

GEORDIE – A LANGUAGE WITHOUT AN ARMY²

Geordie is (...) a term used to describe the dialect that is spoken in Newcastle. It's **more of a language** really. But divvent wo'ry yersel lyke³ because you should be able to understand what is being said most of the time. English is the working language...

University of Newcastle upon Tyne
(<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/marine/about/life/language.htm>)

Introduction

The subject of this article is the variety⁴ of the largest English conurbation, which is conveniently referred to as Tyneside, and which more strictly comprises Newcastle-upon-Tyne together with the surrounding urban areas, “formerly straddling the border between county Durham and Northumberland but now constituting the metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear” (Wells 1982: 374). The variety is known as *Geordie*⁵. Although the variety is often referred to as a dialect, for some people it is much more than that (see the quote at the beginning of this article). This article aims at answering the question: What is Geordie – a dialect or a language?

1. Geordie and Standard English – definitions

1.1. What is Standard English?

Standard language is nothing more but one of many dialects spoken within a nation (St Clair 1982: 164). It is “a dialect that succeeded in the competition with other dialects” (Brun 1946: 196). It is “legitimated by the government of

¹ Katedra Filologii Angielskiej, Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz.

² Aa'd leik te thank Prof. Joan Beal o the Department of English Language an Linguistics o the University of Sheffield fre hor invaluable help an understanding.

³ ...you don't have to worry.

⁴ The more technical and neutral term variety (which applies to “any kind of language which we wish, for some purpose, to consider a single entity” (Spolsky 1998: 92) and which “can be something greater than a single language as well as something less, less even than something traditionally referred to as a dialect” (Wardhaugh 1986: 22)) is deliberately used here to avoid the judgmental, subjective and emotional terms language and dialect (Fishman 1970: 21, Majewicz 1989: 10).

⁵ It must be remembered that not all inhabitants of Tyneside speak *Geordie*. Most of the features of the variety described in this paper would probably be condemned, especially by well educated inhabitants of Tyneside, as “bad English”.

a nation for use in the school system, the public media, literature and government” (St Clair 1982: 164) and in consequence it is the only officially recognised form of speech. Standard languages do not appear in a consistent way but their emergence is, generally speaking, closely related to the concept of power. Castellano, for example, was adopted as the official dialect of Spain and imposed on other Spanish provinces, as a result of the domination of Castile. In Italy the legitimated form of speech comes from the aristocracy of Florence (165). St Clair enumerates six features of the legitimation process (166):

1. *Power* – a group that achieves political control usually defines the official dialect of a nation and the official social reality;
2. *History* – the establishment rewrites the history to enhance its own self-image and perceives diachronic changes in language from the point of view of the standard language;
3. *Instrument* – standard language is used as an instrument in the power structure to control social mobility;
4. *Deviancy* – non-standard dialects are stigmatised and considered deviant;
5. *Change* – linguistic control is to prevent change caused by other social and political influences;
6. *Accommodation* – all dialect speakers accommodate to the official language of power.

According to Freeborn (1993: 39), at the end of the fourteenth century when Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* the notion of Standard English did not exist. There was no single grammar or spelling norm that would be used throughout the country. Therefore Chaucer, who worked and lived in the London area, wrote in the educated variety of this region. However, William Langland wrote *Piers Plowman* in the south Midland dialect and *The York Mystery Plays* were written in northern dialect⁶. What is now considered to be Standard English developed out of the dialects “used in and around London as these were modified through the centuries by speakers at the court, by scholars from the universities and other writers, and, later on by the public schools” (Trudgill 1974: 17). Standard English nowadays is no longer a regional dialect as it has spread throughout the country. It is spoken by the educated part of the society, most often used in print and in news broadcast, as well as taught at schools and to non-native speakers (18). This is why, Standard English is usually considered to be “the English language” and other dialects as its imperfect versions. Linguistically speaking, however, Standard English is only one dialect among many and the English language consists of a sum of its dialects (Freeborn 1993: 39).

⁶ Nowadays the United Kingdom still does not have a legally sanctioned official or national language, which is to reflect the freedom of the individual in language choice and language use, as in other forms of social behaviour (Cheshire 1991: 14).

According to Hughes and Trudgill (1979: 20-25), the differences within Standard English among regions are not numerous. They include some well known vocabulary items (e.g. *rubbish* Standard BrE and *garbage* Standard AmE) use of contractions (e.g. *I haven't got it* – preferred in the south of England and *I've not got it* – more common in the north of England) or the use of the verb *to have* (e.g. *Do you have any money?* AmE, *Have you got any money?* BrE, *Have you any money?* north of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland). Generally speaking, despite the minor differences the grammar and vocabulary of Standard English are widely accepted and codified. There is an agreement among educated people and authorities as to what is and what is not Standard English.

The agreement concerning vocabulary and grammar of Standard English, however, does not apply to pronunciation. “There is no universally acknowledged standard accent for English, and it is, at least in theory, possible to speak standard English with any regional or social accent” (Trudgill 1974: 18). Clearly though, very localised accents, associated with people who have had relatively little education, hardly ever occur together with Standard English. There is one accent, however, known as RP (‘received pronunciation’), which occurs only with Standard English. It is the educated English accent whose history can be traced to the 16th century, when it began “as a court-based variant on the London speech of the day” (Morrish 1999: 2). It was standardised in the public schools in the 19th century and was first identified by the name in 1869. According to Brazil this socially prestigious speech of London used to be characterised by a well-recognised sound system, the use of a pleasing voice quality, a rhythmical unhurried speech tempo, a good articulation that was not staccato or too precise and the lack of any trace of regional intonation (<http://thenortheast.com/northlib>). However, as Morrish points out,

those who cling to the notion of RP as “correct”, “clear”, “beautiful” speech are not telling the whole truth. In its upper-class form it is none of these, being full of irrational elisions and slack articulation. It thrived because it was the language of the dominant class (1999: 4).

