SCOUSE ENGLISH: TRENDS IN USAGE AS ACCORDING TO REGIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: Scouse English is one of England's most recognisable accents, and this has been a factor in the establishment of a strong sense of Scouse identity. This study aims to look at whether how strongly a person identifies with Liverpool affects their use of local linguistic variables. Some non-local features will also be looked at, as well as looking into how age may affect the presence of both local and non-local features. The amount of Merseyside citizens that have faced accent discrimination is also briefly explored. It is hypothesised that people with higher Scouse identity scores will be more likely to use local features, which is supported by the NURSE-SQUARE merger, the use of *lecky* and *ciggie* and /t/ lenition support the first hypothesis, but refuted by the BOOK-SPOOK merger, /k/ lenition and use of *barm* for what RP speakers may call a *bread roll*. The second hypothesis is that broader northern features will be unaffected by identity score, which is unanimously supported by the absence of BATH-TRAP and FOOT-STRUT splits, as well as the presence of the 'velar nasal plus'. It is also hypothesised that younger speakers will be more likely to use the local and regional variants, which is supported by /t/ lenition but rejected by all of the other variables.

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1. Introduction

Scouse English is one of the most recognisable accents in England, in no small part due to the number of features that make it stand out from other accents. Possession of such a unique accent is one factor that helped contribute towards a sense of Scouse identity that has persisted over the years. This study will look at whether or not how strongly a person identifies with Liverpool affects their use of local linguistic variables. Some broader features associated with northern accents will also be looked at for comparison's sake, as well as looking at how all of these factors are affected by a speaker's age. Accent discrimination that the participants have faced will also be briefly explored.

Section 2 will explore the literature surrounding the research questions, beginning with a discussion of identity more broadly before focusing on how this can be applied to Scouse identity. This is followed by looking at key studies into the linguistic variables that are on display in the Scouse accent and how age may affect some of these. By looking at previous research, it was possible to outline the three key hypotheses of this study; that variants associated with Liverpool specifically will be used more frequently by those with high Scouse identity scores, variants not associated with Liverpool will not be affected by these identity scores, and that younger people will be more likely to use the regional variants than older people. The methodology is outlined in detail in the next section, paying close attention to the demographics of the participants and the questions that they were asked. Results are then outlined in section 4 with the help of graphs, and these are then unpacked in the discussion section. It is concluded that the NURSE-SQUARE merger, the use of *lecky* and *ciggie* and /t/ lenition support the first hypothesis. Meanwhile, the BOOK-SPOOK merger, /k/ lenition and use of *barm* for what Received Pronunciation (RP) speakers would likely call a *bread roll* refute this hypothesis. A second conclusion is that the absence of BATH-TRAP and FOOT-STRUT splits, as well as the presence of the 'velar nasal plus' show unanimous support to the second hypothesis. And finally, it is also concluded that although /t/ lenition supports the third hypothesis, all of the other variables reject it.

2. Literature Review

This section explores a plethora of linguistic, sociological and even political literature, all of which was instrumental in formulating the hypotheses.

2.1 Defining Identity

Anderson (1991: 3) claimed that identity was 'notoriously difficult to define'. Many have given their own definitions and theories of what identity means. Looking specifically at regional identity, it has been said to rise out of 'collective social classifications/identifications' (Paasi, 2002: 803) from those in a particular area. Arkette (2004: 162) argued that each community have their own sets of 'sound markers' which play a role in reinforcing this sense of identity. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that regional accents are prime examples of sound markers, with Scouse in particular being referred to as 'Liverpool's instantly recognisable badge of difference' (Belchem and MacRaild, 2006: 388).

This essay will refer to identity in the sense described by Hall (1990: 225), which ultimately describes identity as somewhat of a social construct; not only is a sense of identity based on past experience and a sense of collective similarity, but it is also open to change in accordance with our understanding of history, culture and power. Feelings of difference and exclusion – as well as the aforementioned similarities – can also come to play in shaping identity when using this perspective. Ashworth and Graham (2005: 3) explain that '[i]n defining the discourses of inclusion and exclusion that constitute identity, people call upon an affinity with places'. As such, an affinity for Liverpool is a large part of what causes a person to identify as a Scouser.

2.2 The Scouse Identity

Keeping that definition of identity in mind, for this essay it is important to look at the many factors which have come to shape the Scouse identity as we know it today.

2.2.1 A Brief History

Given Liverpool's history as a port town which saw lots of trade, it is no surprise that the area has a rich history. Belchem (2000: 35-36) discusses how the term 'Scouse' is a reference to *lobscouse*, a Scandinavian stew that was popular in seaports, which reflects the city's origins. It then eventually became popular within the city as a whole, leading to a stereotype about the Liverpudlian people that enabled the term Scouser to rise to prominence. Though Liverpool was once 'one of the richest and most prosperous trading centres in the world' (Muir, 1907: 195), in recent decades its economic position has worsened, to the point where the Liverpool local authority was the most deprived local authority in 2007 (Social Disadvantage Research Centre, 2008).

During the Great Potato Famine in Ireland which lasted from 1845 to 1857, many Irish citizens left their country and settled in Liverpool due to the fact that the city was a main point of entry to England (Cesiri, 2008: 333). Even before this, the census in 1841 showed Irish-born people made up 17.3% of Liverpool's population (Belchem, 2000: 72), showing that the number of Irish citizens in Liverpool was already quite high. Additionally, a number of negative stereotypes that are applied to the people of Liverpool today can actually be traced back to racial profiling against Irish immigrants (Leonard, 2005: 526). Leonard goes on to say that an explanation for this is a shared 'Liverpool-Irish culture' that occurred due a joint sense of identity in Irish citizens. This then may have led to those stereotypes becoming associated with Liverpool as a whole and subsequently internalised.

In the past few decades, Scouse has reportedly started to spread beyond its previous boundaries to areas like Southport, Maghull and Ormskirk (Knowles, 1973: 14). Honeybone and Watson (2006: 2) assert that the accent has also become firmly established within the areas adjacent to Liverpool, like Knowsley and Birkenhead. This is a process which Kerswill (2003: 223) refers to as geographical diffusion, a process in which features spread from a dominant central point. In this case, that central point is Liverpool. Rather interestingly, Cremer (2007: 42) found that Scouse English is even having an influence on the accents of people from Bangor, showing that its scope is potentially widening even further than was previously suggested.

2.2.2 Politics and Independence

With the strong sense of identity that is present in Liverpool, there has been a sense of political consensus amongst the majority of its citizens that has existed for a number of decades. Boland (2010: 18) suggests that local identities within Liverpool are highly politicised and part of this is because of a sense of difference from the rest of the country. Dissent with the wider British Government is something that has been prominent in the city for quite some time, showing that disconnect. Resentment towards Margaret Thatcher's government in particular has remained a prevalent part of Scouse identity to this day (Jeffrey, 2017). This is in no small part because of the belief that she played a significant role in the cover-up surrounding the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, which has even been discussed by Labour politicians (BBC News, 2012).

A long history of frustration with the Conservative Party and its governments has been a factor in Liverpool's citizens consistently voting for the Labour Party. Parliamentary reports into the 2019 General Election (Parliament, House of Lords, 2020) found that all seats in the Liverpool city area –

as well as the immediately adjacent Knowsley – were some of the Labour Party's safest seats, all having majorities of at least 62.8%. Compare this to the party's overall vote share across the country of 32.1%, and it is clear that there is a schism between the Liverpool area and the rest of the country that perhaps contributes towards that feeling of difference within Scousers.

On numerous occasions, this disconnect with the political outlooks of England as a whole has spread further, into a recurring discussion about possible independence for the city. Following on from the 2019 General Election, there were renewed calls for the city to become its own independent city-state (Parker, 2019). Citizens are expressing this in a number of ways, including a petition which is at almost 15000 signatures at the time this study was conducted (Roberts, 2019). This is not the first time that there has been an expression for Liverpool to become independent, as Shaw *et al* (2010) found 42% of the Liverpool citizens they spoke to supported independence, with this number rocketing to 72% – a clear majority – when only considering the answers of those who supported Liverpool Football Club. Therefore, a link between a strong identity as Scouse and a desire for independence has been shown a number of times in the past 20 years alone.

2.3 Features of Scouse English

Scouse English is an accent that is easy to pinpoint due to a number of identifiable features, ultimately allowing it to stand out amongst British English accents. Given the number of linguistic variables associated with Scouse English, it was necessary to focus in on a few of them. Particular attention was paid to phonology and lexis.

2.3.1 Phonology

Perhaps the most widely acknowledged feature of Scouse English is the use of [x] in words like *back*, when other varieties would use /k/ (Honeybone and Watson, 2006: 11-12). This is a feature that is highly uncommon in English accents, and is due to lenition occurring within the speakers of Scouse English (Paton, 2013: 183). Lenition also differs for /k/ if the preceding vowel is front and high or a raising diphthong. In these cases, it will be pronounced with [ç] rather than [x], like in the stereotypical Scouse pronunciation of *chicken* (Watson, 2007: 353). Hughes and Trudgill (1996: 93) discuss this lenition in great detail, and describe it as the process of plosives softening/weakening to become affricates/fricatives. In addition to /k/, /p/ and /t/ are often said to be lenited within the Scouse accent, which results in them being realised as [φ] and [s].

Another signature phonological feature of Scouse English is the NURSE-SQUARE merger, a process which has led to a lack of contrast in the vowels for *nurse* and *square*, with both being represented by [ɜː] (Honeybone, 2007: 126). This same vowel merger was discussed by Wells (1982: 372), who said that [ɛː] can also be found as a more conservative variant of this merger, which implies that there is a degree of variation within Scouse English itself. Even then, the NURSE and SQUARE vowels still rhyme, just not in the same way. Broader Scouse accents – particularly in the case of older speakers – may also substitute [u] for [ʊ] in words featuring <oo> followed by <k>, such as *look* or *book* (Honeybone and Watson, 2006: 6). This would mean these words rhyme with *spook* instead of *luck*.

Scouse English also features a different pronunciation of the <ng> consonant cluster than RP. The endings of words such as *sing* and *thing*, as well as medially in *singer*, will have [ŋg] in this variety (Watson, 2002: 196), as opposed to [ŋ] in RP and many other varieties of British English. This feature is referred to within the literature as the 'velar nasal plus' (Baranowski and Turton, 2015: 295). Wells (2003) discusses how the presence of a 'velar nasal plus' makes *singer* and *finger* rhyme fully, whereas this is not the case in the areas that would pronounce that consonant cluster as [ŋ]. This feature is not strictly locked to Liverpool however, as it has been reported to occur in Manchester and Birmingham too (Juskan, 2015: 2).

As it is a northern accent, Scouse English is expected to lack a FOOT-STRUT split (Mearns, 2015: 167). Specifically, this means the accent lacks the /ʌ/ vowel in the STRUT lexical set and will express it as /ʊ/, the same vowel as the one for the FOOT lexical set (Honeybone and Watson, 2013: 309). A similar case is seen with the absence of the BATH-TRAP split in Scouse English, with both vowel sets being pronounced with [æ], meaning the TRAP set is not pronounced with [ɑː] (Cooper and Lampropoulou, 2021: 110). This is also to be expected from northern accent. From this it can be concluded that although the accent may sound different 'to other English people and especially those of the North West region in which Liverpool sits' (Boland, 2010: 6), it does in fact retain at least commonalities with the accents from nearby cities.

