A corpus-based study of some aspects of the Notts subdialect

Jake Flatt – Laura Esteban-Segura
University of Málaga / Spain

Abstract – Rural dialects are slowly disappearing and giving way to larger, more generalised ways of speaking (Trudgill 2004; Kortmann 2008; Beal 2010; Braber 2015). This paper is concerned with the study of the specific subdialect of Nottinghamshire, known as 'Notts' or 'Nottinghamese', and aims at describing its linguistic features. For the purpose, a personalised corpus of approximately 26,000 words has been compiled. The corpus consists of oral texts, which have been transcribed, from a TV show set in the area. The analysis is focused on three facets of the dialectal variation surrounding the county of Nottinghamshire, namely relating to the linguistic levels of phonology, morphosyntax and lexis. Several conclusions have been reached, including the /æ/ phoneme as an indicator of a northern dialect, the usage of the velar nasal plus cluster, as well as the pronunciation of continuous forms and past tense irregularities. In terms of lexical analysis, a justification for the evolution of language use in the area is provided.

Keywords – English dialects; Nottinghamshire; Notts; North/South divide; linguistic variation; spoken language

1. INTRODUCTION

England has 48 ceremonial counties and a total land mass of 130,279 km². This means that if every county had a different dialect, there would be 2,714 km² between them on average. According to Bragg (2011), these changes in dialects can be seen mostly in small towns, villages and parishes that are isolated from the bigger cities of the country to such an extent that locals can distinguish linguistic features from towns between five to ten miles away from their own.

This paper takes into consideration a subdialect of the better-known East Midlands dialect, named as such due to its geographical location. By subdialect we mean a subdivision of a dialect which is more specific to a certain region. The subdialect in question is called 'Notts' (or sometimes 'Nottinghamese') and is located around the area of Nottinghamshire. The Notts subdialect is rather unique, as the region is a boiling pot

of different pronunciations and variations specific to Nottinghamshire. They involve slight changes as one moves around the county and can mean that a word used in one part of Nottinghamshire is not pronounced the same or even recognised at all just 15 to 20 miles away. For now, Notts is alive and well thanks to its many villages and parishes, so much so that it has, within itself, many more subdivisions. As pointed out by Beeton (2005):

> From the flat vowels heard in the south around the Meadows, Sneinton and Clifton, if you move north-east to the Newark – Retford area you can hear an influence of rural Lincolnshire. Go north to Mansfield or Worksop and a Yorkshire twang becomes evident. Head west to Kimberley or Eastwood and Derbyshire begins to affect the accent.

Braber (2015: 32) contends that "there is plenty of variation within Nottinghamshire too — a miner from Mansfield will speak differently from a factory worker in Nottingham or a farmer in Newark." This variation exists due to the historical background surrounding the area. The main influence on the Notts subdialect (especially in terms of grammar and vocabulary) comes from Scandinavian ancestors from over a thousand years ago. With the Viking invasions in the eighth century, the eastern part of the Midlands, formerly part of the Kingdom of Mercia, eventually became the so-called Danelaw. These places became fortified city states, with the most important part (outside of York) being the five boroughs of the Danelaw, one of which was Nottingham (Falkus and Gillingham 1989).

However, the vernacular heard there today is not solely Scandinavian. A lot of the traditionally thought-of Nottinghamshire slang words find their origins as direct borrowings from mainland Europe in the Middle to Early Modern English period. During the mediaeval period, Nottingham was a large trading centre and European merchants (especially from France, Denmark and the Low Countries) established businesses there, leading to the growth of foreign communities (Beeton 2005). These businesses thrived so much that some of their owners' native vocabulary was absorbed over time into the local dialect.

Taking this into account, the main objective of this investigation is to analyse the Nottinghamshire subdialect in order to describe its linguistic features. To this end, a tailored corpus, based on the television show *Cops UK: Bodycam Squad*, has been compiled. The television show has direct and unscripted conversations from police officers in the Nottinghamshire area throughout, turning it into valid data for reliable research.

In terms of the reasoning for this study, the idea was put into motion after listening to a BBC radio production presented by Melvyn Bragg that addressed how regional dialects and accents had been affected in the last century as a result of a drive from speakers to hide their linguistic roots in order to be considered part of the metropolitan set and not to be labelled 'provincial' or 'unfashionable'. Another important factor was the mass migration of people from rural towns to the major cities to find work. In consequence, these rural varieties are slowly disappearing. That is why investigations that document their characteristics, in comparison to the more standardised language, are important to ensure their future preservation. Dialects and, accordingly, subdialects are more than just words and sounds; they are essentially integral to the customs and traditions of their local communities.