RP is generally limited to Britain and it is a non-localised accent. It is usually used by television and radio announcers and other public figures and it is commonly referred to as “BBC English” or “Queen’s English”. Owing to its use on radio and television it is also the most widely understood of all accents within Britain. Probably for this reason it is also taught to non-native speakers learning British pronunciation (Trudgill 1974: 18). RP has also been chosen as the reference accent here.

1.2. What is Geordie? – definition and origins of the name

The origins of the name *Geordie* remain unclear and there are a few theories of how and where it was coined.

Some people claim that originally the name applied only to miners. According to *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1996), *Geordie* denotes a coal-miner. Indeed the name appears in many “coal mine” poems and songs. The term could have also originated from George Stephenson’s miners’ lamp (invented in 1815) which soon became known as *Geordie*. The Northumberland miners, who preferred it to the one invented by Sir Humphrey Davy, could have been named *Geordies* after the lamp.

According to another theory, the term originally referred to keelmen. In 1826 George Stephenson gave evidence to a Parliamentary Commission on Railways. His blunt speech and dialect are said to have been scoffed at by Londoners, who from that date on, began to call the keelmen carrying coal from the Tyne to the Thames – *Geordie* (‘Newcastle upon Tyne City Libraries & Arts – local fact sheet 5’).

The most convincing theory however, is provided by Smith who claims that the name originally referred to all the inhabitants of Newcastle. According to Smith the name was coined in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 (<http://www.une.edu.au/langnet/geordie.htm>). In 1714, despite the strong claims to the throne of the Catholic James Stuart known as “The Old Pretender”, George I, a German protestant was appointed the King of England, Scotland and Wales. The Jacobites, who strongly supported the claims of Stuart, plotted a rising in Northumberland against the new king. All the Northumbrian towns declared support for the Jacobites apart from Newcastle upon Tyne. Newcastle’s trade and livelihood depended on royal approval and merchants and gentry did not want to risk becoming involved in a plot against the new king. The rising of the 1715 was a total disaster. A second rising took place in 1745 when Newcastle once again closed its gates to the Jacobites and faithfully declared its support for King George II. Newcastle and the surrounding areas were all “for George” – hence the name *Geordies* (<http://www.thenortheast.fsnet.co.uk/Geordieo.htm>).

It is disputable who the name originally referred to. Nowadays, it seems that anyone born in Northumberland, Durham or on the banks of the river Wear can call themselves “Geordie” (<http://members.lycos.co.uk/sixfour/bobjude/index/newc.htm>).

2. Dialect and Language – linguistic criteria of distinction

Let us now go back to the question posed in the introduction. How can we know if Geordie is a dialect or a language? According to Majewicz (1989: 14) there have been a few attempts to establish linguistic criteria that would make the distinction between *dialect* and *language* possible. For the sake of simplicity let us concentrate on Bloomfield’s theory, known as *mutual intelligibility theory*. Bloomfield claimed that “every language undergoes changes at a speed that enables its users an undisturbed verbal communication; if owing to the changes there emerge groups of users between whom communication is disturbed – the groups speak different dialects and if communication between the groups becomes im-

possible – the groups speak different, related languages” (qtd. in Majewicz 14). Let us now see how different Geordie is from Standard English and how it can be classified according to the above-mentioned theory.

2.1. The grammar of Tyneside English

I. The verb phrase

a) Irregular Verbs⁷

The differences in patterns of irregular verbs between Tyneside and Standard English include:

- “reversal” of past tense and past participle verb forms, e.g. *I seen* – as the past form, and *I have saw* – as the perfect form,
- a number of verbs with participle ending in *-en*, e.g. *getten*, *putten*, *forgetten*,
- irregular pattern instead of standard English regular one, e.g. *tret* – as the past tense and past participle form, instead of Standard English – *treated*,
- certain verb forms not used in Standard English at all, e.g. *gan*, instead of standard English *go*, or the negative *divvent* instead of *don't* (Beal 1993: 192-193).

b) Modal verbs

In Tyneside English, similarly to Scots English, *may* and *shall* are hardly ever used and there is no grammatical need for these verbs in Tyneside (Beal 1993: 194). All functions of *may* are performed by *can* and *might*. *Can* replaces *may* to express permission and *might* to express possibility, e.g. *Mind, it looks as though it might rain, doesn't it?* (McDonald 1981: 284). *Shall*, as in Scots and Irish English, is replaced by *will* not only for the expression of futurity but also for first person questions, such as: *Will I put the kettle on?* instead of *Shall I put the kettle on?*

Secondly, according to a rule of Standard English only one modal verb can appear in a single verb phrase. For this reason a sentence *He must do it* is grammatical, whereas *He must can do it* is not. “Standard English has developed a whole battery of ‘quasi modal’ verbs to ‘stand in’ for modals where the meaning requires them and the above rule forbids them” (Beal 1993: 195). Thus, in Standard English the meaning of the above sentence would be expressed as: *He must be able to do it*. Double modals appear in Tyneside English if the second modal verb is *can* or *could*, e.g.

- *I can't play on Friday. I work late. I might could get it changed, though.*
- *A good machine clipper would could do it in half a day* (McDonald 1981: 186-187).

⁷ For a full picture of the differences between the verb patterns of Tyneside and Standard English see McDonald (1981).

Thirdly, in Standard English adverbs such as *only* or *just* are placed before main verbs but after modals, e.g. *I only asked* but *I can only ask*.

In Tyneside English, by contrast, adverbs may be placed before *can* and *could* (Beal 1993: 196) e.g.

– *That's what I say to people. If they only could walk a little they should thank God.*

– *She just can reach the gate.*

Fourthly, in Standard English *be able to* is used in perfective constructions e.g.

– *He has not been able to get a job since he left school.*

– *I thought I would have been able to bring it back again.*

In Tyneside English, however, *can* and *could* is used in perfective constructions e.g.

– *He cannot get a job since he left school.*

– *I thought I could've brought it back again (McDonald 1981: 215-216).*

Fifthly, there are several cases in which the same meaning is expressed by means of a different modal verb in Tyneside and Standard English. Moreover, sometimes the meaning of a modal or quasi-modal verb is different in Standard and Tyneside English. For example where Standard English uses *can't* for negative conclusions *mustn't* is used in Tyneside English.