A phenomenon that has been frequently discussed over the past three decades is that of dialect levelling. Williams and Kerswill (1999: 150) describe this as 'a process whereby differences between regional varieties are reduced'. They found that this is occurring in both the north and south of England, though Hull – the northern city they looked at – did retain some of its native features, though this is possibly because it is still undergoing levelling. Reasons for levelling are

various, including improved geographical mobility, with people from cities moving to rural areas and vice versa (Giddens, 1997: 477). Although Britain (2002: 63) had observed that dialect levelling was occurring widely around the UK, Watson (2006: 61) asserted that this is process is actually not having much of an effect on Scouse English. The potential effects of country-wide dialect levelling will be considered in relation to Scouse English later on.

2.3.2 Lexis

Fischer (2003: 10) argued that 'lexis is an unreliable indicator of the precise nature of a contact situation, and the socio-historical evidence necessary to reconstruct the latter is often not available'. While this may be true regarding Old and Middle English because of the inability to preserve records of accents and dialects, this historical evidence is more easily accessible when studying the past couple of centuries. Due to the large Irish population within Liverpool both prior to and following on from the Great Potato Famine, Irish lexis has historically had a noticeable impact on the Scouse dialect. Amongst the examples provided by Cesiri (2008: 345-347) are *gawping* 'looking surprised', *sag* 'play truant' and *bog* 'toilet'. Grant (2007: 150) discusses the impact Scouse has had on the wider British English lexicon, primarily when it comes to abbreviations. Some examples include *bevvy* 'an alcoholic drink', *ciggie* 'a cigarette' and *lecky* 'electricity'. Derivatives from these words can also be established through affixation, as seen with *bevvied* 'extremely drunk'. After being introduced through Scouse, these words eventually became more widely used.

Another form of lexical variation across England comes to how people refer to what Liverpudlians would generally call a *barm* or a *barm cake* (Crowley, 2018: 27), otherwise known as a *bread roll* or by various other names. This is a form that has been linked to Manchester English as well (Beal, 2006: 54), suggesting it may be a lexical choice that is found in the North West more generally.

2.4 Social Judgements of Scouse

Given Liverpool's history and the strong sense of identity expressed by the Scouse accent, it leads to some interesting implications when looking at how outsiders view those who speak this variety of English. Coupland and Bishop (2007: 79-80) found that – alongside a number of other urban accents – Scouse scored very poorly for both social attractiveness and prestige, which of course indicates that it is not viewed favourably. It is apparent that this has attitude towards Scouse has persisted for quite some time, as it also suffered from poor scores in Giles' study (1970) which was rather similar to the one carried out by Coupland and Bishop. There also appears to be a particular

aversion to broader accents, with those that maintain some regional features but stick closer to the likes of RP being evaluated more positively (Donnelly *et al*, 2019: 501). Belchem (2000: 33) provides a possible explanation for why Scouse is consistently evaluated so poorly, suggesting that it is because of the accent's many unique features. He says these are such distinct markers of Liverpool's history as a working-class area that people could be considering this when making judgements about speakers of the Scouse accent. Another explanation is put forward by Boland (2010: 7), who believes that negative stereotyping of Scousers within the media has contributed towards the consistent negative perceptions of the Scouse accent.

That being said, not all of the evaluations of Scouse are unanimously negative. An article by Ward (2000) highlights a number if positives about the accent. Some of the positive attributes ascribed to the accent were 'straight, understanding and friendly'. In terms of the status and solidarity distinction commonly used within perceptual dialectology research (Stewart *et al*, 1985), these attributes would certainly fall into the solidarity category, suggesting that even if the sense of solidarity from the Scouse accent is high, it may seemingly lack in status.

2.5 Accents and Sociolinguistic Variables

Accents are not just conditioned by where a person comes from, but also an intersection of various social factors. This study specifically looked at two such factors, a speaker's age and also their identity score.

2.5.1 Age

Due to the aforementioned process of dialect levelling largely occurring in younger speakers, it is important to consider whether or not there is a difference in the use of both accent and dialect features based on age. The underlying assumption of the apparent-time construct is that linguistic differences amongst speakers from different generations are reflective of diachronic change (Bailey *et al*, 1991: 242). By using the apparent-time construct in linguistic studies, it is possible to gain at least some insight into possible changes between the generations, for example if certain vowel mergers or lexical items are falling in or out of use. It should be specified that the word age in this context refers to a person's chronological age, which is simply the time that has passed since that person's date of birth (Hejná and Jespersen, 2021: 2).

Finding specific examples of the role age has on Scouse accent features was quite difficult, as this has not been explored too thoroughly in the literature. In terms of the BOOK-SPOOK merger, Watson (2007: 358) suggests that younger speakers use this feature less often than their older peers. However, the opposite has been reported in a number of cases. For the NURSE-SQUARE merger, as Juskan (2017: 159) found that the vowels are more distinct in younger speakers. Melville *et al* (2007: 4) also put forward the argument that the Scouse accent was becoming stronger in younger people.

2.5.2 Identity

Considering it is being investigated in this study, it is important to consider just how a person's accent and dialect features can be influenced by their identity and opinions of an area. Mugglestone (2007: 63) talks of how linguistic forms can become tangled up in identity politics, suggesting a connection between the two. Looking at Middlesbrough English, Llamas (2007: 601) found that those with a positive perception of Newcastle were more likely to adopt features from Tyneside English than those with more negative opinions.

There are also some studies that have specifically looked into how the perceptions people have of Liverpool and Scousers generally can affect their linguistic choices. According to Clark and Watson (2016: 58) found that speakers from Skelmersdale that had positive opinions of Liverpool were more likely to use /t/ lenition than those with negative opinions of the city. Belchem (2000: 33) specifically mentions that Scouse identity 'is constructed […] by how they speak rather than what they say'. This of course implies that the presents of accent features are an important aspect of maintaining a Scouse identity. Interestingly, this seems to be something people are quite aware of, as they use the term 'plastic Scouser' to refer to people – usually from the Wirral – who want to sound Scouse, but are not from Liverpool (Grant, 2007: 156). Juskan (2018: 172-173) also noted that the participants themselves described their accent as playing a major role in their identity as Scousers.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

There are three research questions that this study aims to look at. The first research question is 'do local Liverpool linguistic features occur more in speakers with high Scouse identity scores?'. In a similar vein, the second research question is 'are broader (but still northern) features affected by a

speaker's Scouse identity scores'. Finally, the third research question is 'does a speaker's age affect how likely they are to use a local Liverpool feature?'.

Having drawn on the readings into Scouse English and identity, a number of hypotheses can be formulated. Firstly, it was hypothesised that linguistic features associated with Liverpool and the surrounding areas (the NURSE-SQUARE merger, <ng> consonant cluster, etc.) will be more common in speakers who have a higher identity score. It was also hypothesised that features more generally associated with the north and regions beyond just Merseyside (FOOT-STRUT split, BATH-TRAP split, etc.) will be unaffected by a person's identity score. Although there is conflicting information in the literature, for an age-related hypothesis it was hypothesised that younger speakers will be more likely to use the non-standard features than the older participants due to this seemingly being the reported trend in Liverpool-specific literature.

4. Methodology

Drawing on Llamas' (2000) work which looked at Middlesbrough English, this study has two primary components; a section that asked about the participants' accent features and one that asked about their Scouse identity. In addition to this, participants were also asked to provide their demographic information (age group, gender identity, etc.). All questions were included in a single Google Forms questionnaire. A link to the questionnaire and all questions participants were asked is provided in Appendix A. The linguistic section included questions about potential rhyming pairs. Specifically, *spur* and *spare* were used to test the NURSE-SQUARE merger, *singer* and *finger* were used to see if the <ng> consonant cluster is represented as [ŋg], *hassle* and *castle* were used to ask about the TRAP-BATH split, *foot* and *strut* were used for the FOOT-STRUT merger, and finally it was asked whether *suck* or *spook* rhymed with *book*, or if it was sometimes *suck* but sometimes *spook*. After this there were questions in which a speaker had to say a word out loud and answer with how they pronounced it. Participants were asked whether or not they pronounced a [t] at the end of *what* and whether they pronounced the word *chicken* with [k] or [x] (referred to as soft and hard k in the questionnaire). Lexical questions then followed, with participants being shown images and asked to say what term they would use to describe each of the pictures. These images can be seen in Appendix B.

For the identity section, the aim was to assess how strongly each participant felt they were linked to Liverpool. This was measured with questions regarding the football teams they supported (such as Liverpool or Everton), whether they were proud to call Liverpool their home and if they would

hypothetically support the city becoming an independent city-state. Political affiliation was also questioned, but participants were encouraged to skip this question if they did not want to divulge that information. From their answers, participants were then given an identity score that was used alongside the answers they gave for the linguistic section. Though not central to the hypotheses, participants were also asked whether or not they had ever been mocked for their accent, tying in with the literature on social judgements of the accent and any potential accent discrimination they had faced.

In order to prevent any sort of influence on participants, the identity questions were asked after the linguistic ones, as the other way around could have led to convergence or divergence from the Scouse linguistic variables. The identity score was calculated based on the responses to the identity-related questions, and the scoring was as follows:

- Do you support either of the following football teams: +1 for Liverpool or Everton, 0 for I don't really follow sports, -1 for I follow sports but don't support either of these teams.
- How proud of you that you're from Liverpool: +2 for 9-10, +1 for 7-8, 0 for 5-6, -1 for 3-4, -2 for 1-2. Brackets of 2 for each score would help limit the weighting of extreme responses.
- Do you support the idea of Liverpool becoming independent: +2 for Strongly Support, +1 for Slightly Support, 0 for Unsure, -1 for Slightly Against and -2 for Strongly Against.
- Which party would you vote for if a General Election was held today: +1 for Labour, -1 for Conservatives, 0 for everyone else.

Once the participants had been given an identity score, this was then used to analyse their responses to the linguistic questions and see if any patterns could be found. Due to the discussion of dialect levelling in the literature, the participants' ages were also considered within the context of the apparent-time construct.

The study was briefly trialled as a pilot study and sent out to a handful of participants to ensure that the questions were clear and easily understood. Following on from some feedback, all of the questions except one – the one about how participants referred to their electricity bill – remained the same, with the necessary alteration being a switch from a 'fill in the blank' question to one with pre-set options to choose from.

4.1 Participants

There were 129 participants overall, although 13 of these had to be removed due to not being from Liverpool or Merseyside more broadly. They were only removed if this was the case and they achieved very low identity scores, as their results were then irrelevant to this particular study. Of the remaining 116 participants, 42 identified as male, 73 as female and 1 as a trans male. 68 participants were aged 18-30, 16 were 31-40, 10 were 41-50, 9 were 51-60 and 13 were 61+.