The paper is made up of five different sections. After the introduction, Section 2 offers an in-depth review relevant to the subject. In Section 3, the methodology is explained, as well as the problems that were encountered in compiling the corpus. Section 4 deals with the analysis and discussion of the results. Finally, the conclusions to the research are provided in Section 5.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In comparison to subdialects such as Geordie, Scouse or Brummie, the Notts subdialect has received very little attention to date. As Braber (2015: 4) remarks, this could have been because "this variety of language was either not worth studying, or not considered sufficiently different to other regions," whilst adding that she believes neither of these possibilities to be true.

2.1. Rural versus received

The loss of regional dialects to what has come to be known as 'Standard English' is not based so much on the geographical features, but rather on the socio-economic characteristics of the speaker. The Notts subdialect, by contrast, is very much a geographic one. Most of the 1,237,477 speakers of the region (915,477 of them) are located in the towns, villages and parishes of the county, which means that this subdialect is more rural/regional than urban. Public interest in regional dialects is keener than ever. According to Joan C. Beal, Emeritus Professor of English Language at the University of

Sheffield, features of dialect are still clear markers of regional and local identity (Beal 2010: 7). She asserts that the idea of subdialects and dialects dying out is "nothing new," as many of those present in twenty-first century urban life

> are themselves the product of the same levelling and diffusing processes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when […] 'push' and 'pull' factors […] caused people to move from the countryside into rapidly expanding industrial towns and cities (Beal 2010: 2.)

According to Joseph Wright in his *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898–1905) and *English Dialect Grammar* (1905), the continuous change in accents was at first (at least during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) accredited not to the standardisation of English from migration to cities, but to the rising levels of education in the countryside, towns and districts, as well as the new ways of communication. This would make sense, as the standardised levels of English grammar were purposely made this way to unconsciously soften features of regional accents, making them less noticeable to someone that was not from the same region as the speaker. There are, nevertheless, local features that are retained, but they are almost always phonological. This is because regional lexicon and syntax are often viewed as 'incorrect' and refrained from.

2.2. Phonological variation in the Notts subdialect

Phonological differences are the first and easiest changes that happen in a deviation from the established dialect. This means that they are also the most straightforward to document and to record. Nottingham is around 50 kilometres above the generalised isogloss that divides what most native speakers call 'the North/South divide' (Trudgill 1990: 69).

2.2.1. The /æ/ phoneme

The most important indication of a northern speaker in modern England, Nottingham included, is the vowel sound used in words like *path* and *bath*, with it being pronounced with the phoneme /æ/ in the north and with the phoneme /ɑ:/ in the south (Trudgill 1990: 69). There are even examples of local vocabulary which contain both sounds: the word *nanar* meaning 'grandmother' (Braber 2015: 19) and *tarr-ar*, meaning 'bye bye' (Braber 2015: 26). Although they are very much features that divide the country, these variations

are still relatively new according to Beal (2010: 13), with both actually originating in the southern part of the country 300 years ago.

2.2.2. The /ʊ/ phoneme

During the Shakespearian era, words such as *but*, *flood* and *glove* would have been pronounced with the /ʊ/ phoneme, as most of the workers that arrived in London in the seventeenth century travelled downwards from the East Midlands area (Beal 2010: 13).

According to Dobson (1957: 585), it was around the middle of the seventeenth century that the /ʊ/ sound started to be pronounced differently in the south. The northern pronunciation of this phoneme means that homophones exist on a much greater scale in comparison to what is pronounced in the south, with pairs of words such as *could* and *cud*, *puss* and *pus*, and *put* and *putt* all having the same vowel. These homophones are not present in Standard British English, since the first word is pronounced with /ʊ/ but the second word is pronounced with the /ʌ/ phoneme.

2.2.3. The velar nasal plus cluster

There is a tendency for speakers on the outer parts of western Nottinghamshire (the closest part to Derbyshire) to pronounce *ng* as a cluster: /ŋg/, which Wells (1982: 365) refers to as 'velar nasal plus'. He argues that, in some northern accents, words with this cluster "have a velar plosive phonetically present after the nasal." This variant can help speakers differentiate with more ease pairs like *thin/thing*, *thin/think*, *kin/king*, *win/wing*, *win/wink*, *sin/sing* and *sin/sink*. Trudgill (1990: 58–59) took this into account when describing the velar nasal plus isoglosses and used it as one of the defining characteristics that helped separate the western part of the East Midlands from the north-eastern, as well as the outer part of Nottinghamshire from Nottingham city centre.

