g. Wright 1905) and linguistic maps (Orton, Sanderson & Widdowson 1962–71). Emphasis was mainly on the forms used in rural areas, with dialectologists collecting material designed to reveal conservative, ‘pure dialect’ forms. The subjects whose speech was recorded were mainly non-mobile, older rural males (NORMs). The findings from such studies continue to be analysed (e.g. Klemola & Jones 1999), providing extremely valuable historical material for comparison with data collected in current research.

Work within this ‘traditional dialectology’ framework has been criticised, however, on a number of counts (see Chambers & Trudgill 1998, Milroy & Gordon 2003). Most important, perhaps, is that the methods permit little insight into variability within the speech of an individual or a community, since it was generally one speaker in each location who was recorded, in interview with a fieldworker. Since the 1960s variationist sociolinguistics has shifted the focus to within- and across-speaker variation, investigating urban as well as rural settings, and with a view to identifying and explaining the trajectories of change over space and time (Labov 1994, 2001).

A methodological consequence of these interests has been the collection in a range of locations of large samples of speech from a broad and socially heterogeneous population of speakers. From the earliest studies in the USA (e.g. Labov 1966, Labov, Yaeger & Steiner 1972) the dimensions of class, sex, age, ethnicity and style have been shown to influence pronunciation. Much work has gone into refining our understanding of the effects of these influences. Sociolinguistic and dialectological work has also become increasingly entwined with research in other areas of linguistics, including phonetics and phonology. We turn now to a brief discussion of advances in understanding variation, bearing in mind the apposite comment by Hodge & Kress (1993:vii) that ‘disciplines, unlike cows, yield least when most contented’.

Class and network

Socioeconomic background, abbreviated as ‘class’, has a particularly strong influence on linguistic behaviour. Class is rather problematic to define and quantify, however (Ash 2002, Milroy & Gordon 2003). Most

studies therefore handle class in an informal way, for example contrasting neighbourhoods with markedly different types of housing (e.g. Docherty & Foulkes 1999, Watt & Milroy 1999).

Social network and sociometric analysis have enhanced our understanding of the role of social differences, particularly in settings where social class is relatively homogeneous (Milroy & Milroy 1985, L. Milroy 1987). These studies have shown that patterns of behaviour are closely dependent on a person's degree of entrenchment in any social group. The more tightly knit the network structure, and the more integrated an individual is into the group, the stronger the impetus to adhere to the group's accepted norms of behaviour. In Western societies strong, tight knit networks can be found in traditional 'working-class' communities. People tend to live, work and socialise in a compact setting. More middle-class communities tend to be characterised by looser network structures, with greater mobility for work, leisure and housing. Strong networks promote the maintenance of local linguistic features, while looser networks are conduits for linguistic change (Milroy & Milroy 1985). Change is facilitated by face-to-face interaction, in which interlocutors typically accommodate to one another. Accommodation involves selecting linguistic alternatives to establish solidarity with (or distance from) the interlocutor (Giles & Coupland 1991). Accommodation normally promotes *convergence*. That is, speakers avoid linguistic features which are restricted in currency in favour of those which mark the common ground with the interlocutor. In prolonged contact situations speakers with differing dialects may converge with each other to such an extent that long-term change ensues (Trudgill 1986). Loose networks act as a catalyst for change through accommodation since they increase an individual's range of contacts.

Britain (1997a) refines the network hypothesis, drawing on Giddens' (1984, 1989) theory of *routinisation* as a factor in the perpetuation and maintenance of social structures. Routine activities serve to promote the maintenance of patterns of behaviour, including language use. Norm enforcement is achieved by the perpetuation of routines. Social and political changes may cause breaks in routine, which may therefore open windows for changes in behaviour. Typical middle-class communities are distinguished by weaker cycles of routine, since factors such as travel for leisure or work provide breaks in routine. Over recent years major social upheavals have been felt in British society which have come to cause major disruption to patterns of routine. There has been a dramatic decline of many traditional industries and a fragmentation of the communities which they supported, a marked increase in leisure opportunities and a huge expansion of the communication media. Concomitant with these events has been a rise in geographical and social mobility. These factors together

have contributed to the disruption of routines, the weakening of networks and hence the promotion of rapid linguistic change through more widespread contact between speakers of different varieties.

The principal linguistic effect of these social changes is homogenisation. Sociolinguists have described some homogenisation processes as dialect (or accent) *levelling* (e.g. Watt & Milroy 1999, Williams & Kerswill 1999, Dyer 2002, Watt 2002). Levelling emanates mainly from the loss of minority and regionally restricted forms in favour of variants shared by the majority of speakers who are in contact (Trudgill 1986, Kingston 2000). Levelling is not a new phenomenon, as witnessed for instance by research into linguistic change in the Fens from the seventeenth century onwards (Britain 1997a, b, 2001). It does, however, seem to be increasing rapidly. There is abundant evidence pointing to the erosion of the traditional dialects found in small geographical regions, and the development of new regional varieties (sometimes referred to as regional standards). The latter comprise phonological (as well as lexical and grammatical) features which cover large areas (Trudgill 2002a). Regional varieties appear to be developing around several major cities, including London ('Estuary English'; see Przedlacka 2002, Altendorf 2003 and John Wells' web-site: www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/home.htm), and Newcastle (Watt & Milroy 1999). Homogenisation may also be achieved by the *diffusion* of features as well as contact-induced levelling. Ongoing changes such as the spread of glottal stops and the use of [f, v] for (θ, ð) have been analysed as diffusing from the south-east (Kerswill 2003).

Trudgill (2002a) claims that (contrary to popular perceptions) the phonologies of these regional standards are mainly diverging, not converging, since there are numerous examples of change being promoted within the boundaries of a particular dialect. For example, several ongoing changes in Norwich have no obvious external motivation (Trudgill 1999c).

Sex and gender

Although sociolinguists often refer to the effects of speaker sex (e.g. Labov 1990), Eckert (1989, 2000) has shown that the social construct of gender offers a more accountable explanation of linguistic variation than the binary category of biological sex. In a study of teenagers in Detroit, Eckert found that some of the linguistic differences between groups of schoolgirls were greater than those found between girls and boys. Eckert (2000:122ff) concludes that 'the primary importance of gender lies not in differences between male and female across the board, but in differences within gender groups ... a general constraint against competition across gender lines leads people to compete, hence evaluate themselves, within their gender group'.