5. Results

To present the results in a more orderly fashion, each variable will be split into its sub-section in which the results for both identity and age will be provided.

5.1 Identity Scores

First, it is important to discuss the breakdown of identity scores. No participants received the lowest scores of -5 or -6, so these will be omitted from the graphs. Both -4 and -3 were only achieved by 1 person each. 3 people scored -2, 7 scored -1 and 8 got 0. An identity score of 1 was given to 14 people, and both 2 and 3 were assigned to 15 people. By quite a wide margin, 4 was the most common score with 24 people receiving it. 14 people got a score of 5 and 13 got a score of 6. Through this, it can be seen that the positive numbers were much more frequent than the negative ones.

Something worth discussing is how both age and postcode affected the distribution of identity scores. Regarding age group, there was a degree of variation, though the average of each age group remained positive. The 61+ group showed the lowest average identity score at 0.54, and a noticeable increase to the next lowest average score, which was 2.18 amongst the 31-40 group. The 41-50 group had an average of 2.8, and the 18-30 group's average identity score was 3.07. Another steep increase comes with the highest average amongst the age groups, which was 4.22 amongst the 41-50 group. In terms of postcode, much like with the age groups, all of the postcodes showed positive average scores. The highest score came from those whose postcode started with L1-10, with an average score of 4. This score was followed by the L21-30 group with 3.63, and the L31-40 group with an average of 3.21. The lowest score came from the speakers whose postcodes started with PR, with an average of 0.2, and those with WA postcodes had the next lowest average of 1.5. Interestingly, the 'other' group scored 2.33, which was higher than the L11-20 average of 2. Those with a CH postcode also had a higher score than this at 2.45.

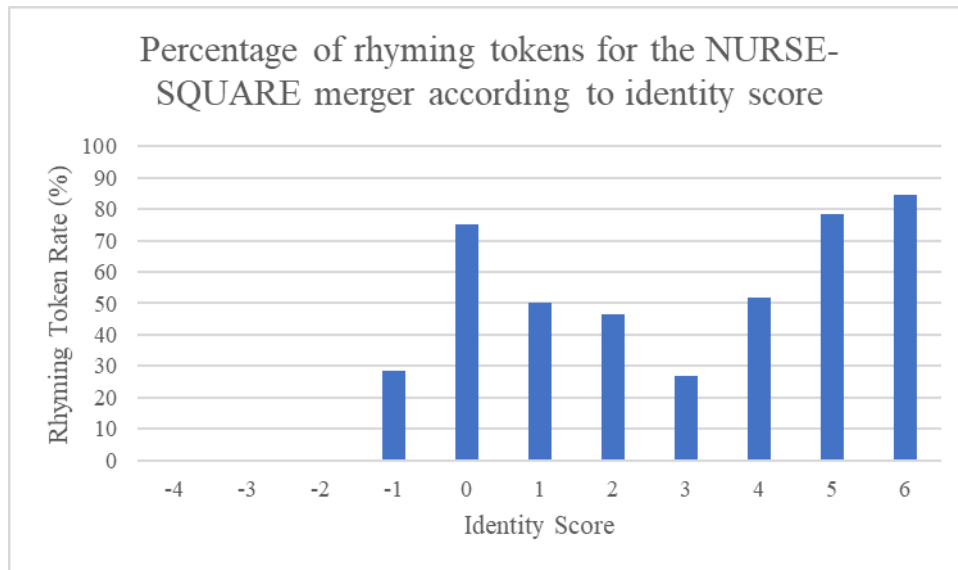## 5.2 NURSE-SQUARE Merger

Figure 1: The frequency of rhyming NURSE-SQUARE tokens grouped by identity score.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the speakers with the lowest identity scores reported no merging of the NURSE and SQUARE vowels at all. On the other hand, speakers that scored between 5 and 6 reported the highest rates of rhyming between the two vowels, with 78.57% and 84.62% respectively. On the extreme ends, a pattern can be seen. However, there is much more fluctuation with the scores in the middle or the range, particularly with 0 having a very high rate of merging at 75% and 3 having a particularly low one at 26.67%.
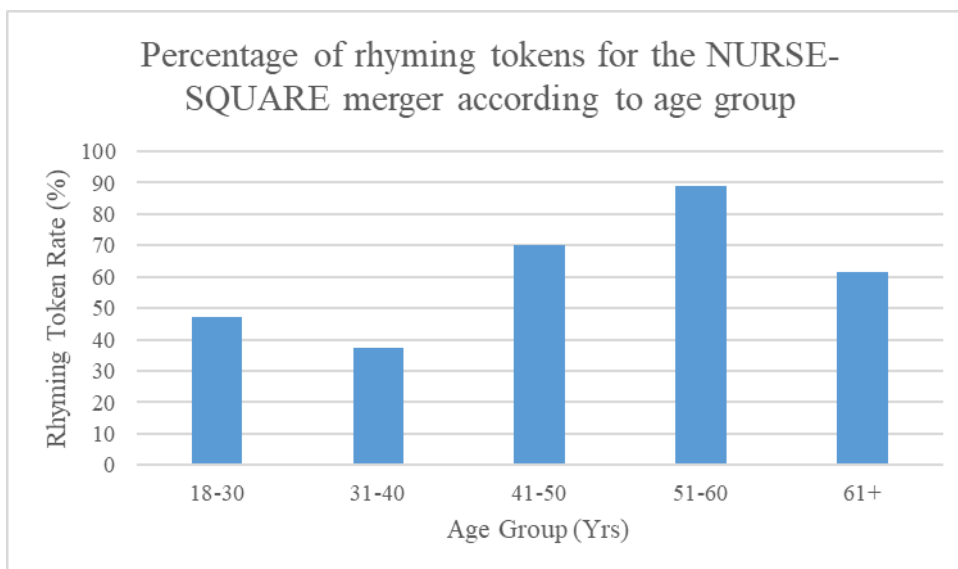
Figure 2: The frequency of rhyming NURSE-SQUARE tokens grouped by age group.

Regarding age, the findings are rather interesting. Though the 18-30 group has the second-smallest rate at 47.06%, this takes a noticeable dip in the next age group to 37.%. However, this trajectory does not continue, with it shooting up to 70% in the 41-50 age group. This again increases in the 51-60 group to 88.89% before going back down to 61.54%. Overall, the older groups do appear to use it more than the younger speakers, but there is a level of fluctuation that makes it difficult to fully determine the pattern at play.

5.3 Singer and Finger
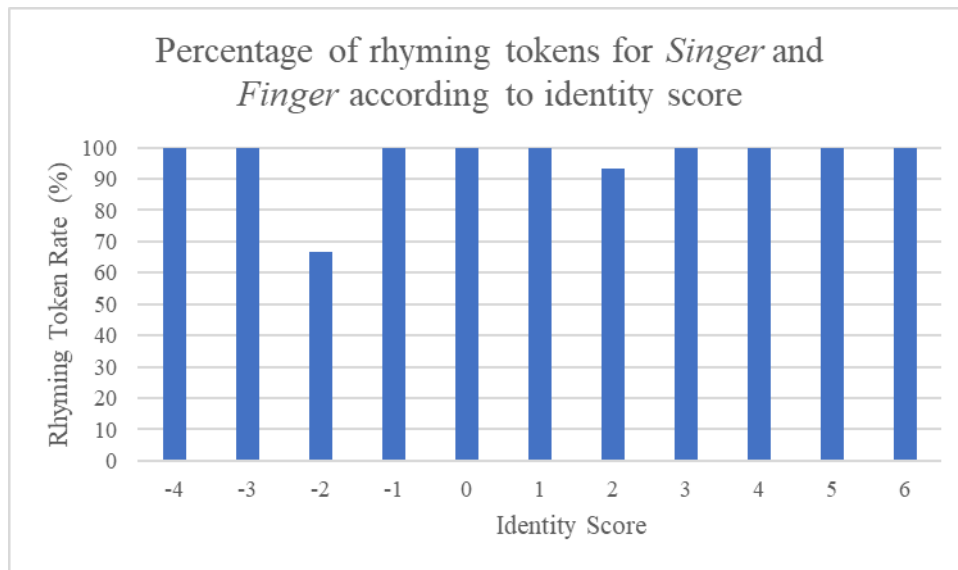
Figure 3: The frequency of rhyming *singer* and *finger* tokens grouped by identity score.

It is clear to see that the vast majority of speakers did in fact say that *singer* and *finger* rhymed, therefore showing the presence of a 'velar nasal plus'. In fact, it was only two participants that did not say this. One had a participant score of -2, and the other had a score of 2. The drastic difference in percentages is not because it was less frequent in this case, but 1 participant reflects a much bigger part of the 3 people with a score of -2 than the 24 with a score of 2.
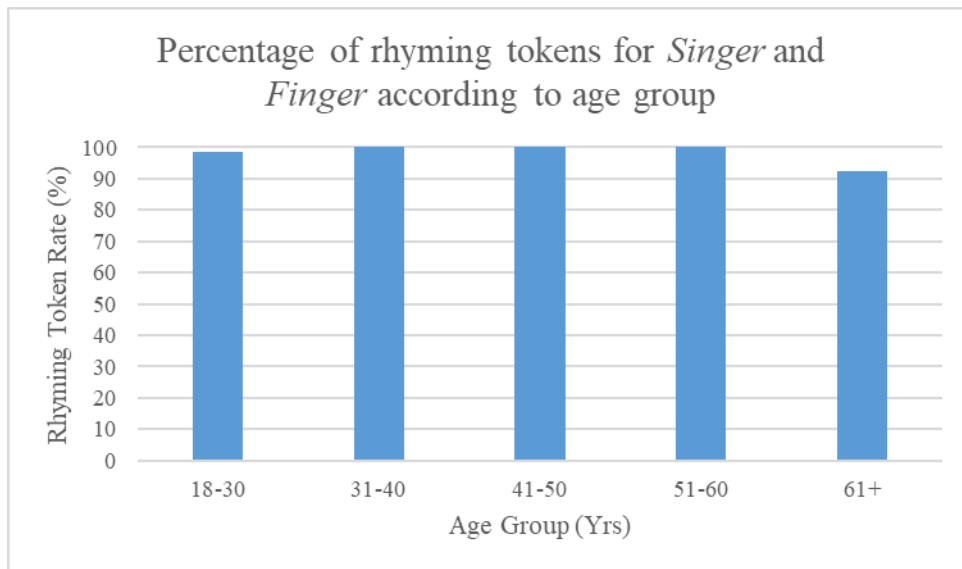
Figure 4: The frequency of rhyming *singer* and *finger* tokens grouped by age group.

Much like Figure 3, the pattern seen in Figure 4 is clear, and it is that there is an extraordinarily high rate of speakers in and around the Liverpool area who will pronounce the <ng> consonant cluster as [ŋg] in all circumstances. The two groups which had a single participant each that did not do this were the 18-30 and 61+ groups, though again the percentage difference this makes differs between them due to the differing sample size between the age groups.