– *The lift can't be working* – Standard English;

– *The lift mustn't be working* – Tyneside English (Beal 1993: 197).

Moreover, *must not* is used in Standard English to prohibit, and to refer to prohibitions and *do not have to/have not got to* is used to say that there is no obligation (Swan 1980: 346), e.g.

– *You mustn't tell George* – means – don't tell George;

– *You haven't got to tell George* – means – you can if you like but it is not necessary.

Tyneside English, by contrast, uses *haven't got to* to refer to prohibitions. The sentence: *You haven't got to tell George* does not mean therefore that you are not obliged to tell George but that you are obliged not to tell him.

c) Verb phrase complementation

There are certain types of verb phrase complementation that are different in Tyneside and Standard English.

First, the construction *for to*, which only survives in archaic usage in Standard English, such as folk songs, is still used in Tyneside (as well as in Scots, Irish and some American dialects). In modern Standard English the infinitive is introduced by *to* unlike in Tyneside English where the infinitive may be introduced by *for to* especially where it has the sense of *in order to*, e.g.

– *The firemen were putting on breathing apparatus for to go into the house.*

– *The pair of them tried to contact Debbie for to tell her the news about the baby (Beal 1993: 197).*

Secondly, Standard English has either a passive infinitive or a form ending in *-ing* after verbs of necessity, such as *need* and *want*. Tyneside, similarly to Scots and Irish English has the past participle after *need* and *want*. Thus, a Standard English sentence: *My hair needs to be washed* or *My hair needs washing*, could be “translated” into Tyneside English as: *My hair needs washed*.

Thirdly, certain conditioning clause operators, such as *being as* and *with*, are used in Tyneside but not in Standard English, e.g.

– *He can't come, being as he's working.*

– *With the wife being ill, I'll have to look after her* (Pellowe 1972: 46).

d) Other non-standard verbal patterns

Certain types of verbal patterns that are found in Tyneside do not occur in Standard English (Beal 1993: 198).

First, in conditional clauses Standard English uses *had* + *past participle* e.g.

– *She might have got the same sort of job if she had stayed at school.*

Tyneside English uses *had have* + *past participle* in this case (the *have* is often reduced to *a*) e.g.

– *She might have gotten the same sort of job if she have had stayed at school.* or

– *She might have gotten the same sort of job if she a had stayed at school.*

Secondly, since *been* and *being* are homophones in Tyneside their functions compared to Standard English may seem reversed. The “reversal” of *been* and *being* can also be seen in written Tyneside English e.g.

– *I also played in the muck where my dad had being digging.*

– *I think old people should not be kept alive because the death of the person is just been prolonged.*

II. Interrogative tags

There are two main types of interrogative tags in Standard English. According to Swan (1980: 479), negative tags are put after affirmative sentences e.g. *It's cold, isn't it* and positive tags follow a negative clause e.g. *It's not warm, is it*. Positive tags following positive statements are used in standard English as “attention signals” to repeat what the speaker has just heard, to express “interest, surprise, concern or some other reaction” (481), e.g.

So you are getting married, are you? How nice!;

So that's your little game, is it?

Positive tags following positive questions are more common in Tyneside English and are used to ask for information concerning the statement, e.g.

You could say it could you? (McDonald 1981: 325-326).

Moreover, positive tags in Tyneside may follow positive questions, a combination which, according to Swan, is not allowed in Standard English (1980: 478) e.g.

*Are you next door to each other are you?*⁸ (McDonald 1981: 325-326).

⁸ In the examples there is no pause before the tag.

Furthermore, negative tags following negative statements, which are not used in Standard English, do appear in Tyneside in two combinations. First, when information is sought, a negative clause is followed by *auxiliary + subject + not*, e.g. *She can't come, can she not?* Second, when confirmation of the negative is sought a negative clause is followed by *auxiliary + n't + subject + not*, e.g. *She can't come, can't she not?*

The tag system of Tyneside is syntactically more complex than that of Standard English, where the different expectations are signalled only by stress and intonation patterns (Beal 1993: 202-203).

III. The noun phrase

a) Pronouns

– Personal pronouns

Firstly, the system of Tyneside English concerning the second person pronoun seems to be much more complex than the one of Standard English. Where Standard English has only one form – *you* for all functions of subjective, objective and plural of the second person pronoun, Tyneside English uses distinctive forms such as: *ye, yous* and *yees* (Beal 1993: 205)

Secondly, the functions of *we* and *us* are reversed in Tyneside English, e.g. *Us'll do it* – which could be „translated” into Standard English as: *We'll do it*. *They beat we four nil!* – which corresponds to: *They beat us four nil!*

Table 1. The personal pronouns of Standard English and Tyneside English (Beal 1993: 205)

	Subject		Object		Possessive	
	Standard	Tyneside	Standard	Tyneside	Standard	Tyneside
singular						
1 st person	I	I	me	us	my	me
2 nd person	you	ye	you	you	your	your
3 rd person m	he	he	him	him	his	his
3 rd person f	she	she	her	her	her	her
3 rd person n	it	it	it	it	its	its
plural						
1 st person	we	us	us	we	our	wor
2 nd person	you	yous	you	yous/yees	your	your
3 rd person	they	they	them	them	their	their

– Reflexives

In Tyneside English reflexives are formed by adding *self* or *selves* to the possessive form of personal pronouns. Tyneside is very consistent in this respect, unlike Standard English where reflexives are formed by adding *self* or *selves* to the possessive forms of the first and second person pronouns, but to the objective form of the third person pronoun. The differences are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reflexives of Standard English and Tyneside English (Beal 1993: 206)

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Tyneside</i>
myself	meself
yourself	yourself
himself	hisself
herself	herself
itself	itself
ourselves	worselves
yourselves	yourselves
themselves	theirselves

– Objective pronoun in subject position

In compound subjects, in Tyneside English, the objective pronoun may be used as the subject, e.g.

Me and my brother Martin went on a trip.

Her and her friend were looking at a programme (McDonald 1980: 16).