Numerous studies have shown that males and females within a community exploit phonological resources differently. It has been argued, in fact, that gender should be seen as prior to class in its influence on linguistic variability, since in many communities the distinction between gender roles is greater than that between social classes (e.g. Milroy, Milroy & Hartley 1994).

Early studies (e.g. Trudgill 1974) showed that men produce more vernacular forms than women, and explained the results by identifying women's speech as more influenced by the norms of the standard language. More recent work, however, suggests a more complex picture. Milroy & Milroy (1985), for instance, argue that reference to a local/supralocal dimension is more revealing than the vernacular/standard continuum. Men are typically more oriented to local norms, while women show more extensive usage of forms with supralocal currency, whether or not these are aligned with the standard language. Such a hypothesis receives support from studies where gender-correlated variability involves forms which cannot be associated with the standard language (e.g. Watt & Milroy 1999, Mathisen 1999).

Gender-based distinctions have been explained with reference to the different type of network ties typical of men and women. A particularly clear case is that of Ballymacarrett, Belfast (L. Milroy 1987). Men in Ballymacarrett rarely leave the neighbourhood, since they work and socialise locally, and their movements are greatly constrained by the city's territorial boundaries, drawn on ethnic lines. Their social networks are therefore particularly dense. Women do not face such restrictions, enjoying greater mobility. Women therefore also construct looser networks, with weaker ties than men to the Ballymacarrett community.

Age

Eckert (1997) deconstructs the apparently innocuous dimension of age, showing that culturally determined *life stages* are more important than a speaker's biologically determined age. In the context of the USA Eckert identifies three key life stages (childhood, adolescence and adulthood) which form the focus of much of our understanding of the relationship between age and language use. She notes that the analysis of life stages should probably be more fine-grained than this, pointing, for example, to our very poor understanding of the effect of ageing on language use (a factor which is ripe for further investigation in light of the rapid expansion of the elderly population).

Like Eckert, Cheshire (1982a) and Kerswill & Williams (2000) identify the importance of the adolescent peer group in the transmission of

vernacular forms. Adolescence is a time at which conformity to peer group norms becomes especially important. The vernacular takes on a special role: its use becomes symbolic of the construction of identity, a means by which adolescents can align themselves with some speaker groups and differentiate themselves from others. As a result, usage of vernacular forms tends to accelerate beyond those of the previous generation, a phenomenon which emerges most clearly where the parents' generation has different regional dialects from the adolescents, as in Milton Keynes.

A consequence of such work has been to show that it is often adolescents who display the greatest use of vernacular forms. This finding therefore calls into question the assumption of early dialectological work that older men are the 'best' source of local linguistic forms (Milroy & Gordon 2003:18). Furthermore, the common hypothesis that language patterns are fixed through adulthood has been brought into question by *real-time* studies, which have shown that individuals may change linguistic performance as they get older and their social circumstances change (e.g. Harrington, Palethorpe & Watson 2005).

The acquisition of variable forms in childhood is less well understood, although recent work shows that complex patterns of variation are acquired from the earliest stages (Roberts 2002, Foulkes, Docherty & Watt 2001, Docherty, Foulkes, Tillotson & Watt 2006). Work on bilingual acquisition has also shown that children learn specific rules of articulatory timing and perceptual categorisation, even where the phonological systems of their two languages apparently overlap (Khattab 2002a).

Ethnicity

Another major social development of the late twentieth century in Britain has been the huge rise in immigration, and the establishment of large ethnic communities in many cities. In the 2001 census, 13% of the population of England registered their ethnicity as other than White British (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001). The figure is far greater in cities such as Bradford, where over 50% of the residents in some suburbs are of Pakistani origin (Bradford Education 1996), and Leicester, where in 1998 over 35% of the city's state school pupils spoke English as an additional language (OFSTED 1998). Some recent research has investigated phonological changes in British Panjabi (Heselwood & McChrystal 1999). However, there is strikingly little work on the phonetics and phonology of the English spoken in ethnic sub-communities. The few readily available sources include the studies of Caribbean immigrants by Wells (1973), Sutcliffe (1982) and Sebba (1987), and Fox's (2006) thesis on Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets. Heselwood & McChrystal (2000) present a preliminary

study of the accent features of Bradford Panjabi–English bilinguals. Intriguingly, their results suggest that young males in Bradford employ much more marked features than do females, for example using more noticeable retroflexion in stop articulations.

Focusing on ethnicity based on religious rather than racial criteria, L. Milroy (1987) and McCafferty (1999, 2001) provide detailed discussions of Protestant/Catholic differences in Belfast and (London) Derry respectively.

Speaking style

All individuals, even young children, are capable of modifying their speech in relation to different styles of speaking. So much so, in fact, that one of the thorniest problems in dialectology has been obtaining speech samples which are *not* modified, but representative of the speaker's habitual vernacular (the *Observer's Paradox*: Labov 1972:209). In early sociolinguistics style was viewed as a continuum along which a speaker could vary. At one pole lay the vernacular, defined by Labov (1972:208) as the style in which a speaker pays minimal attention to speech. The remainder of the continuum was punctuated by various degrees of formality, defined in terms of self-monitoring and elicited in fieldwork by different types of interview method, including reading tasks. It has generally – but not always – been found that in more self-conscious styles speakers modify their speech increasingly towards the standard language (or at least their perceptions of it).

Analysis of style has been revised somewhat over time. Reading tasks have been criticised since they may present quite discrete speaking challenges for speakers of dialects which are particularly distinct from the standard (Milroy & Gordon 2003:201ff.). Rather than inducing gradual shifts in articulatory performance, reading tasks can cause individuals to enter a different mode of speaking, not unlike the kind of shift associated with bilinguals. In Belfast, for example, the vernacular form of *brother* may be [brɔɹɪ]. In reading style the presence of *th* in the orthographic form causes most people to make a categorical shift to the standard form with [ð].