5.4 BATH-TRAP Split
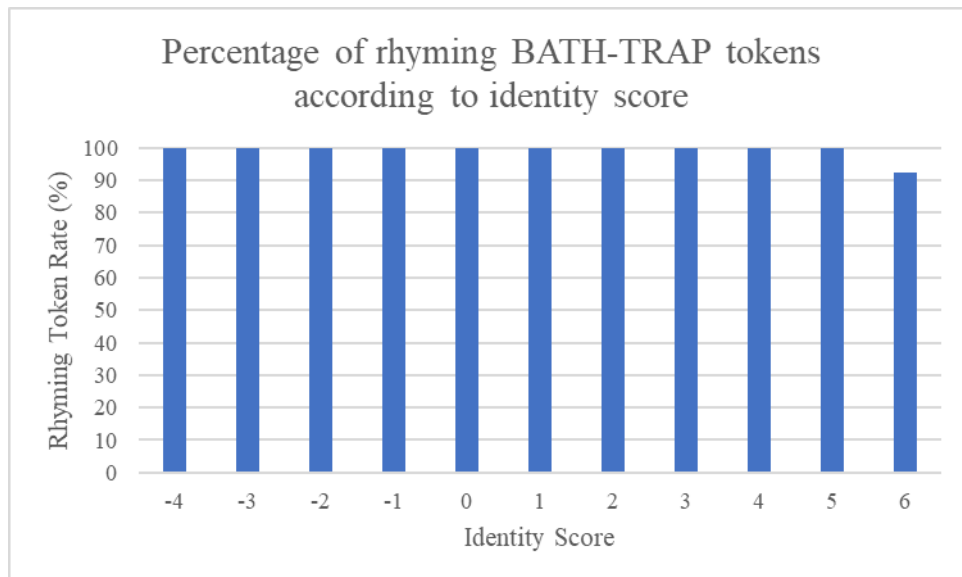
Figure 5: The frequency of rhyming BATH-TRAP tokens grouped by identity score.

Much like what was seen with the previous variable, there was an overwhelming majority of speakers that said *hassle* and *castle* rhyme, in turn showing that they rhyme their BATH and TRAP

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vowels. A 100% rhyming rate was found in all but one of the groups. Only a single participant with an identity score of 6 said the two words did not rhyme, leaving that group's score at 92.31%. Given the clear pattern amongst the other groups, it is possible to dismiss this as an anomaly.
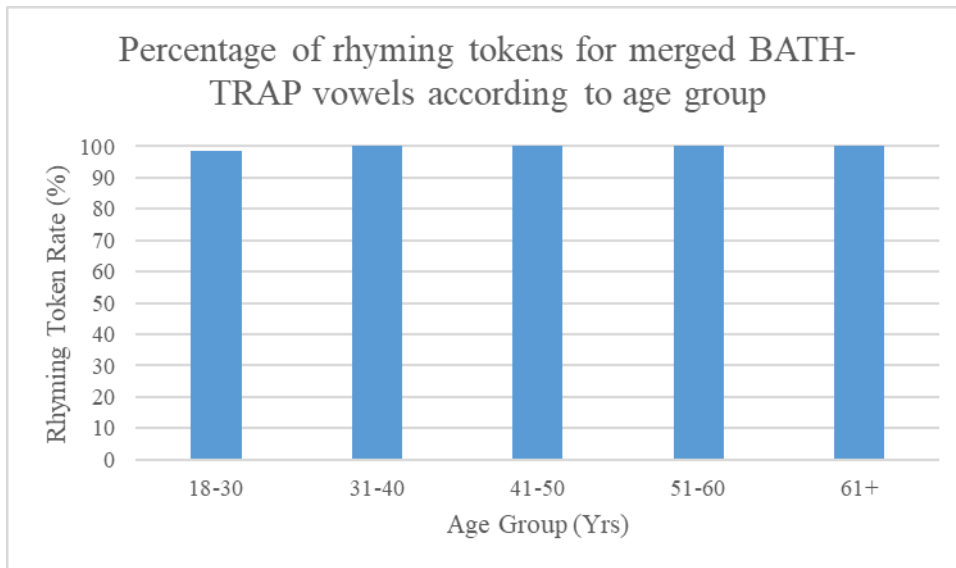
Figure 6: The frequency of rhyming BATH-TRAP tokens grouped by age group.

It is apparent from Figure 6 that there is a unanimous consensus in speakers aged 31 and up that the BATH-TRAP vowels do rhyme to them. In addition to this graph also showing the very high rate of rhyming these vowels, it shows that the person who did not rhyme the two was aged 18-30. Due to the larger sample from this group, it lowers the rhyming rate for the 18-30 group to 98.53%. Again though, the solitary nature of this specific result could be considered anomalous.
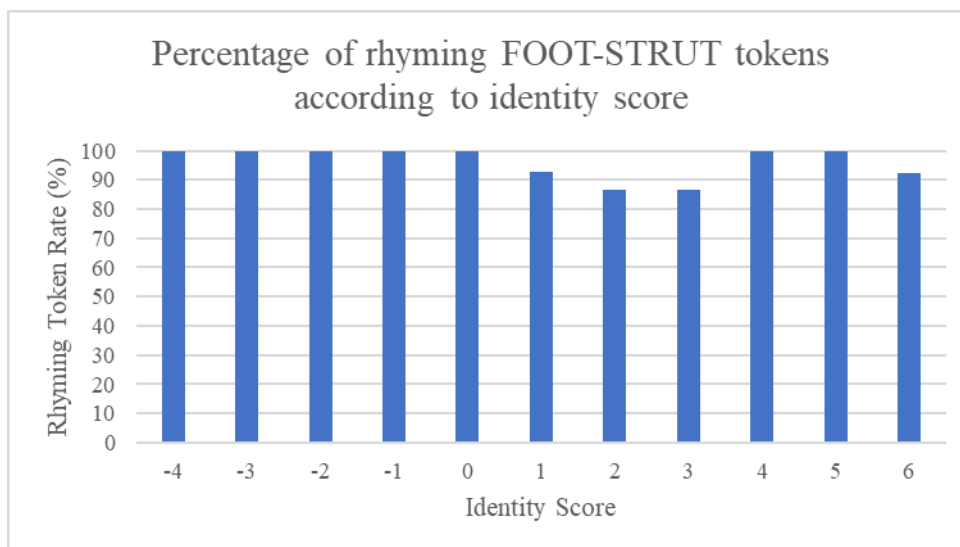
5.5 FOOT-STRUT Split

Figure 7: The frequency of rhyming FOOT-STRUT tokens grouped by identity score.

Figure 7 does not show a strong pattern between a speaker's identity score and whether or not they rhyme FOOT-STRUT. Lower scores of rhyming are shown with scores from 1 to 3, with those scoring one rhyming 92.86% of the time and the latter two having a rate of 86.67%, All of the scores below that – as well as 4 and 5 – have a rhyming rate of 100%. A score of 6 shows a slight reduction from this again, with a single speaker not rhyming. This reduces the score of that group to 92.31%. A single speaker is also what caused the lower rate in speakers with an identity score of 1.
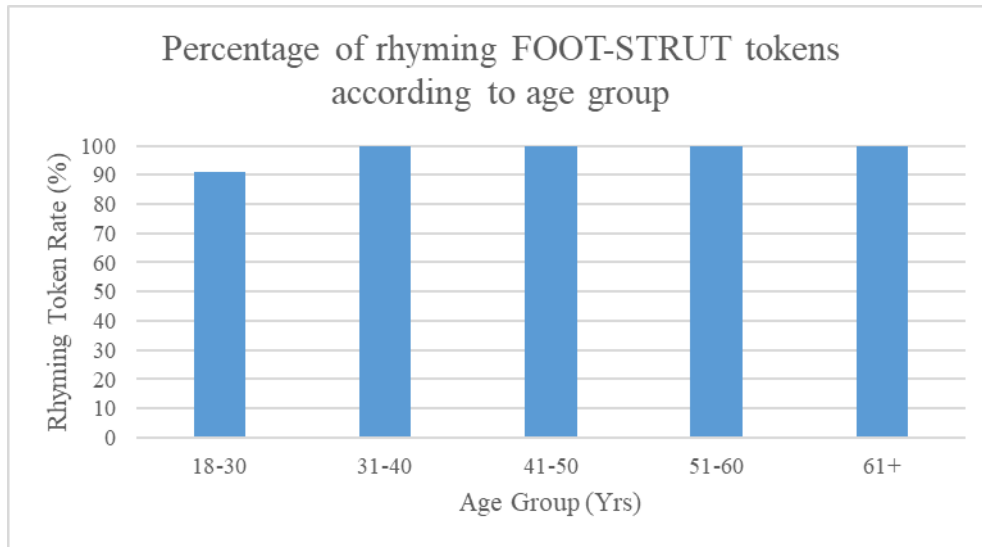

Figure 8: The frequency of rhyming FOOT-STRUT tokens grouped by age group.

An interesting pattern can be seen in Figure 8. All of the speakers aged 31 and up reported that the words *foot* and *strut* rhyme for them, suggesting the FOOT-STRUT split is not present. However, in the 18-30 group, 6 speakers said that they did not rhyme, leading to the frequency in their group falling to 91.18%.
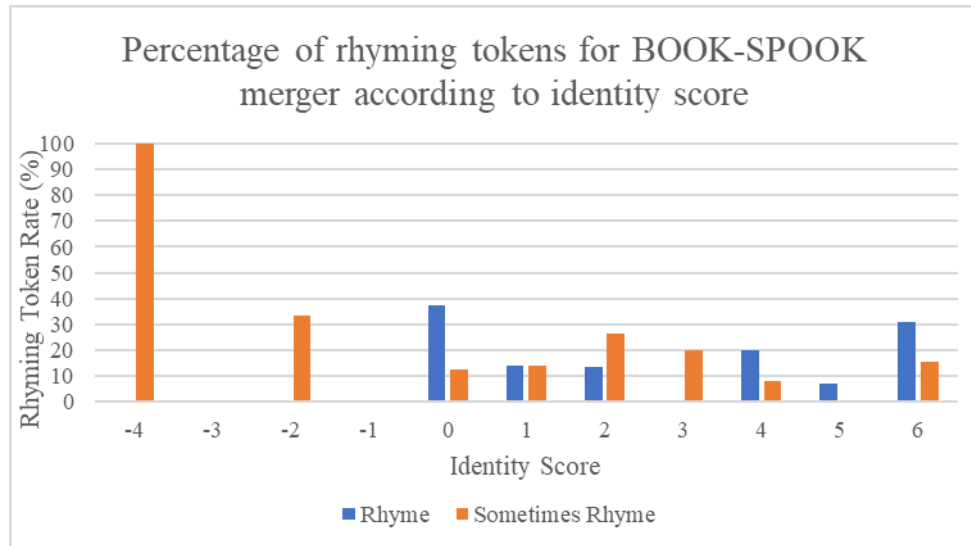
5.6 BOOK-SPOOK Merger

Figure 9: The frequency of rhyming BOOK-SPOOK tokens grouped by identity score.