– Demonstratives

Standard English uses *those* as a demonstrative for distant reference with a plural noun, e.g. *I like those books*. In Tyneside English, by contrast, *them* is used in such cases, e.g. *I like them books* (Beal 1993: 207).

– Relative pronouns

The use of relative pronouns in Tyneside English differs from that in Standard English in the following respects.

Firstly, in Standard English *which* occurs only after an impersonal referent, e.g. *It's a book which will interest children of all ages* (Swan 1980: 488).

In Tyneside English *which* may occur with a personal antecedent, e.g.

The ladies which accompanied him had curly hair (McDonald 1980: 20).

Secondly, the non-standard relative pronoun *what* is used in Tyneside English (Beal 1998: 207). The antecedent of *what* may be either personal or impersonal, e.g.

The coats what the men wore were very long.

It cannot be anyone else but you what's left that bath dirty (McDonald 1980: 20).

Thirdly, the relative pronoun may be omitted in Standard English if it is the object of the clause e.g. *The man I served yesterday came back to complain* (McDonald 1980: 20). Formerly, in Standard English the relative pronoun could be deleted even if it was the subject of the relative clause (Beal 1993: 208). In Tyneside the construction can still be observed, but only after clauses containing the verb *to be* and a complement, e.g. *Leck is a young boy was coming home from school* (McDonald 1980: 20). In this sentence there would be a pause before *was*, which would be pronounced fully stressed.

b) Replacive 'one'

Standard English uses *one* as a substitute for a noun, e.g. *My ideal job is a receptionist. I would like to be one because it is a job where you can meet people.* *One* occurs with the indefinite article only if an adjective intervenes, e.g.

A: Would you like a drink? B: Yes, but just a little one (Beal 1993: 208).

In Tyneside, by contrast, *one* is preceded by an indefinite article whether an adjective intervenes or not, e.g. *My ideal job is a receptionist. I would like to be a one because it is a job where you can meet people* (McDonald 1980: 21).

c) Intensifiers

Tyneside English sometimes uses different intensifiers than Standard English.

Firstly, where Standard English would have *so...that*, Tyneside uses *that* alone, e.g.

I was so excited that I didn't know what to say – Standard English

I was that excited I didn't know what to say – Tyneside English (Beal 1993: 209).

Secondly, *geet* is used as an intensifier in Tyneside. It is used in the same way as *right* in Yorkshire and *dead* in Northern English (and also in Tyneside), e.g.

This is geet hard, Sir – Tyneside English; *This is dead hard, Sir* – Northern English (also Tyneside English); *This is really hard, Sir* – Standard English (Beal 1993: 210).

IV. Sentence-final elements

a) Pronouns

In Tyneside English the subject of a sentence may be placed again at the end of the sentence (Beal 1993: 211). According to Smith ([a] 5), objective pronoun is used in this position, and the structure is used for emphasis e.g.

They're useless, them.

My skirt's too short, this.

I really love chips, me.

b) But

In Standard English *but* functions as a conjunction at the beginning of a clause. In Tyneside, however, similarly to Scots and Irish dialects, *but* can also stand at the end, where it is equivalent in meaning to Standard English *though* e.g.

I'll manage but.

It'll be dark, but (Beal 1993: 211).

There are also other characteristic features of Tyneside English such as:

- *never* which in Tyneside does not mean “not on any occasion” but is merely an emphatic negative, e.g. *The women were waiting for the men to play cards but the men never turned up so the women sent Ruby out to look for*

them (McDonald 1980: 13) instead of: *The women were waiting for the men to play cards but the men did not turn up so the women sent Ruby out to look for them.*

- multiple negation e.g. *You couldn't say nothing bad about it* (McDonald 1980: 13).
- no 'negative attraction', e.g. *No one wanted to hear them* would be expressed in Tyneside as: *Everyone didn't want to hear them*⁹.
- The same word order is used in direct and indirect questions and *whether* is not inserted in indirect questions, e.g. *She once asked me did it interfere with me* (McDonald 1980: 15).
- double comparatives and superlatives can still be noted, e.g. *She's got the most loveliest clothes* (McDonald 1980: 22) or *I think alcohol is much more safer kind of relaxing if took in small quantities.*

2.2. The lexis of Tyneside English

The lexis of Tyneside English, similarly to its syntax, often bears little resemblance to Standard English. Geordie and Northumbrian vocabulary is more than 80% Angle in origin. In Standard English, on the other hand, the figure is less than 30% (www.thenortheast.fsnet.co.uk). Geordie speakers in the same way as Anglo-Saxons use the word *wife*, as a term for a woman whether she is married or not. They also use the verb *to larn* in the meaning of both *to learn* and *to teach* (the Anglo Saxon word *laeran* meant *to teach*). Other Geordie words of Anglo Saxon origin include *axe* – to ask (from the Anglo-Saxon *acsian*), *burn* – a stream, *hoppings* a funfair and *gan* – meaning to go. Moreover, a few lexical items characteristic of Tyneside, such as *gadgie* meaning *a chap* and *baari* meaning *excellent*, are thought to be of Roman origin (Smith [a] 5). Other typical Geordie words are also found further south, and appear to be part of a general Northern English lexicon, e.g. *aye* – yes, *gob* – mouth, *chuffed* – happy, *wisht* – be quiet, or *nowt* – nothing (Smith [a] 5)¹⁰.

Although many lexical items characteristic of the region have faded into history (especially words connected with mining and other heavy industries) distinct north-eastern vocabulary is not in danger because new terms are constantly being coined, e.g. *charver* – a thug, *mint* and *belter* – fantastic (Wainwright 2001: 1).

The differences in lexis between Tyneside and Standard English may be a source of mutual unintelligibility and hilarious misunderstandings. For example,

⁹ According to Harris (1985: 305) the same syntactic feature appears in Irish English and may be caused by interference from the syntactic patterns of Irish. In Tyneside the feature may be a result of Irish influence.