2.2.4. Vocalisation of the /l/ phoneme

Another dialectal feature, found in Nottinghamshire, is what has been commonly described as the 'vocalisation of /l/', which entails that /l/ becomes /ʊ/ (or sometimes /w/), thus creating a diphthong when it appears after a vowel (as illustrated in some pronunciations of the words *milk* and *old*). This vocalisation seems to have first started in

the south of England, especially around the area of greater London and then climbed up the country (Beal 2010: 20). Although some scholars have predicted that it will become the norm in the next generation of speakers (Wells 1982: 259), it has recently been argued that the vocalisation of /l/ is blocked in areas where there is not clear-dark /l/ distinction (Britain 2009: 140).

2.2.5. *H*-dropping

Another prominent variation that originated in London is the phenomenon of '*h*-dropping', which is thought to have originated in lower England and occurs when the /h/ of Standard English is absent. Since the eighteenth century, *h*-dropping has been regarded more as social rather than geographical variation in the English language. Speakers who do not pronounce the sound are thought to belong to the lower classes of society, a stigma which, according to Wells, is still "the single most powerful pronunciation shibboleth in England" (1982: 254). This was something that writers like Dublin-born George Bernard Shaw found almost comical. One of his most famous quotes about pronunciation being more social than geographical can be found at the beginning of the preface for *Pygmalion*, which was first published in 1912: "[i]t is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him." However, recent investigations show that *h*-dropping "does not show any sign that it may be receding. On the contrary, […] it survives as a clear marker of social identity" (Burbano-Elizondo 2008: 192), although this has been ascribed to a rejection of the prescriptive side of language in general, as well as to the decline in popularity of Received Pronunciation.

2.3. *Morphosyntactic variation in the Notts subdialect*

As mentioned above, the scarcity of investigations into the Notts subdialect has made it hard to find reliable and objective data. One documented reason for the lack of studies dealing with, in this case, regional morphosyntactic features has to do with the "difficulty of collecting 'natural' data," since many of these features "are restricted to specific pragmatic contexts, and so can prove elusive" (Beal 2010: 27). In this section, the most distinguishable and/or salient morphological and syntactic differences of the Notts subdialect from Standard English are addressed.

2.3.1. Verbal ellipsis

Whereas in the standardised English grammar, the act of creating a question requires the use of a (semi-)auxiliary verb, the Notts subdialect sometimes omits this requirement and therefore creates no inversion of SVO (subject-verb-object) as a result of verbal ellipsis, as in the following example:

(1) a. What are you doing? (General grammar)

   b. What you doing? (Notts grammar)

Something similar can be observed in yes/no questions. The standard representation would need an auxiliary verb, as in *Do you get the point?* This also seems to be ignored, since in Nottinghamshire it is not uncommon to hear a phrase like *You get the point?*

2.3.2. Contractions

Since Nottinghamshire is in the centre of England, it is normal for it to receive southern influential features in the grammar. The most interesting of these involve contractions in both negative and interrogative sentences. In the negative sentences, the use of the word *ain't* as the negated form of the verbs *be* and *have* is usually considered a characteristic that started in the south of England (Beal 2010: 26).

Another instance is a tertiary contraction, in which the auxiliary and the negator are contracted (Petyt 1985: 184), the most common being *in't it* and *innit*, found in examples such as *In't it hers?* or *Innit hers?* In the latter, it is common for the initial consonant of the pronoun to be dropped, creating a fluid sound similar to /ɪnɪtɛrz/.

2.3.3. Pronouns

Even though most speakers categorise dialectal grammar as incorrect, in some cases it functions more effectively than its Standard English counterpart. This is illustrated when differentiating between the second-person singular and plural personal pronouns; in traditional grammar *you* is used for both. However, one variation of *you* appears in the shape of a plural *yous(e)*, which can be found throughout the lower part of the north, including Sheffield, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, and interestingly, it is most commonly heard north of the English border in Scotland (Beal 2010: 30, 41). In this sense, Wales (1996: 19) claims that "many dialect speakers […] have felt the loss of a singular-

plural distinction in standard English to be a disadvantage, and so have initiated new plurals."