Results in Figure 9 between those that rhymed *book* with *suck* all the time, and those that only rhymed the two sometimes. As can be seen in Figure 9, categorical rhyming is only observed in those with identity scores of 0 or above, though the rate fluctuates somewhat, and is not present at all in those with an identity score of 3. Those with a score of 0 categorically rhymed the two words 37.5% of the time, and those with scores of 1 and 2 had rhyming rates of 14.29% and 13.33% respectively. Speakers with scores of 4, 5 and 6 said they rhymed these words 20%, 7.14% and 30.77% of the time respectively. The highest rate therefore came from the speakers with a score of 0. In terms of those that rhymed sometimes, the highest rate is from the speaker with a score of -4, though they are an individual. -2 showed the next highest rate of sometimes rhyming at 33.33%. Those with scores of -3, -1 and 5 reported that they did not occasionally rhyme the two. Other than these, the lowest value comes from those with an identity score of 4, as they said they rhyme the two words sometimes only 8% of the time. -3 and -1 are the only groups with 0% in both categories, therefore reporting that they do not even occasionally rhyme these words.
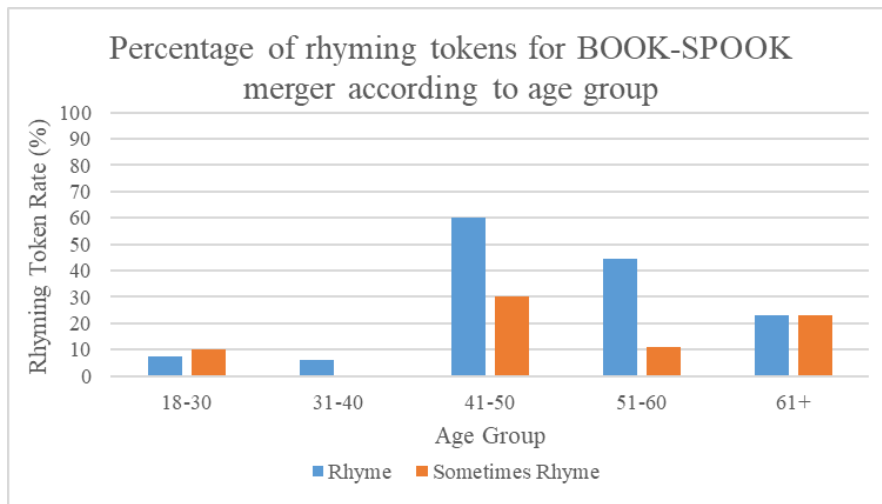
Figure 10: The frequency of rhyming BOOK-SPOOK tokens grouped by age group.

Figure 10 shows that speakers aged 41-50 are the most likely to categorically rhyme *book* with *spook*, with a rate of 60%. The next highest group is the 51-60 group, with a rhyming rate of 44.44%. The groups that showed the lowest rates of categorical rhyming were the youngest groups, with speakers aged 18-30 rhyming 7.35% of the time, and those aged 31-40 rhyming slightly less than this at 6.25%. In terms of those that only rhyme sometimes, the highest group was again the 41-50 group, with a rate of 30%, followed by the 61+ group with 23.08%, the same as their categorical rhyming rate. The lowest groups are again the two youngest ones, with the 18-30 group reporting an occasional rhyming rate of 10-29%, making them the only group with a higher rate of occasional rhyming than categorical rhyming, albeit narrowly. The 31-40 group had the lowest rate again, with the speakers reporting that they do not at all rhyme the words only sometimes.
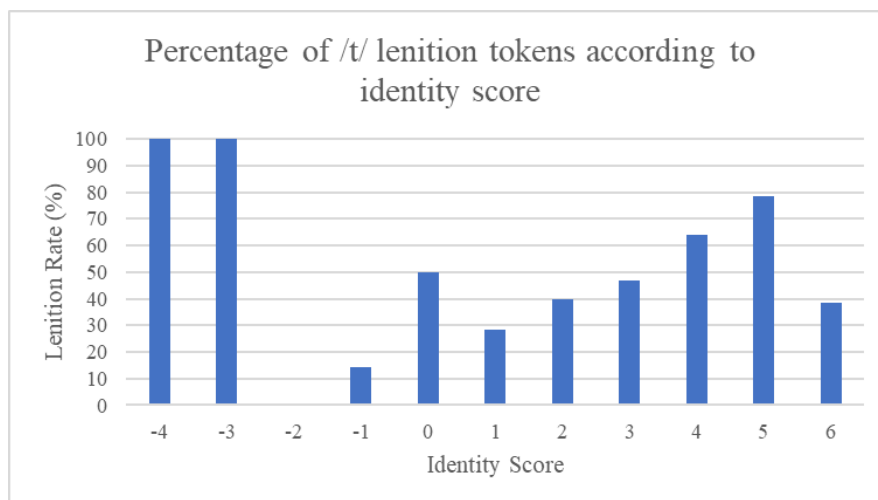
5.7 /t/ Lenition

Figure 11: The frequency of /t/ lenition grouped by identity score.

In Figure 11, speakers with the two lowest identity scores are shown to have categorical use of /t/ lenition, but this plummets all the way to 0% in -2. Moving down the line, with the exception of 0 having a higher rate of lenition at exactly 50%. Outside of this value, the lenition rate of speakers with a score of -1 is 14.29%, and this increases steadily until the group of speakers with an identity score of 5, who claim to showing lenition 78.57% of the time. However, this is effectively halved by those with a score of 6 reporting a lenition rate of 38.46%.
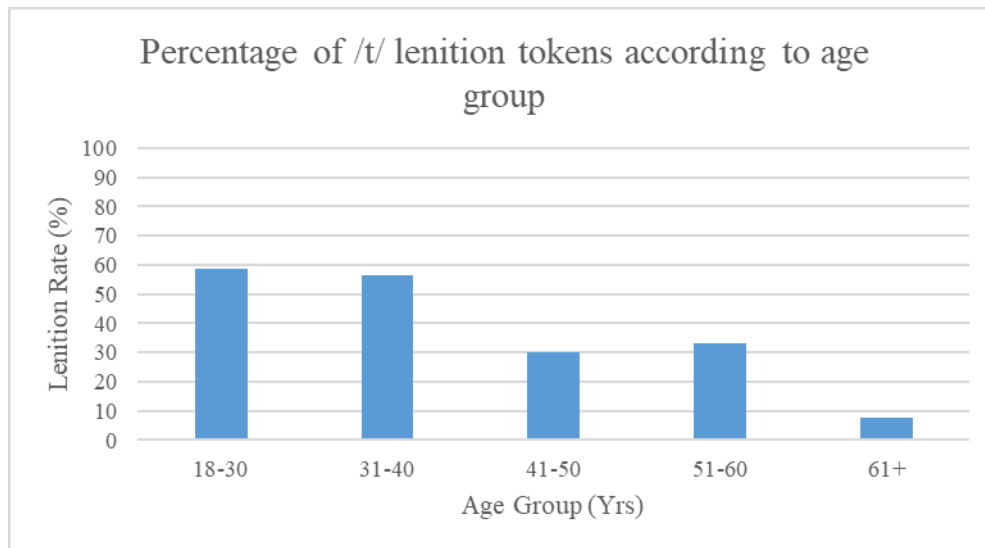

Figure 12: The frequency of /t/ lenition grouped by age group.

As can be seen in Figure 12, the oldest speakers (those aged 61+) were the least likely to report /t/ lenition, with a rate of only 7.69%. Both the 41-50 and 51-60 groups had a noticeably higher amount than this at 30 and 33.33% respectively. Finally, the speakers aged 31-40 had a lenition rate of 56.25%, with the 18-30 group reporting a marginally higher rate of 58.82%. From this, it is safe to assume that younger speakers show much more /t/ lenition than their older counterparts.
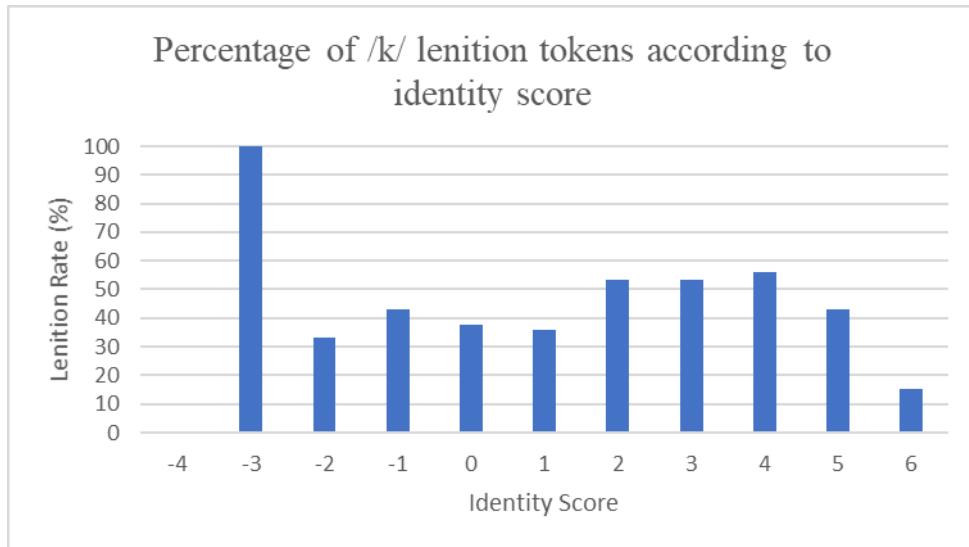
5.8 /k/ Lenition

Figure 13: The frequency of /k/ lenition grouped by identity score.

It can be observed from Figure 13 that the highest rate of lenition comes from the speaker with an identity score of -3, though this could very well be anomalous. Excluding this, the highest rate is from those who scored 4, with a lenition rate of 56%. Not far behind this are speakers with scores of 2 and 3, with both groups reporting /k/ lenition in 53.33% of cases. Other than the 0% shown by the speaker with an identity score of -4, the next lowest score is from those with a score of 6, who said that they lenited only 15.38% of the time. The fluctuation makes it difficult to identify a pattern.
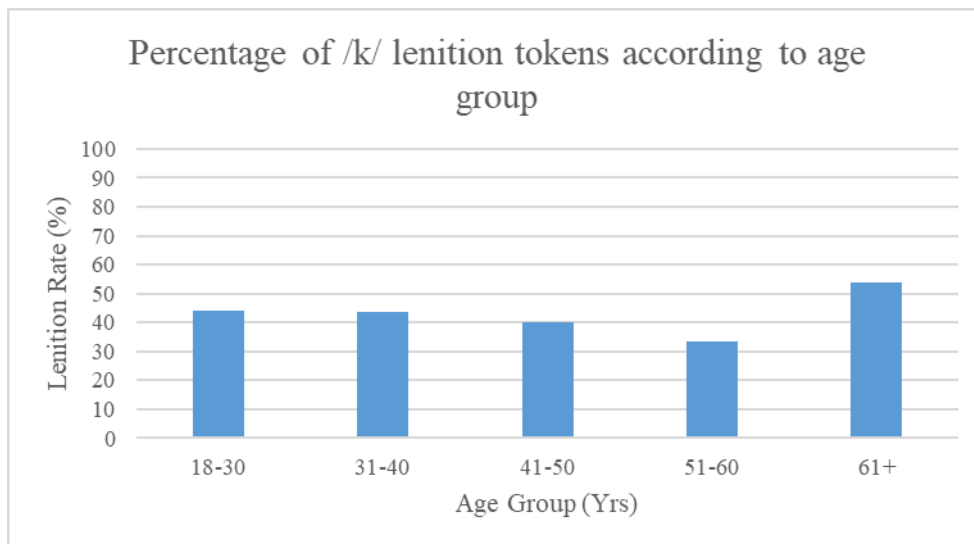

Figure 14: The frequency of /k/ lenition grouped by age group.