¹⁰ For more Geordie words see e.g. Geordie Dictionary <http://members.tripod.com/newcastleupontyne/geordie.html>

pigs in the Northeast for superstitious reasons, especially among fishermen, were rarely called by their proper name and the name *gissy* was preferred. A *pig*, on the other hand, was, according to Heslop, an earthenware hot water bottle. A traveller in Northumberland was astonished when told that country people slept with the *pigs* for warmth (qtd. in Graham 1986: 32). Other words may cause similar misunderstandings. For example a *wig* means a tea-cake in the Northeast and a *spice wig* is one with currants. Heslop tells a story of a Newcastle lady, who, when in London, enquired where she could get some *wigs*. She was directed to a barber's shop, where she astonished everyone by asking the price of *spice wigs*, as she wanted half a dozen for tea (qtd. in Graham 1986: 38).

2.3. The pronunciation of Tyneside English

Vowels¹¹

a) The STRUT words

The lack of the FOOT-STRUT Split (i.e. the lack of a phonemic opposition between the vowels of FOOT and STRUT) is one of the most important characteristics setting northern local accents apart from southern ones (Wells 1982: 351). In the local accents of the north, so also in the accent of Tyneside, *put* is a homophone of *putt* and the strong form of *could* a homophone of *cud*. This can be traced historically to the split of Middle English short /u/ into two phonemes (the FOOT-STRUT Split). The split was carried through further south, west and north, "so that in the south of England, in Wales, and in Scotland we now have a six-term system of vowels" (ibid.). In the north of England, however, where it did not take place, a five-term system was preserved. In Tyneside the feature extends well up the social scale and "would be quite usual [...] in a lower middle class accent" (1982[b]: 352).



Figure 1. Approximate southern limits in broad local accents of unsplit FOOT-STROOT (solid line) and flat BATH (broken line) (Chambers and Trudgill 1980 qtd. in Wells 1982[b]: 336)

¹¹ For a full picture of typical realisations of Tyneside see Watt and Milroy (1992: 2) and for realisations of certain Tyneside diphthongs see e.g. Hughes and Trudgill (1997: 66).

b) The BATH words

Another important characteristic setting northern local accents apart from southern ones is the absence of BATH Broadening; namely the use in the BATH words the vowel of TRAP (Wells 1990: 353). Generally speaking, the same short open vowel [a] is used in both BATH and TRAP words. There is also a long, back [a:], used in START words: dark [da:k], starts [sta:ts]. Correspondences between [a], [a:] and [ɔ:] of Tyneside English and [æ], [ɑ:] and [ɜ:] of RP are presented in Figure 2.

c) The THOUGHT words

Roughly those THOUGHT words, which are spelt with *a* have broad Geordie pronunciation with [a:] rather than [ɔ:] e.g. *all*, *talk*, *walk* or *war* but also *know* and *cold*. Therefore “[wɔ:k], which in most English accents can only be *walk*, is *work* in broad Geordie [see NURSE words], while *walk* has the unambiguous form [wa:k]” (Wells 1982[b]: 375). This peculiarity has been used in a well known Geordie joke:

Workman visiting doctor: *Me leg's bad, man, can ye give us a sick note?*

Doctor: *Can you walk* [wɔ:k]?

Workman: *Work* [wɔ:k]? *Y'a kiddin' man, A cannat even walk* [wa:k]! (Smith [b] 6)

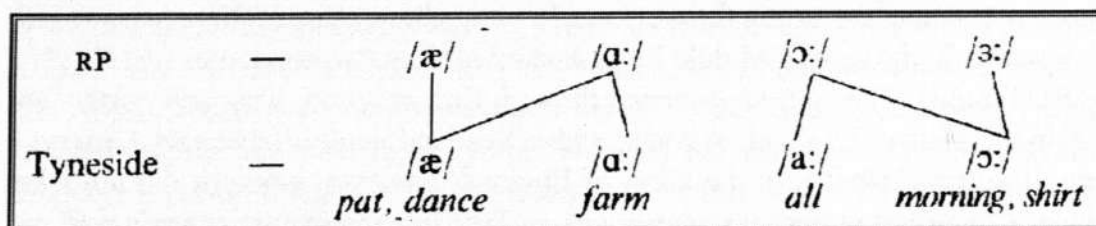


Figure 2. Correspondences between [a], [a:] and [ɔ:] of Tyneside English and [æ], [ɑ:] and [ɜ:] of RP (Hughes and Trudgill 1979: 66)

d) The FACE words

The FACE vowel is predominantly a monophthong /e:/, which varies somewhat in height, e.g. *mate* [me:t] but *met* [met]. Moreover, the diphthong /ɪə/ is very common among male speakers e.g. *pale* [pɪəl]. Another diphthong [æɪ] may occasionally be heard in *eight*, *game* etc. (Watt and Milroy 1992: 2).

e) The GOAT words

The GOAT vowel is mostly a monophthong [ɔ:]. However, the diphthong [ʊə] is frequent among working class, especially among men. Thus, *goat* is either [go:t] or [gʊ:t]. Archaic pronunciations of *know*, *snow*, *old*, *cold* etc. take [ɑ:]¹² (as per

¹² Some working class men use [aʊ] in *old*, *gold*, *soldier*, or *shoulder* (Watt and Milroy 1992: 2).

some THOUGHT/ NORTH/FORCE items) (Watt and Milroy 1992: 2). This has been used in another well known joke:

Billy: *Geordie, Di yi na any card [ka:d] games?*

Geordie: *Aye, ice hockey.*

Billy (looking puzzled): *Ice hockey's not a card [ka:d] game man.*

Geordie replies: *It's the coldest [ka:dist] game A na* (Graham 1986: 15).

f) The PRICE words

There is no agreement concerning the diphthong used in the PRICE words in Tyneside English. According to Watt and Milroy (1999: 2), in the PRICE words in Tyneside English, [eɪ] is found before voiceless stops and fricatives e.g. *knife* [neɪf], and [aɪ] elsewhere e.g. *knives* [naɪvz]. Viereck, claims that the two diphthongs ([eɪ] and [aɪ]) are in free variation (1966: 69-70), and O'Connor maintains that there is only the raised [eɪ] variant (qtd. in Wells [1990: 376]). Examples of Tyneside usage of the PRICE words given by Wells are: *Tyneside* [teɪnsaɪd], *like* [laɪk], *twice* [tuɪs], *mind* [maɪnd] but *five* [faɪv] (1990: 376)¹³.

g) The MOUTH words

The traditional pronunciation [u:] of the MOUTH words is still prevalent among the working class. Examples of the traditional pronunciation would be: *down* [daʊn], *house* [haʊs], *out* [aʊt] or *cow* [kaʊ] (Watt and Milroy 1992: 2).