It has also been shown that speech is modified for reasons other than self-consciousness. Adjustments can be made in order to express solidarity with, or distance from, an interlocutor. A clear example of this was encountered by Trudgill (1986:8) in Norwich, who found his own use of [ʔ] varied in correlation with the proportion of glottals used by his interviewees. Bell (1984) has termed this effect *audience design*. In a similar vein, Lindblom (1986, 1990) has suggested that speakers operate along a continuum from *hyper-* to *hypo-speech* in accordance with the perceived interactional needs of the interlocutor. More elaborated (hyper) articulations can be used where a speaking situation demands 'listener-oriented'

speech, such as giving instructions or speaking in noisy conditions. On the other hand, articulatory control in interactions such as informal conversations may be more ‘speaker-oriented’, permitting a greater degree of underarticulation (hypo-speech).

The work of Bell and Lindblom further intersects with findings from conversation analysis, which reveals that phonetic cues may be manipulated for pragmatic purposes such as delimiting speaking turns. Phonetic cues therefore take on a role particular to the participants in a specific interaction (see for example Local, Wells & Sebba 1985, Local, Kelly & Wells 1986, Local 2003).

Geography

As we noted earlier, academic study of the geographical distribution of linguistic forms has a long history, dating back to the 1800s. Britain (2002a) refines the sociolinguist’s understanding of geographical space, concluding that space has usually been viewed as ‘a blank stage on which sociolinguistic processes are enacted’ (p. 603). He argues that it is not just *Euclidean* (geographical or objective) space which acts as a force in the maintenance or change of linguistic forms. There may also be contributions from *social* space – the distance between individuals derived from socio-economic and political distinctions and through human communication; and *perceived* space – a psychological correlate of the physical and social space dimensions. Britain shows that the Fens are less affected than the neighbouring city of Peterborough by various changes diffusing from London. While the physical distance to London is similar, Peterborough is much closer to London in social terms, for example via high-speed commuter rail links. The Fens are further removed from Peterborough, and thus from the influence of London, both in social and perceived space. Contact between Fenlanders and residents of Peterborough takes place mainly in the social amenities of the city, which are served by relatively poor transport links from the Fens. Attitudinal factors serve to further increase the distance between the two populations, with a strong negative perception of the Fenlanders as country bumpkins. Watt & Ingham (2000), in their discussion of changes in progress in Berwick, similarly note the effect of the ‘psychological border’ between English and Scottish identity as well as the geographical boundary dividing England from Scotland.

Analytic techniques

Recently research in phonological variation has benefited greatly from technological advances. Fieldwork has been facilitated by the development

of high quality but cheap and portable recording equipment (Ladefoged 2003). Fieldwork techniques themselves have undergone various refinements in light of the advancements in our understanding of the social constraints on language use. Llamas (1999), for instance, has developed a very useful method for eliciting comparable data on the phonological, lexical and grammatical levels simultaneously. Instrumental analysis has also become far easier, faster and cheaper with the development of computer-based acoustic analysis software.¹ Acoustic analysis has always been central to Labov's work in the USA, where extensive vowel formant analysis has formed the basis of the chain shift model of change (Labov 1994). Formant analysis has played a less prominent role in work on British English, although it is exemplified by a number of studies on RP (Henton 1983, Deterding 1997, Fabricius 2002b, Hawkins & Midgley in press), and also by Watt & Tillotson (2001, with data from Bradford), Torgersen & Kerswill (2004: Ashford), and Nevalainen & Aulanko (1996: Somerset). Harrington, Palethorpe & Watson (2005) use acoustic analysis to show that Queen Elizabeth II's vowels have changed during the course of her adult life. Vowel duration rather than quality has been analysed by Scobbie, Hewlett & Turk (1999) and Watt & Ingham (2000) (see below).

Acoustic analysis of consonants, while virtually absent in North American work, has proved revealing in recent British work. Docherty & Foulkes (1999, 2005) show that patterns of stop realisation in Derby and Newcastle vary with respect to fine-grained aspects of inter-gestural timing, and that these patterns correlate with the social characteristics of the speaker. Similar findings emerge in Foulkes & Docherty (2000) on prevocalic (r) and Lawson & Stuart-Smith's (1999) work on (m) and (x) in Glasgow.

There has been relatively little articulatory analysis of consonantal variation, but see Wright (1989) and Hardcastle & Barry (1989) for electropalatographic investigations of (l) vocalisation. Newer articulatory techniques such as MRI and ultrasound are also being applied to large speaker samples (e.g. Zhang, Boyce, Espy-Wilson & Tiede 2003).

Technological advances are furthermore facilitating new insights into the way in which listeners show sensitivity to variable features in speech perception. For example, Strand (1999) shows that gender stereotypes influence listeners' categorisation of tokens on a nine-step [s]–[ʃ] continuum,

¹ Free acoustic analysis software systems can be downloaded via the Internet. The SFS system (from www.phon.ucl.ac.uk), Wavesurfer (www.speech.kth.se/wavesurfer) and Speech Analyzer (www.sil.org/computing/speechtools/speechanalyzer.htm) offer spectrographic and spectral analysis, while Praat (www.praat.org) is a more sophisticated package which also includes functions for statistics and speech synthesis.

suggesting that ‘higher-level relatively complex social expectations might have an influence on such low-level basic processes as phonological categorisation of the speech signal’ (p. 93). Such work has intriguing implications for theories of phonological representation and acquisition which have tended to assume that one of the key tasks in speech perception was to filter out the variable features of the signal. We expect the role of variability in speech perception to be an area of increasing interest to researchers in speech perception in the coming years (see further Hawkins & Smith 2001, Hawkins 2003).

This sketch of the research methods of dialectal variability is by necessity very brief (see further Chambers 2003, Milroy & Gordon 2003). But it serves, we hope, to identify the complex set of factors which influence pronunciation, and also to explain why there is unevenness in the extent of knowledge we have about particular accents and variable features. In the next two sections we discuss aspects of segmental and prosodic variation in the light of these influences, combining descriptions of geographical distributions with what is known about social and stylistic constraints.

Segmental variation

Following Wells (1982) we employ a set of keywords such as *GOAT*, *FACE* and *START*, to illustrate classes of words which contain a particular phonological vowel. /l/, /h/, and /θ, ð/ and other consonantal variables are given in standard sociolinguistic notation, e.g. (h).