Looking at how the age group of speakers affects /k/ lenition, it is apparent that the 61+ group reported the highest rate of lenition, which was 53.85%. There is less variation amongst the

remaining groups, with the next highest rate coming from the 18-30 group at 44.12%, closely followed by the 31-40 group with 43.75%. The group with the lowest reported /k/ lenition rate were the speakers aged 51-60, with a rate of 33.33%. Therefore, other than the 61+ group, there was just under 11% between the highest and lowest lenition rates.
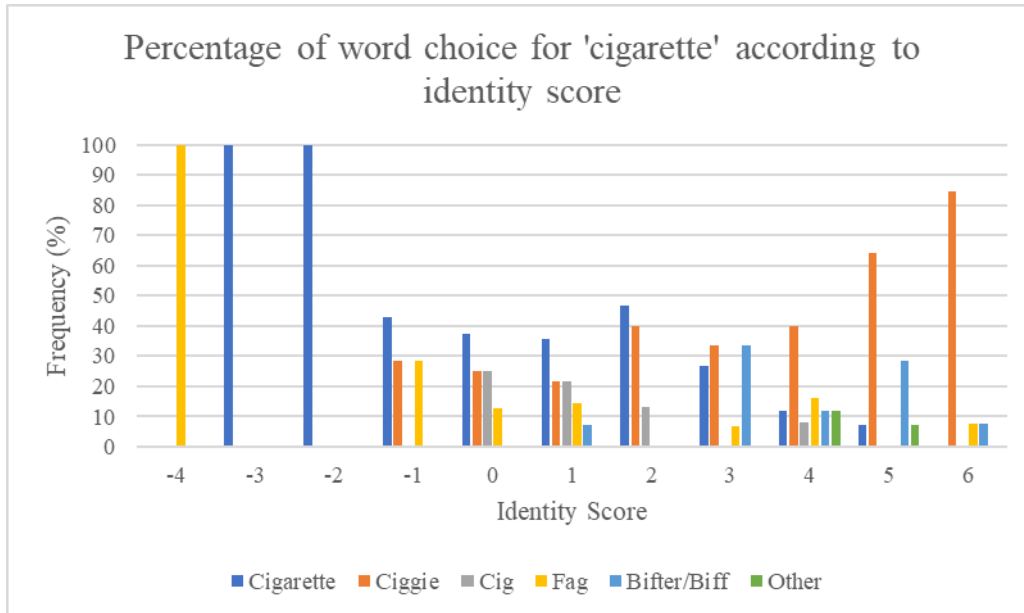
5.9 Cigarette

Figure 15: Word choice for 'cigarette' grouped by identity score.

As can be seen in Figure 15, there is a primarily upward trend seen in the use of *ciggie* as the identity score rises. Speakers with an identity score below -1 do not use the term at all, and those with a score of -1 use it 28.57% of the time. The next two groups – those with scores of 0 and 1 – show slight reductions to 25% and 21.43% respectively. There is a noticeable rise when looking at speakers who scored 2, as they use *ciggie* 40% of the time. This falls slightly to 33.33% in speakers with a score of 3 before going back up to 40% with those who scored 4. In the group with identity scores of 5 use *ciggie* rises again to 64.29%, and there is a final rise in the group with scores of 6, who use the word 84.62% of the time. Meanwhile, *cigarette* looks to be on a general downward trend as the identity score increases, from 100% amongst some of the negatively scoring groups to 0% in those with a score of 6. There appears to be more fluctuation in the other words like *fag* and *bifter*/*biff*, as these go up and down and do not seem to show any solid patterns relating to identity.
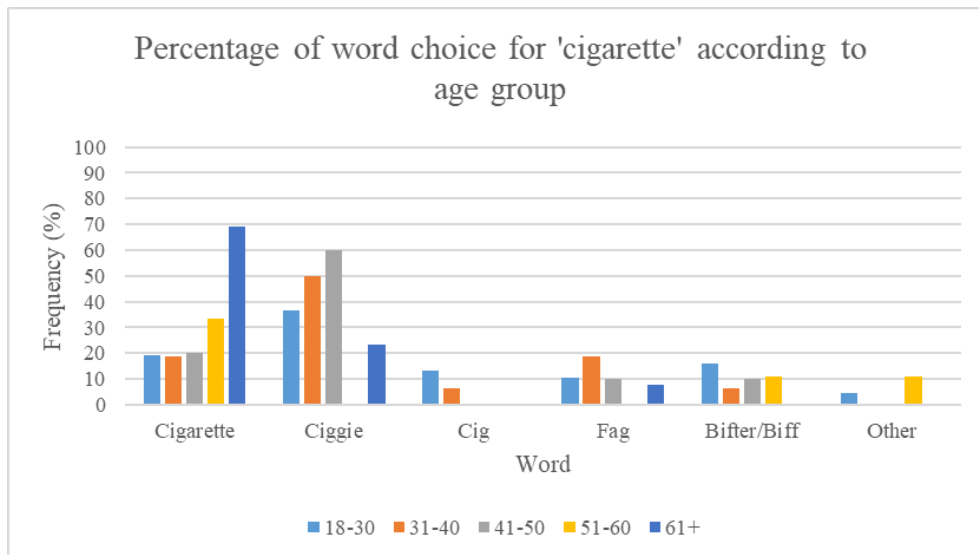
Figure 16: Word choice for 'cigarette' grouped by age group.

Figure 16 shows that *ciggie* is most favoured by speakers aged 41-50, who use it 60% of the time. The next highest groups were the younger ones, though a decline can be seen as the 31-40 and 18-30 groups said they would use it 50% and 36.76% of the time respectively. The lowest score was from the 51-60 group, who reported no use of the word *ciggie* at all, with the 61+ group reporting a frequency of 23.08%. It can also be seen that the word *cigarette* is widely favoured by speakers in the 61+ category, who used it 69.23% of the time. This falls to 33.33% in those aged 51-60, and then the youngest three groups report rather similar rates with only 1.25% separating the higher and lower of these rates; 20% for the 41-50 group, 19.12% for the 18-30 group and finally 18.75% for the 31-40 group.
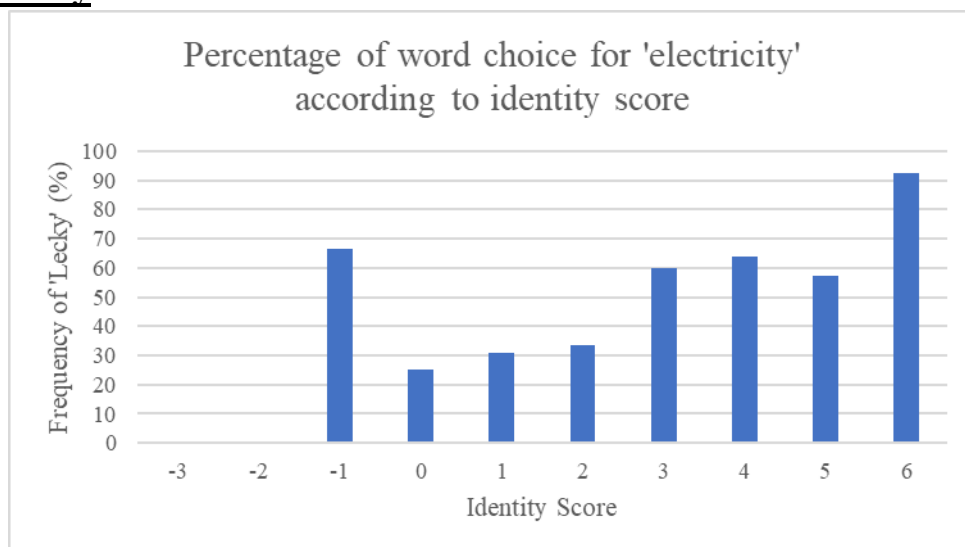
5.10 Electricity

Figure 17: Word choice for 'electricity' grouped by identity score.

By looking at Figure 17, a general upward trend can be seen in the number of people who use *lecky* to refer to their electricity bills. As this question was reworked into a multiple-choice question due to confusion, a couple of tokens were excluded in the results, hence the speaker with an identity score -4 being absent, amongst others. Those with scores of -3 and -2 did not use *lecky* at all, with those who scored -1 showing the second highest rate of usage at 66.67%. This specific finding is not in line with the rest of the pattern, but is important nonetheless. The lowest frequency of *lecky* usage after the categorical non-use came from those with identity scores of 0, with a frequency of 25%. This slowly rises with those who scored 1 and 2, with a move to 30.77% and 33.33% respectively. A larger increase is seen in those who had an identity score of 3, with 60% of these speakers reporting use of *lecky*. Those who scored 4 and 5 showed frequencies of 64% and then 57.14%, so a slight increase and decrease. Finally, those with the highest identity score of 6 claimed to use *lecky* 92.31% of the time, representing a significant jump from the previous rates.
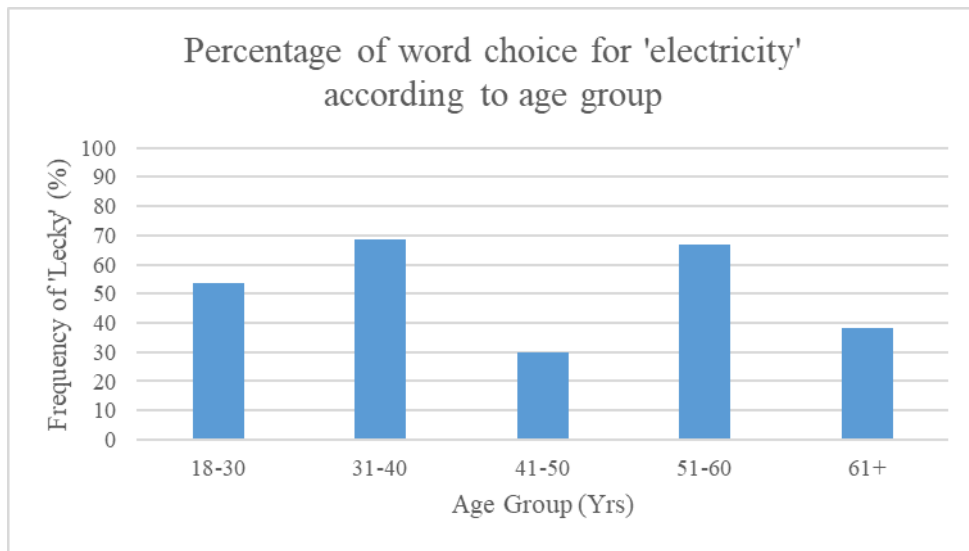
Figure 18: Word choice for 'electricity' grouped by age group.