There may be no grammatical feature more characteristic to the Nottinghamshire region than the reflexive pronouns. This is due, firstly, to the pronunciation of the word *self* as /sɛn/ and its application to the end of the pronouns, so *myself* and *yourself* become *mesen* and *yoursen*/*thysen*. Similarly, we find the use of *ourn*, *yourn* and *theirn* instead of the standard *ours*, *yours* and *theirs*, respectively (Braber 2015: 18–29).

2.3.4. Irregular past tense paradigms

The past tenses show, even in Standard English, a high level of irregularity regarding its morphological patterns for the irregular verbs. There are verbs that have the same form in all their tenses (for instance, *cut/cut/cut*), with others presenting a vocalic change in the stem of each verb tense (*drink/drank/drunk*). There are verbs that use the same form for both the past simple and the past participle (for instance, *catch/caught/caught*), and then there are verbs that have the same form in the present and the past participle but an ablaut change in the past simple (for example, *come/came/come*). In addition to this, there are verbs that suffer ablaut changes in the past simple and then add a final consonant (normally *-n*) in the past participle (for example, *know/knew/known*).

These inconsistencies of verb tenses become even more complicated in the case of regional dialects. The range of possible changes stays relatively similar, but the verb distribution can vary altogether. Anderwald (2009: 33) notes that there is a "tendency to level to /ʊ/ in verbs like *do*, *come*, and *run*" in the past simple and past participle, resulting in them both being pronounced the same.

On the other hand, a study undertaken under *The Survey of British Dialect Grammar* investigated the use of past simple and past participle verbal forms and concluded that speakers employed *done* as the past simple with a frequency of 67 per cent in the East Midlands and 60.5 per cent in the lower north of England (Cheshire *et al*. 1993: 78).

Although it is rather rare in the eastern part of the Midlands, *I is…* can be used as the conjugation of the verb *be*. This does not happen further south than Leicester and cuts off around the northern part of Yorkshire. According to Anderwald (2009: 107), it is the consequence of the considerable influence that the Viking Norwegian and Danish settlements exerted on the area before the Norman Conquest and affects both the present

and past tenses of the verb. It is worth pointing out that almost every accent in British English varies in terms of the verb *be*, whose forms in the past simple can be levelled to *was* (*I was*; *you was*; *he/she/it was*; *they was*) or to *were* (*I were*; *you were*; *he/she/it were*; *they were*).

The exact locations of these phenomena are quite vague due to the overlapping nature of language, but there are certain generalisations in terms of usage. As reported by Cheshire *et al*. (1993: 72), levelling is "less widespread […] in the northern part of England."

2.4. Lexical variation in the Notts subdialect

It goes without saying that trying to quote all the vernacular vocabulary used in the county would be impossible and naive. As the trends change, so does the way in which words are used. The main influence on the lexicon of Nottinghamshire seems to be its pre-Norman ancestry (Braber 2015: 31).

2.4.1. Place names

Interestingly, when Nottingham was part of the Kingdom of Mercia, it was originally called *Tigguo Cobauc* in Old Brythonic, which meant 'a place of cave dwellings'. From there, it became *Snotengaham* during the late ninth century and later appeared in the Domesday records as *Snotingeham* (Braber 2015: 34), meaning 'the homestead' (*ham*, from Old English *hām*) of the people (*inge*, from Old Norse *inge*) of Snot, the name of the chieftain. More examples, such as *Mansfield* and *Beeston* can also be found within the boundaries of the modern-day county: *field* comes from Old English 'open-ground' (Braber 2015: 33) and *ton* means 'farmstead'.

In terms of Old Norse suffixes, the most important one is *by*, which means 'dwelling' or 'town' (see the *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *bī*, n.). This can be found throughout the East Midlands in general, with cities such as Derby and towns such a Thoresby. There are, on the other hand, two Danish loanwords that have, for a millennium, been embedded into the places that the Vikings left behind; these words are *beck* and *brook*. Although most of the loanwords now seem rather archaic, both *beck* and *brook* are still used today, competing with the Anglo-Saxon word *stream* (Beal 2010: 55).

The importance of these words is confirmed by the sheer amount of town names that have adopted them, with *Ockbrook* and *Cressbrook* in Derbyshire, as well as *Willowbrook*, *Maplebeck*, *Holbeck*, *Shirebrook* and *Leabrooks* in Nottinghamshire, to name just a few.