Stops

Probably the most widely studied variable in English phonology is (t), in particular with reference to its realisation as a glottal (for a thorough survey see Fabricius 2000, 2002a). We hesitate to say glottal *stop*, since acoustic analysis shows that sounds perceived as [ʔ] or an oral plosive with glottal reinforcement in fact tend not to contain a glottal stop closure (e.g. Grice & Barry 1991). Our work in Newcastle revealed that 70% of audibly glottal(ised) segments were fully voiced, with the glottal percept being cued by creaky phonation (Docherty & Foulkes 1999, 2005).

Glottal forms of (t) are increasing in frequency across much of the British Isles. Indeed it is becoming rare to hear word-final pre-consonantal (t), as in *get ready*, articulated as anything other than a glottal. Collins & Mees (1996) demonstrate, in fact, that RP speakers born as long ago as 1848 used pre-consonantal glottals. For younger RP speakers (t) may be deleted altogether in some contexts (Fabricius 2000:85). In word-final prevocalic position (e.g. *get off*) glottals are less common, but now well

established even for RP speakers (Fabricius 2000, 2002a). Most varieties tolerate glottals before syllabic nasals and/or laterals, and also in turn-final position (Newcastle provides an exception on the latter score: Docherty, Foulkes, Milroy, Milroy & Walshaw 1997). It is really in intervocalic position, e.g. *water*, where the ongoing spread is most noticeable. In Derby, for example, older speakers produced only 4 medial glottals in almost 1000 tokens in unscripted conversation. By contrast, younger speakers produced 22% glottals (Docherty & Foulkes 1999). The use of glottals remains a stigmatised feature for many self-appointed guardians of the language (e.g. Norman 2001), although the stigma is undoubtedly waning fast and is probably now restricted to intervocalic positions. Today's undergraduates fail to see what any of the fuss is about. Glottals can also be heard, but much less frequently, as realisations of (p) and (k) and occasionally for fricatives and (d) (e.g. Sullivan 1992, Tollfree 1999, Trudgill 1999c). Glottal realisations of the definite article can be found across many northern regions, although these are probably retreating in the face of standardisation (Shorrocks 1991, 1998, Jones 2002).

Deletion of (t) and (d) in word-final consonant clusters, (e.g. *last piece*) is the norm in many dialects, particularly in faster and more casual speech styles. This phenomenon has been investigated in many US dialects (e.g. Guy 1980), but so far few in the UK. However, Tagliamonte & Temple (2005) shows that patterns of deletion in York differ from those found in North American studies.

A range of voiced variants of intervocalic (t) can be found across varieties, including [ɹ] and [r]. The former is restricted to a small set of lexical items, mostly in final position, e.g. *get off*, *what if*, *that is*, but also medially in *better* and *getting*. This variant is mainly found in northern areas, is often stigmatised and seems to be receding in currency. This is true at least in Newcastle (Watt & Milroy 1999:29) and Derby (Docherty & Foulkes 1999:51). The distribution of [r] and voiced stop variants is less clear. Mathisen (1999:110) reports [r] to be mainly a feature of older male speech in Sandwell. On the other hand, it appears to be on the increase in Newcastle (cf. Watt & Milroy 1999:29). Docherty & Foulkes (1999) discuss innovative pre-aspirated variants in Newcastle, which mainly affect pre-pausal (t) and are strongly associated with young women. See also Sangster (2001), Honeybone (2001) and Watson (2002) for discussions of fricated stops in Liverpool English.

Variation in voice onset time is discussed by Heselwood & McChrystal (2000), who report deaspiration of voiceless stops for some Bradford Asians. Variable deaspiration is also mentioned by Lodge (1966, 1978) for Stockport and by Wells (1982:370) for North Lancashire (see also Scobbie 2006). Another source of variation, at least at an individual

level, in whether or not vocal cord vibration is present within the closure phase of voiced stops (Docherty 1992, Khattab 2002a). Some speakers in Manchester and London employ audible affrication, yielding for instance a [tʰ] quality for (t), which Tollfree (1999:170) associates with confident, affected or emphatic speech styles.

While realisational differences have received the most attention, it has also been shown that dialects may differ in the connected speech processes they permit. Nolan & Kerswill (1990) found variable assimilation effects for school children in Cambridge. Kerswill & Wright (1990) showed that place assimilations common in standard varieties, such as *red car* [ɹɛg kɑː], appear not to occur in Durham. Durham, by contrast, permits regressive voicing assimilation which is not found for RP. Thus *like bairns* may be pronounced with a final [g] in the first word. Parts of West Yorkshire, notably Bradford, follow a similar pattern with voiceless assimilation, thus *Hyde Park* may be [haɪf̥ pa:k] (or [haɪʔ pa:k] via glottaling).

Fricatives

Two particularly striking changes are affecting the fricative system of English. The first concerns the realisation of (h). Although (h) dropping is cited by Wells (1982:60) as 'perhaps the single most powerful sociolinguistic shibboleth in England', it appears from recent work that the spread of h-loss has been halted or even reversed. Tollfree (1999:173) suggests that the feature has stabilised in London. In Hull younger and older speakers use roughly the same proportion of [h], while in Milton Keynes and Reading, children have a strong tendency to pronounce [h] in interview style (Williams & Kerswill 1999:157–8).

The second change concerns labiodental realisations of the dental fricatives (θ, ð). Use of [f, v] in e.g. *think, mother* is spreading as rapidly and widely as any feature bar glottaling (J. Milroy 1996, Kerswill 2003). Speakers can, however, usually differentiate dentals and labiodentals in careful speech (Wells 1982:328). Initial (ð) in function words (*the, this, they*, etc.) is rarely affected but instead may be articulated as a dental or alveolar stop.

The [ɹ] pronunciation in words such as *which* has all but disappeared from accents in England, having merged with [w] (or [h] preceding the GOOSE vowel, e.g. *who*). Exceptions include conservative RP and parts of rural Northumberland (Wells 1982:228ff.).