From Figure 18, it is apparent that how participants would refer to their electricity bill appears to fluctuate with age in somewhat of a zigzag pattern. The 18-30 group use *lecky* 53.85% of the time, and the 31-40 group have a higher rate of use at 68.75%, the highest of any age group. The rate the falls dramatically for the 41-50 group, who report 30% usage, which was the lowest of any group. It then rises back to 66.67% in speakers aged 51-60 before falling to 38.46% in the 61+group.
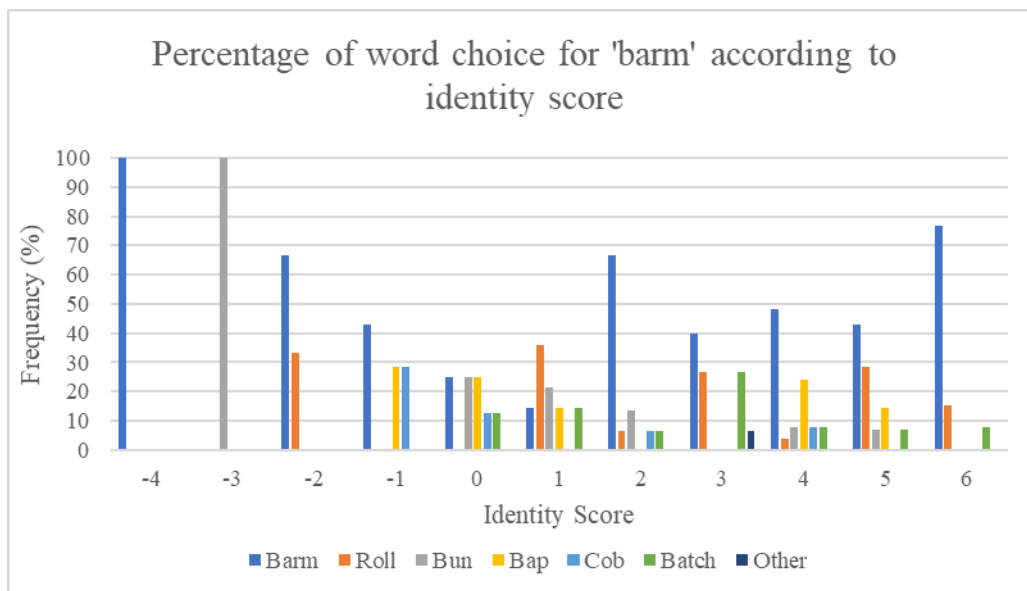
5.11 Bread Roll

Figure 19: Word choice for 'barm' grouped by identity score.

Figure 19 shows that *barm* is generally the preferred term, with a consistent presence amongst all identity scores except -3, which prefers *bun*. Other than that, *barm* may be present in all of the other

identity score groups, but its presence fluctuates a lot. Though it is used by the speaker with a score of -4 and therefore takes 100%, the other highest results come from those with scores of 6, 2 and -2, with the former having a frequency of 76.92% and the latter two both having frequencies of 66.67%. Outside of the 0% result, the lowest rate for *barm* was from those with an identity score of 1, with only 14.29% of those speakers reporting that they used the word. The next lowest was from those who had identity scores of 0, with a rate of 25%. The only time the word *barm* was not the least frequent word in the groups where it made an appearance was with those who scored 1, where it was beaten by *roll*.
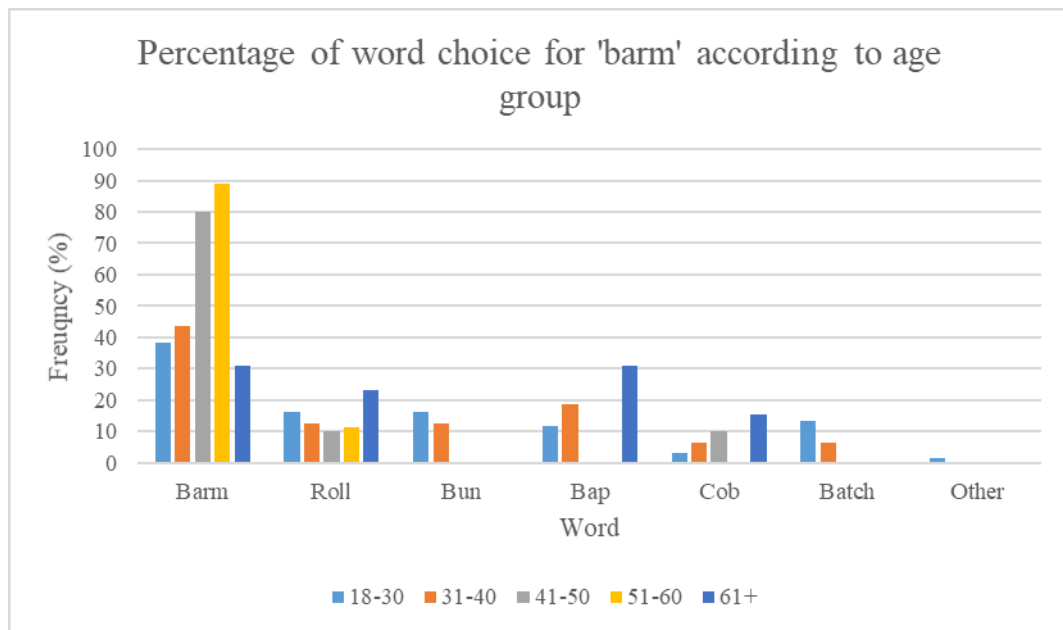

Figure 20: Word choice for 'barm' grouped by age group.

It is made apparent by Figure 20 that *barm* is the most preferred term amongst all age groups except the 61+ group, where it is tied with *bap* at 30.77%. This is also the lowest frequency of *barm* from any age group, with the 18-30 group showing the second lowest frequency at 38.24%. That group shows the greatest diversity in lexical choice out of all age groups, with at least one instance of each word including the other category. The groups that had the highest rate of using *barm* were the 51-60 group at 88.89% and the 41-50 group at 80%. *Roll* is the only other word in which participants from each age group show at least one instance, and it has a frequency of at least 10% in all instances. Other than this, the highest frequency for a word that is not *barm* comes from the aforementioned 30.77% for *bap* in the 61+ group.
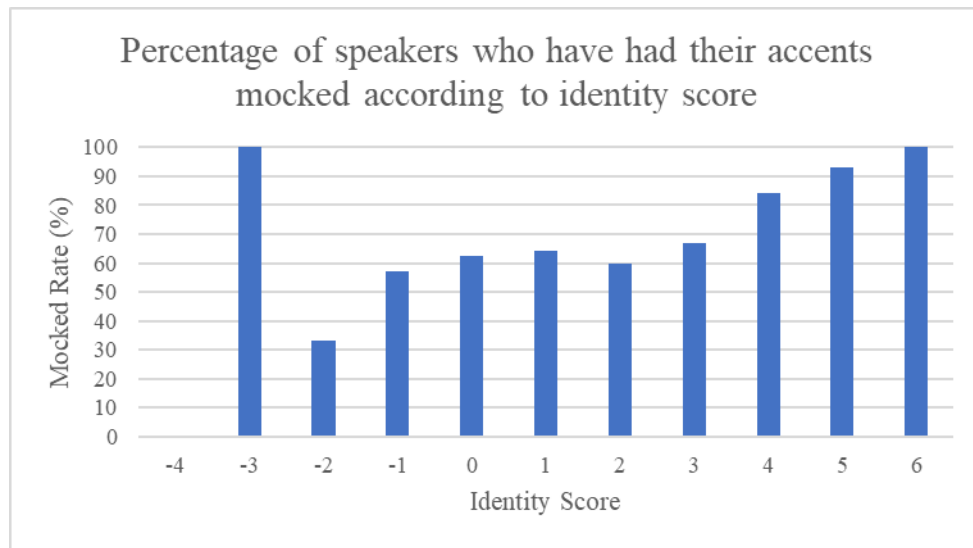
25

5.12 Accent Discrimination

Figure 21: Proportion of speakers who have faced accent discrimination grouped by identity score.

Just by looking at Figure 21, a clear correlation between identity score and the rate of accent discrimination is apparent; the higher a person's identity score, the more likely they are to be mocked for their accent. Excluding the 100% rate of the speaker with an identity score of -3, the highest rate of discrimination was still 100%, but with those who scored 6. This gradually reduces to 92.86%, 84% and 66.67% in speakers with scores of 5, 4 and 3 respectively. 2 is the relative outlier in that it is the only group which has not faced more than its predecessor, but is still close at a range of 60%. 64.29% of speakers with an identity score of 1 reported that they had been ridiculed because of their accent, and 62.5% of those with scores of 0. Looking at those with negative identity scores, 57.14% those with a score of -1 reported that they had been mocked, and then the lowest rate was those with a score of -2, with a rate of 33.33%.
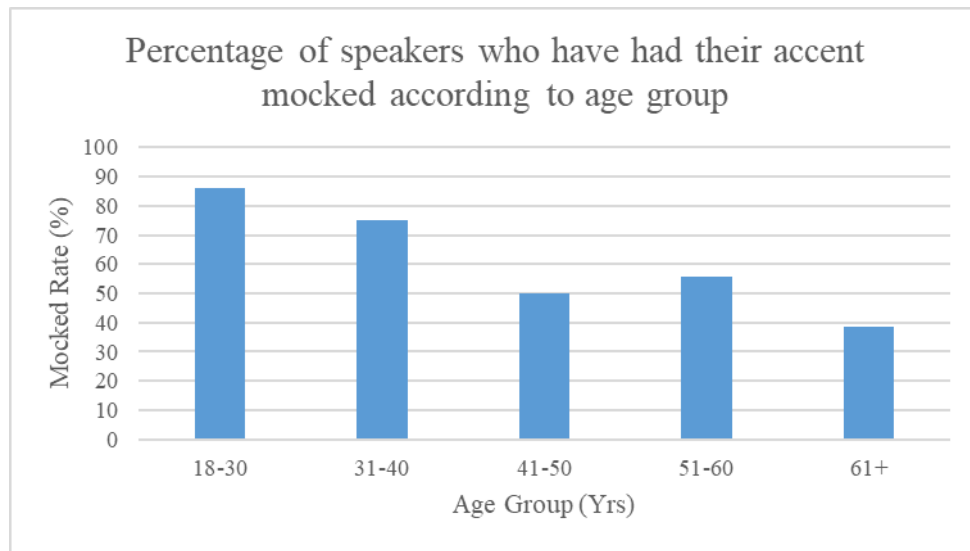
Figure 22: Proportion of speakers who have faced accent discrimination grouped by age group.

From Figure 22 it is apparent that younger speakers have faced more discrimination for their accents than their older peers. The rate for the 18-30 group was 86.15%, which was followed by the 31-40 group with 75%. 50% of the participants aged 41-50 reported that they had been mocked for their accents at some point in their lives. There is a very slight rise to 55.56% within the 51-60 group. Finally, 38.46% of the 61+ group said that they had faced accent discrimination, which was the lowest rate of any group. Conversely, the youngest group had the highest rate, and the results between these two ensure that a pattern is clearly visualised.