Consonants

a) P, T, K

In Tyneside speech P, T, and K are glottalized both in syllable-final position and syllable-initially before a weak vowel. It is either a purely glottal realisation [ʔ] or a combined glottal and oral plosive [pʔ, tʔ, kʔ], e.g. *paper* ['peɪpʔə], *couple* ['kʊpʔəl], *pity* [pɪtʔi] or *documents* ['dɒkʔjəmənts] (Wells 1982[b]: 374).

b) TH, F

According to Watt and Milroy, the labiodental forms [f], [v] for [θ], [ð] can sometimes be observed among younger, working class speakers (1999: 2).

c) L

In RP L is clear before a vowel sound or "j", e.g. *like* [laɪk], *value* ['vælju:] but dark elsewhere, e.g. *milk* [mɪɪk], *fall* [fɔ:l] (Wells [c] 412). In Tyneside speech, by contrast, L is usually clear in all positions, e.g. *milk* [mɪlk], *fall* [fɔ:l] (Watt and Milroy 5).

¹³ Older and/or working class speakers often use [i:] instead of [aɪ] in the PRICE words, e.g. *night* [ni:t], *right* [ri:t] (Watt and Milroy 2).

d) B

According to Graham (1979: 2) in broad Geordie speech *b* is silent in words such as *grumble*, *stumble*, *rumble*, *jumble* etc. Thus, in the written form of Tyneside English the words do not have the *b* either e.g. *grumle* – to grumble.

2.4. Conclusion

Although “the tendency to assimilate the form of the dialect with the current English of the schools is increasing” (Heslop xx-xxi), Tyneside English still remains considerably far from the standard in terms of grammar lexis and pronunciation.

The grammatical dissimilarities concern such important aspects as the use of modal and irregular verbs, the expression of negation or the use of personal pronouns. As for the lexical differences it is difficult to say exactly how many vocabulary items are not common to Tyneside and Standard English. Suffice it to say, however, that the lexis characteristic of Tyneside is more than 80% Angle in origin, compared to Standard English, where the figure is less than 30%. The pronunciation of Tyneside English is also markedly different from RP. Some Standard English vowels (e.g. /ʌ/) are not used, others are changed, and instead of the diphthongs of Standard English Tyneside English uses mostly monophthongs. It seems therefore that communication between a broad Geordie speaker and a speaker of Standard English may not only be disturbed but is virtually impossible. Should we, in the light of the above mentioned arguments, classify Geordie as a language? On linguistic grounds (according to the above mentioned Bloomfield’ theory) it appears so. Still, Geordie has traditionally been referred to as a dialect of English not a separate language. Let us now see why.

3. Language and dialect – linguistic or nonlinguistic notions?

Let us quote Bloomfield’s theory once again: “every language undergoes changes at a speed that enables its users an undisturbed verbal communication; if owing to the changes there emerge groups of users between whom communication is disturbed – the groups speak different dialects and if communication between the groups becomes impossible – the groups speak different, related languages” (qtd. in Majewicz 1989: 14). According to this theory it seems justifiable to classify Geordie as a separate language. Similarly, however, on the same grounds we could classify e.g. all varieties of German, Dutch and Afrikaans as dialects of one language, as well as grant the status of separate languages not only to Afrikaans or Flemish but also Austrian German, Swiss German or even German from the former GDR and FRG (Majewicz 1989: 13). Thus, if we cannot rely on linguistics what other criteria do we employ to draw the line between a language

and a dialect? According to Trudgill, the distinction between language and dialect is often made on the basis of "social and political rather than linguistic factors" (1974: 15).

The difficulty with defining the terms *language* and *dialect* has its origins in Ancient Greece (Haugen 1966: 97). The language of Ancient Greece was in fact a group of distinct local varieties (Ionic, Doric and Attic), which had their own literary traditions and uses. Language, therefore, was used to refer either to a single linguistic norm or to a group of related norms, whereas dialect referred only to one of the norms. However, grouping of the related norms, under a common label of language seems to bear little relation to linguistics and is generally based on social and political factors (Trudgill 1974: 15). Let us now consider the following examples in support of the claim that dialect and language are political rather than linguistic notions.

The first example comes from the Dutch-German frontier. There used to be a continuum of dialects of "one language" there and the dialects spoken on either side of the border still bear a striking resemblance to one another. Moreover, "the ability of speakers from either side of the border to understand each other will often be considerably greater than that of German speakers from this area to understand speakers of other German dialects from distant parts of Austria or Switzerland" (Trudgill 1974: 15). Nevertheless, since national boundaries have hardened the speakers on the Dutch side of the border would claim that they speak a dialect of Dutch and they would look to standard Dutch for their model and the speakers on the German side of the border would probably say that the variety they use is a dialect of German (Gumperz 1971: 56).

The next example comes from India and Pakistan. Hindi, which is one of the official languages of India and Urdu - the official language of Pakistan are the same "language". Owing to the conflict between the two countries, however, the differences between the varieties are being magnified. Hindi is written left to right in the Devanagari script, whereas Urdu is written right to left in the Persian-Arabic script. Borrowings into Urdu come mainly from Arabic and Persian sources and borrowings into Hindi from Sanskrit. The differences have become highly symbolic and seem to be overemphasised by the authorities (Gumperz 1971: 57).

Interestingly enough, the situation in India and Pakistan is in direct contrast to the one in China (Wardhaugh 1986: 28). Although some linguists (e.g. Majewicz 1989: 15) suggest that Chinese should be treated as a group of separate languages the Chinese themselves would probably claim that the mutually unintelligible varieties they speak (e.g. Mandarin and Cantonese) are not separate languages but only dialects of one language. The Chinese then, base their definition of a language on a shared writing system and a common social and cultural tradition rather than purely linguistic factors. Majewicz provides another more puzzling example. In Bulgaria Macedonian is considered to be one of Bulgarian dialects, whereas in Macedonia it was granted a status of the official language (apparently this even led to friction between these two nations) (1989: 13).