2.4.2. Mining vocabulary

Nottinghamshire has had a long history of mining activity; the first mines in the region were set up by the Romans. They mined there because of the advantages of being close to the river Trent, which means 'trespasser' in Celtic, as it often floods. With the growing scarcity of wood from the sixteenth century onwards, the demand stimulated developments in the mines. In 1550, approximately 15,000 tons of coal were mined in the area. By 1950, this had become 21,600,000 tons and was the primary employer. This increase had a significant impact on the lexicon, with more technical terms such as *stint* 'work hours', *scruffs* 'work clothes', *rammel* 'nonsense' and *gobbins* 'waste' becoming familiar to the whole region. One particular technical word that became used in every household is the word *cob*. Originally, *cob* or *cobbles* were considered to be 'medium-sized bits of coal' (Braber 2015: 9), but they later became the reference to bread rolls in the area and still are today.

A peculiar term from Dutch is *snap*,[1] which in Nottinghamshire meant a 'mid-morning snack' and evolved to mean 'the food you take to work with you for a meal'. In other parts of England and Scotland, its meaning as a verb was 'to eat hastily' and, as a noun, 'a hasty meal', as well as those meanings related to biting found in Standard English (Beal 2010: 59). One hypothesis into the semantics of this word is that it was used to portray that the miners had very short break periods during shifts, implying that they had to eat as fast as possible before being called back to their positions in the mines.

2.4.3. Greetings and affectionate vocabulary

Due to the mining importance in the county and the historical variety of the inhabitants, the way that people address one another and speak about their family has also been affected. A prevalent greeting that can be heard within the boundaries of Nottinghamshire is *Ey up mi duck!* The etymology of this phrase is unknown, although most experts

---

[1] Words of Dutch origin can be found in the East of the country as a result of language contact favoured by sea routes between the two areas (Beal 2010: 58).

identify it as being a modern twist on Middle English, with *ey* evolving from *eie* ('eye', *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *eie*, n. [1]) and *duck* meaning 'chief, master', as if to suggest a raising of the sight from the ground in order to greet someone. The term *duck* in Nottingham is not bound to any gender and can be used for both men and women, whether they are known to the speaker or not (Braber 2015: 11). *Bogger* is also a word that can be interchanged with *duck*. Braber (2015: 8) refers to this term as a "mild and affectionate word" that does not have sexual connotations. She also adds that it could be the evolution of the Middle English word *bugge*, meaning 'imaginary monster'.

Other words that can be heard frequently in the region are *lad* or *lass* depending on whether the recipient is male or female, respectively. Finally, a very common affectionate word in Nottinghamshire, especially among the older generations, is *cock*. This is thanks to its use in the mines, as it meant 'a fellow coalminer' or 'the person in front of you'. Despite its popularity, the word has been in decline since the 1980s and now that the last mine, Thoresby, has been closed since July 2015, the term itself is set to decline even more, maybe even to the point of disappearing altogether.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section is concerned with the methodology adopted for the present research. It describes, the source of the data, a TV series, and provides information on the compilation of the corpus.

3.1. Information about the series

The data that have served as input to carry out this study come from the TV show *Cops UK: Bodycam Squad*, which was first aired in the United Kingdom on 4 November 2016. It is still viewable on *Really*, a British television channel, and new seasons are being produced every year. The show is classed as being 'raw-cut TV' because it takes real footage of police incidents from all around the country in every episode, with every season being based in different regions of the UK.

Seasons one and two were filmed with the help of the Staffordshire police, whilst season three (the season that has been selected in this study) focuses on the efforts and contributions of the Nottinghamshire police. The episodes that have been taken into

consideration were aired in Britain from 7 May to 25 June 2018. This meant that every Monday the show could be seen for a total of eight weeks. In terms of the duration of the shows, after eliminating the advertisement breaks, a total of around 44 minutes of usable conversations was left.

The reason for choosing this show over others has to do with the naturalness of the language. The majority of shows that are on television nowadays have scripts that are performed by actors. This scripted acting should not be considered authentic language, as it lacks many of the stutters, mispronunciations of words and what many consider to be incorrect syntax that comes naturally. In order to produce a reliable source for the study, an observation of language was needed, rather than a survey or a questionnaire and the show itself guarantees authentic, real-life conversation. This is corroborated by the fact that all scenes in the episodes were filmed by cameras attached to the uniforms of police officers. Thus, they were recording the incidents to which they were asked to attend or via the police officer retelling the events from memory with the images being shown to the viewers.