6. Discussion

Rather than splitting the discussion into the linguistic variables like the results, it is perhaps better to consider the broader patterns that were observed when looking at the social factors. In both cases, a number of different patterns were observed in the results, showing that how each linguistic variable interacts with the social factors is different, yet some are more similar than others. Regarding identity score, there was a lot of fluctuation amongst the groups, but in a few cases it was clear that there was a positive correlation between identity score and use of the variants we would expect from Scouse English. The three clearest examples of this are the NURSE-SQUARE merger and the use of *lecky* rather than *electricity* and the use of *ciggie* as a diminutive of *cigarette*. In these cases, though there are a few dips along the way, the general pattern is of higher scores leading to more use of the local variants. The other linguistic variable that shows this trend is /t/ lenition, specifically if the two lowest identity scores are discounted due to them only consisting of individual speakers. There is also the fact that the highest identity score of 6 did see a dip in this variable, but otherwise the trend was positive. In these three cases, it would be reasonable to

support the hypothesis that speakers with higher identity scores will be more likely to use the local variants. Furthermore, in the case of /t/ lenition, this also corroborates Clark and Watson's (2016: 58) findings, as they found a similar association between having a positive opinion of Liverpool and being more likely to lenite.

Fluctuation to the point where it was difficult to ascertain any solid patterns was the second group of results. This was the case for BOOK-SPOOK rhyming, /k/ lenition and use of the word *barm* over other lexical choices like *bread roll*. Due to the fact that it is difficult to establish a pattern in either direction, this again means that it cannot be concluded that a strong Scouse identity makes people more likely to use these features. As a result, the first hypothesis would have to be rejected for all three of these linguistic variables.

Carrying on from this, the final pattern was seen when looking at the 'velar nasal plus' as well as rhyming BATH-TRAP and FOOT-STRUT tokens. By looking at how a speaker's identity score affected these variables, it was apparent that there was near categorical use of the expected variant, outside of a few exceptions. Therefore, the result appeared to show a relatively stable level of use amongst participants with different identity scores. Given that all three of these variables are ones that were said to be found outside of Merseyside, the first hypothesis does not apply here, but instead the hypothesis that non-local variants will be unaffected by a speaker's Scouse identity score. As the aforementioned stability would show, this does appear to be the case, and therefore the three variables all support the hypothesis.

When taking these results into consideration, it becomes clear that the effect a speaker's Scouse identity score may have on their use of local accent features is not a simple correlation, as can be seen by some variables supporting the hypothesis and some rejecting it. This makes sense given that accents are influenced by a wide variety of intersecting factors, and the way in which identity was measured in this study encompasses such factors. An interesting topic for future study could be to analyse results according to each of the questions from the questionnaire and see if this differs from the patterns seen with the combined identity score. Interestingly, the consistently categorical use of the less local northern features supports the hypothesis that they would be unaffected by identity scores and implies that perhaps it is more acceptable to use these variants than it is to use local ones. This may suggest that a northern identity is almost unanimously in Merseyside, and perhaps a prerequisite to identifying as Scouse.

Much like what was seen with identity's effect on the linguistic variables, when looking at age it can be seen that there are a number of patterns emerging. The first is a pattern of relative stability. This was the most frequent pattern, and is seen particularly when it comes to the absence of BATH-TRAP and FOOT-STRUT splits as well as the presence of the 'velar nasal plus', in no small part because of their almost categoric usage rates. Another case in which relative stability can be seen is with /k/ lenition, in which groups other than the 61+ group do not appear to vary too much between them. Interestingly, this differs from Juskan's (2015: 11) findings, which showed younger people leniting more than their older counterparts. Stability is not what the hypothesis predicted, and therefore it has to be rejected for each of these linguistic variables. Even if it were to be argued that /k/ lenition was not a case of stability, the hypothesis would still have to be rejected as this also was not what was predicted.

Another pattern when it came to looking at the impact a speaker's age had on the linguistic variable was an inverted U-shaped graph. This was seen with three of the variables; the BOOK-SPOOK merger and the use of the local lexical variants *ciggie* and *barm*. Middle-aged speakers saw the highest frequencies here, which is actually the opposite of what is generally seen when it comes to non-standard variants interact with age. Generally, there is a dip in use amongst the middle-aged and a return to a higher frequency amongst retired speakers (Buchstaller, 2006: 13). The generally cited reason for this is the 'linguistic marketplace', stemming from Bordieu's (1977: 651-625) assertion that language itself is a type of capital that comes from a recognition of a dominant variety, in English's case RP. With people generally entering the workforce in adulthood, a shift towards that dominant variety is said to take place amongst those seeking prestige in the workplace, causing local forms to fall in use until people leave the workforce to retire (Llamas, 2006: 71-72). What was shown in this study is the exact opposite of what would be expected according to the linguistic marketplace theory. The fact that younger speakers did not make more use of the local variants means that the hypothesis has to be rejected in these cases as well.

When it came to /t/ lenition, a third trend was seen when looking at the shape of the graph. It was apparent that younger speakers did in fact lenite more than older ones, as the youngest two groups had lenition rates over seven times higher than the oldest group. From this, it can easily be said that this lone variable is able to support the hypothesis.

Finally, the last pattern that was seen was a level of fluctuation between the age groups. This was seen in the NURSE-SQUARE merger and the use of *lecky*, and both of the variables fluctuate in different ways. For the former, it rises and falls slowly, which is a difficult pattern to explain. It could be that the merger falls in and out of use due to the fact that the curve is going both up and down. However, generally this would be expected to follow the previously mentioned pattern that would come from participation in the linguistic marketplace, though this has been refuted by most of the variables looked at in this study. The symmetrical pattern shown for *lecky* could possibly be explained due to the small sample size, and it would be more stable overall if more participants were to have been recruited. It could also be that the changes are small but rapid, but for both this variable and the NURSE-SQUARE merger, collecting more data in a future study could help shed further insight. For the time being, the findings for these linguistic variables also reject the hypothesis.

Having looked at all of the findings related to the affect age has on these linguistic variables, it becomes apparent that – much like with a speaker's identity score – a simple correlation is not easy to establish. The variety of patterns and shapes of the graphs would confirm this. Other than the presence of /t/ lenition, no variable had a relatively linear trend of older/younger speakers using a variant more than their younger/older counterparts. The linguistic marketplace theory could very well be playing a role in this, and it is intriguing that the findings amongst the participants here show almost the opposite pattern of what that theory would anticipate. One more point about the age findings is that the lack of consistency actually links with the opposing views from the literature that were touched upon in the literature review. Clearly, further study into age's effect on accent features in the Liverpool area is necessary. In particular, there could be a study that is more specifically focused on speaker age, as that was a secondary social variable for this particular study.

Though only briefly discussed, the results on accent discrimination are also rather fascinating. Not only are the discrimination findings amongst the most linear of all the results, but they paint rather interesting pictures too. In terms of identity score, it is possible that a person is more outwardly proud of where they are from, potentially providing people with more negative opinions of Liverpool the opportunity to comment on negative stereotypes they have been exposed to by the media (Boland (2010: 7). For age, it is possible that younger speakers may have faced more discrimination than their older peers due to a steadily rising number of young people attending

university (Bolton, 2021). Given that accent discrimination has recently been highlighted as a problem within universities (Parveen, 2020), this could be one of the reasons why younger people reported a higher rate of discrimination That being said, the very lowest figure for both age and identity score was above 30%, suggesting that there is a generally high rate of discrimination amongst people with Scouse accents. The explanations from both Belchem (2000: 33) and Boland (2010: 7) could go a long way to explaining this; negative stereotypes in the media could be leading to people having negative opinions of Liverpool and its citizens, with the many linguistic markers of Scouse English giving many opportunities for people to comment on the accent. This of course is speculative, and could therefore be explored within a future study.

6.1 Evaluation

One methodological concern that arose when designing the study was the use of self-reporting. As data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, an in-person questionnaire would have been impossible to deliver, this approach seemed to be the best alternative. However, a problem with self-reporting in this instance is that participants may not answer accurately due to potential insecurities about their accent. This is a demand characteristic which could have influenced the findings, so for future studies this is something to consider. A positive of this method is that it made data collection much more streamlined than other options like phone interviews, and allowed a larger number of participants to answer the questions.

Another methodological flaw is that participants were recruited through the informal channel of social media due to the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to a higher amount of people from certain postcode areas. This of course results in a more limited sample. It could also explain why the number of positive identity scores was so much higher than the negative ones, as it is possible that people who identified strongly with Liverpool were sharing it with friends or family with similar opinions on the city.

It is also important to note a methodological problem that arose with some of the identity score questioning. Specifically, the political question may mean that people who do not necessarily identify with Liverpool but vote for Labour would get a +1 to their identity score. This could be another possible explanation as to why the lower identity scores were more scarce than the higher ones. However, the broad range of topics (politics, sports, pride, etc.) were important to gauge a more cohesive picture of how each participant identifies with Liverpool in a number of ways. For a

future study, this questionnaire could be refined to further explore the role of identity on accent in Liverpool.

Something that a future study could expand upon is how older speakers are included in the dataset. This study merely grouped those aged 61 and above into the same 61+ group, though various other studies both within linguistics and other disciplines my split this group further. One common way to do this is by introducing the categories of 'young-old' – often described as those aged 61-74 – and old-old – those aged 75 and above (Jung and Siedlecki, 2018: 141). Dividing this group into two could yield some interesting findings and would make for an excellent addition to a follow-up study.

7. Conclusion

Overall, it is clear that a speaker's use of accent features interacts with the social variables in a number of interesting ways. In terms of their Scouse identity score, it was found that for the NURSE-SQUARE merger, use of the diminutive forms *lecky* and *ciggie* and /t/ lenition all supported the hypothesis that a higher identity score would result in a higher use of the local variants. However, the opposite was observed for the BOOK-SPOOK merger, /k/ lenition and use of *barm*, which meant that they had to reject the hypothesis. Meanwhile, the hypothesis that broader northern features (absence of BATH-TRAP and FOOT-STRUT splits and presence of the 'velar nasal plus') would be unaffected by a speaker's identity score was supported by all three variables. In terms of the role a speaker's age would play, the hypothesis that younger speakers would be more likely to use the non-standard features was only supported when it came to /t/ lenition. For all the other variables that were investigated for this study, it was rejected. A brief look into accent discrimination also revealed that younger people and those with higher identity scores were discriminated against more than their counterparts, opening up some potential topics for future study.

Due to a number of methodological concerns and discrepancies, as well as the multitude of patterns that were observed, this study has opened up a number of possible avenues for repeat or follow-up studies that look at the specific factors that contribute to the sense of Scouse identity rather than the holistic identity score concept, or indeed different ways of measuring an identity score.

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Appendix

Appendix A

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/11m73SdDgz9X0zekem-yFUDnV7Ms6SOIcQv46NCHTSp0/

In order for the questions to be seen, the survey had to be reopened. In the case of any surplus responses, none were considered after January 31st, when the survey was originally closed.

Appendix B