All these examples prove that it is often not *mutual intelligibility* or other linguistic criteria but political and cultural aspects that play the most important role in defining dialect and language. Majewicz (1989: 15) claims that the most important of such extralinguistic criteria are:

- 1) the political status of a given etnolect,
- 2) the national and linguistic identity of a given community,
- 3) the feeling of autonomy,
- 4) the existence of literary form and literary traditions,
- 5) the existence of spelling norms,
- 6) the existence of bilingual dictionaries of a given etnolect,
- 7) the translation of the Bible.

Along the same lines Fishman argues that the „functional allocations” of a language and a dialect „are derivable only from societal observation of their uses and users rather than from any characteristics of the codes themselves” (1970: 23). He presents four factors that are helpful in distinguishing *language* from *dialect* (1970: 24-28):

- 1) *standardisation* – means some kind of codification of a language and usually entails the development of grammars, dictionaries and literature. Standardisation also makes it possible to teach the language in a deliberate manner,
- 2) *autonomy* – this very subjective criterion refers to the language which is considered by its speakers to be different from other languages,
- 3) *historicity* – refers to the sense of unity and identity that a particular language provides for a group of people. The bond that a common language gives may be much more important than social, religious or any other ties,
- 4) *vitality* – can be used to distinguish „dead” languages such as *Manx* (the old language of the Isle of Man), or *Cornish*, from „alive” languages. Vitality then, refers to the existence of a living community of speakers.

Table 3. A table drawn up by Steward (qtd. in Fishman 1970: 28): the distribution of attributes in different types of language varieties

ATTRIBUTES*				VARIETY-TYPE
1	2	3	4	
+	+	+	+	Standard
-	+	+	+	Vernacular
-	-	+	+	Dialect
-	-	-	+	Creole
-	-	-	-	Pidgin
+	+	+	-	Classical
+	+	-	-	Artificial

* 1 = standardisation, 2 = autonomy, 3 = historicity, 4 = vitality

It seems evident now that paradoxically language and dialect are not particularly linguistic notions at all and the distinction between language and dialect as well as “the decision what language a dialect belongs to is (...) social and political rather than purely linguistic. (...) A language, it has been remarked, is a dialect with a flag, or even better, with an army” (Spolsky 1998: 30).

4. Social evaluation of dialects

From a linguistic point of view all languages and all varieties of a particular language are equal. From a social point of view, however, there are more and less prestigious varieties (Yule 1985: 182). A “standard” variety has a preferred status and gives certain advantages to those who use it. On the other hand, non-standard varieties usually produce the opposite effect (Wardhaugh 1986: 22). Regional dialects tend to be stigmatised, disparaged and not valued highly, which may lead to a strong prejudice against people who speak them (Freeborn 1993: 73). As Spolsky (1998: 27) notes “it is not always easy to book a room in a northern US hotel by telephone if you have a Black or Southern accent”.

Freeborn (1993: 73) gives three reasons for social disapproval of regional dialects. Firstly, some people believe that regional dialects are incorrect ways of speaking. The British often use Standard English as “a measuring rod” to evaluate regional dialects and RP to evaluate regional accents¹⁴.

Secondly, regional dialects are often thought to be “ugly”. Accents from Newcastle, Liverpool, Glasgow or Birmingham are usually rated negatively and described as “harsh”, “flat” or “not melodious”. On the other hand RP, together with Highland Scots and West Country accents are usually rated highly. It seems, however, that such opinions are based on social connotations of the areas where the accents are located rather than on aesthetic grounds (Freeborn 1993: 74). Thus, rural dialects, associated with natural charm and beauty, are usually rated higher than those associated with heavily urbanised areas (Edwards 1982: 23)¹⁵.

Lastly, some people believe that regional accents are sloppy and imprecise. The glottal stop replacement of [t] is often cited as an example of such “sloppy”

¹⁴ It must be remembered that Standard English and RP are merely a matter of convention. For example, nowadays non-rhotic accents are usually more socially acceptable in Britain than the older rhotic ones. In the United States, however, the situation is quite reversed. In New York, for example, forms with /r/ are perceived by the majority as more prestigious and “correct” (Trudgill 1974: 22). Correctness, therefore, is “a matter of social convention, relative to time and space” (Freeborn 1993: 74).

¹⁵ Interestingly enough, speakers who are not familiar with the social connotations and asked to evaluate aesthetic value of a given accent, often rate the accents of the big industrial cities more highly than RP (Edwards 1982: 23).

use of the language. On closer inspection, however, one can see that the use of the glottal stop in regional varieties is by no means haphazard. As Freeborn notes: "far from being sloppy, the use of the glottal stop is an orderly business, governed by linguistic rules concerning the position of the [t] sound" (1993: 74). Another example supporting the view of sloppiness and imprecision of regional accents is difficulty in distinguishing between pairs of words such as *hill* and *ill*, which stems from so called "h – dropping". RP, however, which is usually not considered sloppy, also displays a similar "imprecision" in pronunciation (e.g. *tower* and *tar* are homophones [ta:]). Moreover, all accents contain pairs of words that are homophones (e.g. *hour* and *our*) the existence of which does not seem to make communication impossible (Freeborn 1993: 74).

Regional dialects tend to be frowned upon in school classes, as they are often considered to be substandard or bad. (Smith [b] 2). Still, there is nothing intrinsic in a dialect, either linguistically or aesthetically, that would make it inferior and give a standard variety a special status. According to the scientific study all languages, and all dialects, are equally 'good' linguistic systems. All of them are „structured, complex and rule governed systems, which are wholly adequate for the needs of their speakers" (Trudgill 1974: 20). What is more, some so called dialects such as Geordie seem, in some respects, superior to Standard English. Let us consider the following quote from a website on Tyneside English.