Subtler or more restricted variations in fricative production may also be found, although they have received less attention. Word-initial (f, s, ʃ, θ) may be voiced in the south-west, including Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, although these are yielding rapidly under the influence of standard English and are virtually extinct for young urban speakers

(e.g. Wakelin 1986:17, 29). In contrast, devoicing of (z) is cited as a shibboleth to identify speakers of Welsh origin in the border town of Oswestry (Elmes 2000:112).

Dialects may also differ in the relative sibilance typical of (s) and (z). Some older speakers in Derby, for example, tend to use a retracted lingual articulation for these fricatives, resulting in an audibly lower frequency (Docherty & Foulkes 1999:51).

Nasals

Several studies have investigated variability in the realisation of (ŋ). It is well known that the [n] realisation tends to outweigh [ŋ] in colloquial speech, and is usually most closely associated with male speakers from lower socioeconomic groups (e.g. Trudgill 1974). Tagliamonte (2004) discusses language-internal constraints on variation in (ŋ) in York, showing that the most significant factor was the grammatical category of word: verbs favour [n] while nouns and adjectives favour [ŋ].

The variant [ŋg] is common in many parts of the north and middle west (e.g. Knowles 1978, Heath 1980, Shorrocks 1998, Mathisen 1999, Newbrook 1999, Docherty & Foulkes 1999). In fact it appears to be emerging as a local prestige form in some of these areas. In Sandwell, for example, it is commonest for women, is increasing in currency for younger speakers and occurs more frequently for all speakers in more careful styles (Mathisen 1999:120).

Liquids and approximants

The phonetic quality and phonotactic distribution of (r) are both variable. The most widespread form used is the alveolar approximant [ɹ] (e.g. Gimson 1980:204ff.). Several other variants can be found which are restricted to particular phonological positions, regional dialects and/or certain speech styles. These include [r], which is common in northern varieties (e.g. Shorrocks 1998) and conservative RP, especially in intervocalic position; [r̥], which seems restricted to affected or theatrical styles; [ɹ̥], on the verge of extinction but which can still be heard in rural Northumberland and parts of Cumbria; and [ɹ̥], in the south-west (Wakelin 1986). A labial or labiodental variant, usually transcribed [v], has also long been recognised but has usually been dismissed as a feature of immature, defective or affected speech (e.g. Gimson 1980:207). In recent years, however, [v] has become firmly established as an acceptable mature variant in many urban dialects, and appears to be diffusing from south to north (Foulkes & Docherty 2000). Acoustic analysis of labial variants

suggests in fact that a range of phonetic forms are in currency, and [v] should be understood as a convenient cover label rather than a precise transcription (Docherty & Foulkes 2001).

Variability in phonotactic distribution primarily concerns whether or not (r) is articulated in postvocalic positions, a division encapsulated in the descriptive labels *rhotic* vs. *non-rhotic*. While rhoticity is socially prestigious in North America, Ireland and Scotland, the reverse is true for England. Speakers of rhotic varieties are often subject to ridicule (note, for instance, the comments made to Cornish speakers recorded by Elmes 2000:59, 62). In the face of such stigma, it is no surprise to find that non-rhoticity is encroaching on traditionally rhotic areas such as Berkshire (Williams & Kerswill 1999:147), Exeter (Sullivan 1992) and Bolton (Shorrocks 1998:388–9), especially in urban areas. On the other hand, Vivian (2000) shows rhoticity to be very well maintained in a sample of lower-class speakers in Accrington and Blackburn, and slightly less well in Burnley.

Most non-rhotic dialects have a contextualised alternation between [r] (of any phonetic form) and Ø. This is referred to as linking (r), where a rhotic consonant may be pronounced only if a vowel follows, as in (1).

- (1) dollar [Ø] dollar [Ø] bill dolla[r] or two

The alternation is usually an automatic phonological process with little social variation, although in Newcastle it was found to be significantly less common in the speech of the working-class group and the young (Foulkes 1997).

In most non-rhotic dialects (and occasionally in rhotic ones) this alternation is extended to words which did not historically contain (r) (as in 2).

- (2) Tessa [Ø] Tessa [Ø] Smith Tessa[r] O'Brien

The pattern illustrated in (2), called intrusive (r), has traditionally been stigmatised and speakers tend to avoid pronouncing intrusive [r] in conscious styles. Newcastle is again an exception (Foulkes 1997).

Variation in (l) centres on phonetic quality. While RP is traditionally described as having 'clear' (alveolar) [l] in syllable onsets and 'dark' (velarised or pharyngealised) [ɫ] in codas, the distinction does not always hold in other varieties. Clear (l) is found in all positions in the north-east (Watt & Milroy 1999:31) and also in Bradford Asian speech (Heselwood & McChrystal 2000). By contrast (l) appears universally dark in the south-west (Wakelin 1986:31), and variably dark in all positions in Leeds (Khattab 2002b). An intermediate quality tends to obtain in other parts of the north (Wells 1982:370). Where coda (l) is dark, delateralisation may occur, resulting in a variety of vowel sounds (Wells 1982:258ff., Wright

1989, Tollfree 1999, Altendorf 2003). In Hardcastle & Barry's (1989) study, vocalisation was more prevalent in the context of a preceding front vowel and/or a following palato-alveolar or velar consonant. Vocalisation seems to be spreading even though it is usually thought to be stigmatised. It is found in Peterborough (Britain 1997a:42) and the West Midlands (Mathisen 1999:111), but not yet Norwich (Trudgill 1999c:140). It is also increasing in Derby, although historical records show it to have a considerable time-depth in the surrounding region (Pegge 1896, Hulme 1941). There are signs, too, that the perceived stigma is disappearing. Johnson (2001) found no significant difference in rate of vocalisation in casual speech vs. word-list reading for Derby informants.

It furthermore appears from phonological research that the degree of darkness in (l) may be linked to the quality of (r) that is used in the dialect. Kelly (1995) and Carter (2003) show that clear (l) entails dark (r) and vice versa, although these findings are yet to be tested on large speaker samples.

The approximant (j) is variably deleted in consonant clusters in most accents (Wells 1982:206ff.), although it is often categorically absent in Norfolk and the East Midlands (Trudgill 1999c:133). Among many young speakers over a wide area alveolar stop + (j) sequences are assimilating into affricates [tʃ] and [dʒ], thus *tune* is frequently [tʃu:n]. Likewise, in triconsonantal clusters initial (s) may also palatalise through assimilation: *stupid* and *strong* can be heard as [ʃtʃu:pɪd] and [ʃt.rɒŋ].