The Angles and Saxons brought with them to Britain a language which was the forerunner of modern English and indeed it was the Angles of Denmark that gave England its name – meaning the Angle land. Over the centuries the old Anglo Saxon language changed beyond recognition with the gradual introduction of Latin, Norman-French and other foreign influences.

Today the only part of England where the original Anglo-Saxon language has survived to any great extent is of course the North East (www.northeastengland.talk-talk.net/GeordieOrigins.htm).

Geordie is much closer to the original Anglo-Saxon language than Standard English. Does it not seem odd then that we are more inclined to call Geordie a deviation or corruption and Standard English the real English?

REFERENCES

- Beal, J. 1993. *The grammar of Tyneside and Northumbrian English*. In: L. Milroy (ed.). *Real English*. London: Longman, 186-212.
- Bouchard, E. and H. Gilles (eds). 1982. *The Social Psychology of Language 1, Attitudes towards Language Variation, Social and Applied Contexts*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Brazil, D. *The Development of English as a World Language*. <http://thenortheast.com/north-lib>
- Brun, A. 1946. *Parles Régionaux: France Dialectale et Unité Française*. Didier.
- Chambers, J. K. and P. Trudgill. 1980. *Dialectology*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Cheshire, J. 1991. *English around the world – Sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge: CUP.

- Colls, R. *South of the Border: is the North East English?* <http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/looking/south.htm>
- Edwards, J. R. 1982. *Language attitudes and their implications among English speakers*. In: E. Bouchard and H. Gilles (eds). *The Social Psychology of Language 1, Attitudes towards Language Variation, Social and Applied Contexts*. London: Edward Arnold, 20-33.
- Elliot, A. and S. Dobson. 1986. *The Geordie Bible*. Northumberland: Frank Graham Butler Publishing.
- Fishman, J. A. 1970. *Sociolinguistics – a brief introduction*. Newbury House Language Series.
- Foulkes, P. and G. Docherty. (eds). 1999. *Urban Voices*. London: Arnold.
- Freeborn, D., P. French and D. Langford. 1993. *Varieties of English – An Introduction to the Study of Language*. London, New York: The Macmillan Press.
- Graham, F. 1979a. *The New geordie Dictionary*. Butler Publishing.
- Graham, F. 1986. *Geordie Songs, Jokes and Recitations*. UK: Butler and Butler.
- Gumperz, J. J. 1971. *Language in Social Groups*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Harris, J. 1985. Syntactic Variation and Dialekt Divergence. *Journal of Linguistics* 21, 2.
- Haugen, E. 1966. *Dialect, Language, Nation*. In: J. B. Pride and J. Holmes (eds). *Sociolinguistics – Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 97-111.
- Heslop, O. 1892. *Northumberland Words*. London: English Dialect Society.
- Hughes, A. and P. Trudgill. 1979. *English Accents and Dialects. An Introduction to Social and Regional Varieties of British English*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Majewicz, A. F. 1989. *Języki świata i ich klasyfikowanie*. Warsaw: PWN.
- McDonald, C. 1980. *Some Contrasts in Teachers' and Pupils' Language and Aspects of their Relevance in the Classroom*. University of Newcastle: Unpublished Graduate Certificate of Education Dissertation.
- McDonald, C. 1981. *Variation in the Use of Modal verbs with Special Reference to Tyneside English*. University of Newcastle: Unpublished PhD Thesis.
- McDonald, C. 1985. *Notes on Local Syntax*. Mimeo.
- Milroy, L. (ed.). 1993. *Real English*. London: Longman.
- Morrish, J. 1999. The accent that dare not speak its name. *The Independent on Sunday* 21.
- Pellowe, J., G. Nixon and V. McNeany. 1972. *Defining the Dimensionality of Linguistic Variety Space*. University of Newcastle. Unpublished Draft of Paper for Colloquium on Urban Speech Surveying.
- Pride, J. B. and J. Holmes (eds). 1972. *Sociolinguistics – Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.
- Smith, G. (a) *Newcastle English "Geordie"*. <http://www.une.edu.au/langnet/geordie.htm>
- Smith, A. (b) *The History of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*. <http://www.picardie.clara.net/home.htm>
- Spolsky, B. 1998. *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- St Clair, R. N. 1982. *From social history to language attitudes*. In: E. Bouchard and H. Gilles (eds). *The Social Psychology of Language 1, Attitudes towards Language Variation, Social and Applied Contexts*. London: Edward Arnold, 165-174.
- Swan, M. 1980. *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tait, D. 1996. *The Shaping of English*. Tarnów: Progress.
- Trudgill, P. 1974. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to language and society*. Penguin Books.
- Viereck, W. 1966. *Phonematische Analyse des Dialekts von Gateshead-upon-Tyne/Co. Durham*. Hamburg: Cram, de Gruyter & Co.
- Wainwright, M. 2001. Geordie dialect gannin out of fashion. *The Guardian* 6.

- Wardhaugh, R. 1986. *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Page Bross (Norwich).
- Watt, D. and L. Milroy. 1999. *Patterns of Variation and change in three Newcastle vowels: is this dialect levelling?* In: P. Foulkes and G. Docherty (eds). *Urban Voices*. London: Arnold.
- Wells J. C. 1982a. *Accents of English 1: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wells J. C. 1982b. *Accents of English 2: The British Isles*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wells J. C. 1990. *Pronunciation Dictionary*. Longman Group UK.
- Yule, G. 1985. *The Study of Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Website addresses:

<http://members.lycos.co.uk/sixfour/bobjude/index/newc.htm>

<http://perso.infonie.fr/f5oqd/geordies.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/stadium/2577/geordie.htm>

<http://www.thenortheast.fsnet.co.uk/Geordieo.htm>

ABSTRACT

This article aims at presenting the phonetic, lexical and structural differences between the variety spoken in Tyneside (North East England), known as Geordie, and Standard English; and showing that, due to the differences, communication between the users of the varieties is often impossible. This article also aims at answering the question why Geordie is usually classified as a mere dialect of English although, on linguistic grounds (according to e.g. Bloomfield's definition of a language and a dialect (qtd in Majewicz 14)), it should be granted the status of a separate language.