Vowels

It is widely recognised that vowels carry the bulk of responsibility for differentiating English accents from one another (Wells 1982:178). The vowels with perhaps the greatest sociolinguistic significance in England are STRUT and BATH. The main alternants, [ʊ] versus [ʌ] and [a] versus [ɑ:] respectively, divide the linguistic north and south. The *Survey of English Dialects* (SED) data yield famous isoglosses for both from the Severn to the Wash (Upton & Widdowson 1996:6–14). Britain (2001) investigates the performance of speakers who live close to these isoglosses, in the Fens. His findings show that almost all individual speakers vary in their pronunciations for STRUT and BATH, but the patterns for younger and older speakers differ. For STRUT the older speakers show a gradual transition across the Fens, with [ʊ] dominant in the north and giving way gradually to [ʌ] further south. For younger speakers, however, the transition is much sharper, and an interdialectal 'fudged' form [ʌ] has emerged as the main variant for speakers living in the centre of the area. The north to south gradation also applies to BATH, although in the central area speakers tend to use either [a] or [ɑ:], with no intermediate phonetic forms, but with

the alternative variant cropping up in occasional lexical items. Fabricius (2000:35) suggests that northern [a] may be spreading by lexical diffusion into southern varieties.

A study of vowels in Newcastle reveals substantial ongoing change with respect to FACE, GOAT and NURSE (Watt & Milroy 1999, Watt 2000). The traditional local forms of FACE and GOAT, [iə] and [ʊə], are becoming restricted to older males, and are virtually absent in the speech of women. Younger speakers are opting instead for monophthongal variants [e:] and [o:], which have a wide distribution over much of the north of England (see also Kerswill 1984). The traditional variant of NURSE, [ɔ:], is also shown to be highly recessive. The standard-like [ɜ:] is more frequent, but younger women show a distinct preference for a front rounded [ø:]. Gender is overall the most important social constraint on the distributional patterns for these three vowels. Coupled with the shift away from traditional forms, and the relatively small number of standard variants found, Watt & Milroy argue that these patterns are indicative of accent levelling. Watt (2000) furthermore suggests that the apparent parallelism of the FACE and GOAT developments is best analysed with reference to their social connotations rather than as a system-internal development, as predicted by the chain shift model (Labov 1994).

Levelling is also the principal theme of research centred on Milton Keynes (Kerswill 1996a, Williams & Kerswill 1999, Kerswill & Williams 2000). Several vowel variables have shown levelling to be underway as children reduce the wide variety of forms used by their elders, both long-term residents and in-migrants to the town from various other locations.

Levelling to various degrees is found in other new towns, Telford (Britain & Simpson forthcoming) and Corby (Dyer 2002). In Telford, young speakers display focusing to an interdialectal form [ɪ] in PRICE words (compare the traditional Shropshire form [ai] and urban Birmingham [ɔi]), although variants of GOAT remain highly variable. Corby is particularly interesting for its large population of in-migrant steel workers from Glasgow, who moved to the town in the 1960s. Some imported Scottish forms are being eradicated by the younger generation, such as the merger between the LOT and THOUGHT sets (which render *cot* and *caught* homophonous, [kɔt]). Others, however, are being maintained, but with new social evaluations. For GOAT, the Scottish monophthongal form [o:] is winning out over English diphthongs, especially in the speech of young men. By referring to overt linguistic and sociological comments by her informants, Dyer shows that speakers' ideologies have changed, and so too have the social connotations associated with linguistic variants. Monophthongal GOAT variants are emblematic, for older speakers, of ethnic affiliation to Scotland. For younger speakers

the ethnic division has been erased. For them [o:] has become a marker of locality, differentiating Corby from neighbouring towns such as Kettering.

Britain's study of the Fens (1997a, b, 2001) furthermore shows that in dialect contact situations competing forms can be reallocated to allophonic status with different contextual constraints from those found in the contributing dialects. In the Fens, PRICE vowels with an open onset typical of the areas to the west, [ai, a:], have entered into contact with eastern variants containing a more central first element, [əi]. Among younger Fenlanders the latter variants have become restricted to positions before voiceless consonants, as in *night*.

Vowel fronting (sometimes coupled with unrounding), especially of GOAT, STRUT and GOOSE, has been in progress in RP for some time (e.g. Gimson 1984, Altendorf 2003). It seems to be spreading to parts of the midlands (Docherty & Foulkes 1999). Fronting patterns with a different outcome, [ø:], have been found for GOAT in an acoustic study of Bradford English (Watt & Tillotson 2001) as well as Hull (Williams & Kerswill 1999). Watt & Tillotson suggest it is an innovatory form diffusing across Yorkshire and Teesside from a Humberside source.

Competing vowel length is the subject of an acoustic study of Berwick English undertaken by Watt & Ingham (2000). Berwick lies three miles from the Scottish border, and shares many linguistic features with both rural Northumbrian English and also dialects of Scotland, including the Scottish Vowel Length Rule (SVLR; see further Scobbie et al. 1999). Watt & Ingham show that SVLR is present in Berwick, but it is becoming less consistent among younger speakers. This change is discussed as a diagnostic of individual affiliation to a Scottish vs. English identity. J. Milroy (1995) also shows SVLR to be present, at least for PRICE, in Newcastle.

Finally, Wells (1982:257ff.) discusses an innovation in the happy class, where the final vowel is shifting from [ɪ] to [i:]. The shift appears complete in London (Tollfree 1999:169) and Norwich (Trudgill 1999c:139), and nearly so in the Wirral (Newbrook 1999:97). More open qualities, approaching [ɛ], can be found in some northern dialects (e.g. Stoddart, Upton & Widdowson 1999), while Local (1990) shows that length and quality are variable in Newcastle, and subject to harmony with the preceding vowel.

Suprasegmentals

Suprasegmentals are aspects of speech which extend over domains larger than single segments. They include intonation, rhythm and vocal setting. Such features may vary across speakers and speaker groups, just as consonant and vowel realisations do. Nevertheless, there has been relatively

little formal study of suprasegmental variation, particularly in varieties other than RP. In part this is due to the considerable methodological problems associated with suprasegmental analysis. First, it is often difficult to identify the phonetic correlates of suprasegmental features, even with instrumental analysis. Compared, for example, with quantifying the number of glottal versus alveolar stops a speaker produces, it can be problematic to make a reliable judgement of a feature such as velarised voice quality. Second, quantitative analytic frameworks are in many cases quite complex and require considerable training to use reliably. Furthermore, the *form–function problem* faced by those investigating grammatical variation (e.g. Cheshire 1999a) is also acute in suprasegmental analysis. Comparison of any type of linguistic variation is grounded on the hypothesis that a linguistic unit may be realised in a variety of different physical forms. In examinations of segmental variation the issue is generally uncontroversial. We can be confident, for example, that the pronunciations [wɔ:tə] and [wɔ:ʔə] are equivalent in their linguistic function. We can therefore analyse a body of data to quantify how often a speaker uses one form or the other and draw meaningful comparisons across speakers or dialects. In suprasegmental analysis, however, it is often open to debate whether two formally different expressions are semantically equivalent.

O'Connor & Arnold (1973) and Cruttenden (1997, 2001a) offer detailed discussions of the problems in identifying the meanings of particular intonation patterns. Cruttenden argues that intonational meanings are composed of at least three strands, derived from (i) the grammatical structure of the utterance, (ii) the speaker's attitude, and (iii) the pragmatic or discourse function of the utterance (see also Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990). Moreover, the degree of importance of these three levels may vary from token to token. It is therefore often difficult to isolate groups of functionally equivalent utterances, and in turn problematic to make quantitative analyses of the suprasegmental features they contain.

In spite of such methodological problems, recent studies have significantly advanced our understanding of the phonetic, phonological and sociolinguistic patterns of suprasegmental variation.

Vocal setting and voice quality

Vocal setting is defined by Laver (1994:396) as the 'tendency underlying the production of the chain of segments in speech towards maintaining a particular configuration or state of the vocal apparatus'. Speakers who tend to keep the velum lowered, for instance, will possess a habitually nasal voice quality. Extensive studies of the phonetic correlates of vocal settings can be found in Laver (1980) and Nolan (1983).

As already noted, there has been little formal study of the social or stylistic correlations of vocal settings, although impressionistic comments on voice (phonation) quality are more widespread than those on supralaryngeal settings. Creaky phonation as a general dialect feature is associated with RP and many regional forms of US and Australian English (e.g. Laver 1980:4, Henton & Bladon 1988). In many dialects creak performs pragmatic functions, in particular marking turn-endings. Honikman (1964) suggests that RP is also characterised by a slightly retroflex tongue setting, and an overall lax articulatory setting.

Knowles (1978) comments on the velarised voice quality and raised larynx setting used in Liverpool, while Trudgill (1974) describes Norwich voice quality in some detail. Typical features here include nasalisation, creak and raised larynx.

The most detailed studies, however, have been carried out on varieties of English spoken in Scotland. Esling (1978) found class differences in voice qualities used by Edinburgh speakers. For example, the working-class subjects tended to display protruded jaw and harsh phonation. Stuart-Smith's (1999) study of thirty-two Glasgow speakers stands as a model for future studies in a variationist framework, revealing significant differences correlated with class, age and gender.

Rhythm

The rhythmic pattern of speech is a perceptual effect 'produced by the interaction in time of the relative prominence of stressed and unstressed syllables' (Laver 1994:152). Languages are said to be either *syllable-timed* or *stress-timed*, although in practice these constitute two poles of a continuum. In syllable-timed languages (e.g. French), syllables tend to be more regular in duration than in stress-timed languages (e.g. English). In the latter the time from each stressed syllable to the next is roughly equal, while unstressed syllables are compressed in between.

This difference in rhythmic organisation may also occur across different dialects of a language. Welsh English is generally said to be syllable-timed, but Cardiff rhythm is more like the stress-timed pattern of standard English (Mees & Collins 1999:194). Syllable timing is also suggested as a feature of Bradford Panjabi English (Heselwood & McChrystal 2000) and Jamaican Creole (Sebba 1987). Trudgill (1999c:124) notes the characteristic rhythm of Norwich and Norfolk speech, involving very long stressed syllables and very short unstressed ones. Nolan & Kerswill (1990) make comparable comments for local Cambridge speakers.

As with vocal setting, there have been few cross-dialectal studies of rhythm. However, recent work in phonetics has yielded a useful framework,

the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI), which allows us to quantify and compare rhythmic features (Grabe & Low 2002).

Stress and intonation

Although word stress in English is not wholly fixed (Fudge 1984), dialects seem to differ relatively little in the location of main stress placement. This is true both for word-stress and sentence-stress. Thus, words like *acquisition*, *deliver*, *telephone* will almost invariably take stress on the indicated syllable, no matter what the dialect or style of speech. Counter-examples can be found, which as often as not appear to reflect differences between British and North American usage. North American dialects tend to opt for initial word- and phrase-stress (*ice cream*, *cigarette*, *inquiry*, *The English Patient*), some of which have filtered into British usage (as has *kilometre*). However, the traffic is not one-way, with the British pattern for *controversy* replacing the initial-stressed pattern in the USA (Wells 1995). Nolan (2002) shows furthermore that speakers vary in the precise location of peak pitch alignment within a stressed syllable.

Differences may occur in the type of pitch pattern used to represent the main stress within a sentence. In order to circumvent form–function and methodological problems, Cruttenden (2001a:57) identifies two basic and largely universal phonological categories which are signalled by contrasting intonation patterns. *Open* tones, which may be used in yes/no question constructions, parenthetic comments and requests, indicate a ‘continuative’ meaning. They signal, for example, that the speaker has not completed the speaking turn, and that there is ‘more to come’. These contrast with *Closed* tones, which offer no indication of any continuing speech. These are typically used in statements, exclamations and commands.

All languages and dialects appear to contrast these two categories, although their realisations may vary phonetically. RP, for instance, tends to use a falling pitch pattern to signal Closed category meanings, with a pitch rise for Open category meanings. Cruttenden (1997:128) further notes that use of low-rise and fall-rise patterns in Open tones are typical of more formal speech styles in English. Cruttenden (2001a) presents data from four women from Salford, showing that the commonest patterns they use are rise-slump in the Closed category, and fall-level in the Open category. (‘Slump’ is defined as a fall from a relatively high pitch to a relatively medium pitch within a speaker’s overall range; ‘fall’ strictly involves a pitch drop to the speaker’s base line.) The Salford study is intended as a preliminary attempt to describe the intonation of a non-standard dialect, and as such its focus is mainly a comparison with RP.

What also emerges, however, is the degree of variability within the data sample. The two principal patterns only account for 27% and 32% of the data in the Closed and Open categories respectively.

The use of rising patterns in Closed tones in many northern cities is cited by Cruttenden (1997:133) as the most noticeable cross-dialectal variation in English intonation. Rises are traditionally associated with Birmingham, Liverpool and Newcastle (as well as much of Wales, Ireland and urban Scotland, but not Edinburgh). Cruttenden further points out that there are actually four different varieties of tone involved in these 'rises'. See further Knowles (1978), Bilton (1982), Local, Kelly & Wells (1986), Cruttenden (1997:128–38) and Grabe (2004).

Intonational differences have also been reported for London Jamaican (Local, Wells & Sebba 1985, Sebba 1987). Unlike most other varieties of English, nuclear syllables are not marked by pitch movement, which is used only to signal conversational turn-endings. Moreover, the phonetic cue for turn-delimitation in London Jamaican occurs on the final syllable of a speaking turn, whereas in RP and Tyneside it is centred on the final foot (Local, Kelly & Wells 1986). One way by which syllables bearing information focus can be highlighted in London Jamaican is through lengthening initial fricatives, as in (3) (Sebba 1987:64):

(3) You could be getting [s:]ixty pounds a week and I get thirty pounds a week.

One of the most noticeable innovations in recent years has been the development of rising intonation in the Closed tone category in dialects which traditionally use falls. This has been found in the USA, Australia and New Zealand as well as Great Britain, and has been variously labelled *high rising tone* (HRT), *Australian Question(ing) Intonation* (AQI) and *uptalk* (see Cruttenden 1995, 1997:129–31, Fletcher, Grabe & Warren 2005). The pattern is associated with the upwardly mobile ('yuppies') in England (Cruttenden 1997:130), but lower class and/or female speech elsewhere.

Because of its perceptual salience, HRT has been the subject of much comment by non-linguists, including the mass media. Some of these comments are highly speculative and empirically untested, for example, that Australian soap operas are responsible for the spread of HRT (Bathurst 1996, Lawson 1998). Others, taking up the mantle of John Walker and others in lamenting change of any kind, identify HRT as a sign of unstoppable decay in modern English (e.g. Bradbury 1996, Norman 2001). Still others draw a logical but naïve conclusion, based on comparison with standard English, that rises indicate questions, and thus the use of rises in declaratives reflects a psychological state of uncertainty. The voice coach Patsy Rodenburg, for example, is quoted by Kennedy (1996) as claiming

'that rising inflection is about being unsure . . . you make a question rather than a statement because you are scared'. Such statements are ill-founded in that they equate a particular intonation pattern with a single linguistic function. They thereby fail to take account of issues raised earlier: the form–function problem; the fact that intonational meaning is derived from a complex set of sources; and that social and linguistic evaluation of features may vary from speaker to speaker. It is obvious from examination of intonation patterns in dialects such as Newcastle and Liverpool that rises may be employed in the Closed category without any indication of interrogative meaning or uncertainty. Furthermore, linguists who have analysed HRT have identified its positive discourse functions. It has been shown that HRT serves to track the listener's comprehension and attention, especially when the speaker is presenting new information. Listeners perceive HRT to be deferential but friendly (Guy & Vonwiller 1984). It also acts as a turn-holding mechanism in narratives (e.g. Warren & Britain 1999).

Finally, recent work has shown that dialects differ not only in the type of pitch patterns used for Open and Closed tones, but also in the way these patterns are executed in different phonological environments (Grabe, Post, Nolan & Farrar 2000). When voiced material is reduced, for example by reducing the number of syllables upon which a particular intonation contour is overlaid, pitch patterns can either be *compressed* or *truncated*. In compression, the speed at which an intonational change is articulated varies, so that a roughly equal change in fundamental frequency is achieved no matter how much voiced material is available. Grabe *et al.* found this pattern to dominate in RP and Newcastle. In truncation, the rate of change in fundamental frequency stays roughly constant, so that in shorter contexts the change is not as great as in longer contexts. Speakers from Leeds and Belfast tended to use this pattern.

Outlook

Our review of recent studies reveals, we hope, that research into phonological variability is increasingly multiplex and dynamic, thanks to advances in methodology, technology and improved understanding of the social and linguistic factors which affect language use. The findings of such work are being exploited for an ever-widening range of purposes. Within academic linguistics, empirical data are used to inform theoretical issues discussion of phonological representation and organisation, linguistic change and first language acquisition, while empirical studies are in turn shaped by theoretical developments.

Descriptive and theoretical linguistic work are furthermore vital for the development of automated speech recognition systems and speech synthesisers, for speech and language therapy and for reference in forensic analysis of recorded speech central to crimes. Understanding how accents are evaluated, positively or negatively, is important also for industries which are speech-oriented, such as telephone sales and call centres.

Evaluation is of undoubted relevance in everyday situations, too. People's accents are indexical of their social backgrounds and emblems of group allegiances. Linguistic differences have always been the subject of comment and opinion and always will be. However, as Lippi-Green (1997) demonstrates, language differences and uninformed opinions about those differences can make a tangible difference to people's lives. Jobs are won or lost on the basis of traits of speech. People are informed that their speech is good or bad. They may be persuaded to change their speech, which may covertly entail a change in the social allegiances they signal through their speech. Linguistic prejudice can be used as a proxy for other kinds of prejudice.

The most important role of all, perhaps, for work in understanding linguistic variability and its social values, is that it raises awareness of these issues, and promotes acceptance of difference.