3.2. Compiling the corpus

During the recording, all the names of the police officers that were involved in the show were documented. We sent an email to staff at *Really* (the broadcasters) to see if they could legally provide any information about the regions the officers were from but, unfortunately, no reply was received. The first difficulty arose here: by this time, the recordings had been completed and the transcriptions were around 55 per cent finished, reaching an overall word count of around 40,000 words.

It was at this point that one of the police officers said that they were in fact from Derby and that they had moved to Nottingham two years previously. Due to this, and after looking into the other names and that of the narrator, which could be found on the internet, it was discovered that the narrator of the show, Joe Tucker, (to which around 50% of the words belonged to) was from Leicester. This meant that his dialogues could not be used, reducing the number of words that would be included in the corpus significantly.

From the original 25 officers that were documented as speakers on the show, only the speech of nine of them could finally be used since, in one way or another, they had lived in Nottinghamshire for most of their lives, all of their lives or, in the case of PC

Keith Parks, been born in the city of Nottingham, moved down to London to become a police officer and then moved back to Nottingham when he had the chance to further his career. The officers (both male and female) whose speech has been analysed are the following: Response Officer L. Barlow, PC I. Blackstock, PC N. Clarke, PC M. Daley, Response Officer T. Hutchinson, PC D. Knotley, PC L. Marshall, PC K. Parks and Response Officer D. Weaver.

As mentioned above, this study has employed the dialogues of both police officers and the general public that were involved in the incidents, but because of a lack of certainty surrounding many of the speakers, only those that stated that they had lived or were brought up in Nottinghamshire have been considered to provide reliable data for the study.

The final numbers in terms of the recordings and transcriptions are as follows: from the eight hours of footage, 25,944 words were obtained, which included the names of the speakers. When the names had been removed, the final number stood at 25,719.

From all the corpus-making software tools available, *Sketch Engine* was chosen for its simplicity, flexibility and accessibility (cf. Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014).[2] In order to upload the data to the website, the transcriptions had to be transformed into a TXT file. Once this was performed, it was submitted as a new corpus.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The analysis and discussion of results have been divided into three separate sections devoted to phonology, morphosyntax and lexis, respectively, in order to offer more insights into the subdialect of Nottinghamshire.

4.1. Phonology results

4.1.1. The /æ/ phoneme

In the TV show, words such as *path*, *bath* and *castle* are always pronounced with the short phoneme /æ/, as mentioned in Section 2.2.1. Even though there are very few examples of them in the corpus, we also find words such as *laugh*, *graft* 'to work' or *rascal*, which

---

[2] See https://www.sketchengine.eu/

also make use of /æ/, justifying the use of this phoneme in this type of words as the most important indicator of a northern accent (Trudgill 1990: 69).

4.1.2. The /ʊ/ phoneme

As for the phoneme /ʊ/, Dobson (1957) and Beal (2010) have argued that it is the only *u-*sound used in the region and this seems to be in accordance with the findings. The standard or southern pronunciation /ʌ/ for *u* is not found, the /ʊ/ phoneme being employed in words such as *up* (124 tokens), *but* (113 tokens), *us* (76 tokens), *could* (59 tokens) and *put* (44 tokens).

4.1.3. The velar nasal plus cluster

In terms of the velar nasal plus cluster, out of the 106 instances from the corpus containing *-nk* (cf. Table 1), only seven (6.60%) —all of them examples with the word *think*— are pronounced without the cluster. The cluster is present in all occurrences of *thinking*.

Word	Raw frequency	Normalised frequency[3]	Cluster %
Think	66	256.61	89.39%
Drinking	13	50.54	100%
Drink	9	34.99	100%
Thank	9	34.99	100%
Thinking	9	34.99	100%

Table 1: Velar nasal plus cluster with *-nk*

If we look at /ŋg/ (cf. Table 2), the results are rather different and on a larger scale, with 580 occurrences of *-ng*. When the word is a verb in the continuous form (427 tokens), 93.91 per cent (401 tokens) of them suffer the effects of elision, meaning that the final /g/ is eliminated, leaving just the phoneme /ŋ/ or even /n/. In examples including *thing* (111 tokens) —mostly *something*, *nothing*, *anything* and *everything*— 76 of them show the same effects of elision as the verbs in the gerund. The words *thing* and *things* on their own (35 tokens) do not show elision, but they represent only 31.54 per cent of the total words including *thing*. The words *wrong* (18 tokens), *long* (15 tokens) and *Nottingham* (9 tokens) all display the cluster.

---

[3] Raw values have been normalised by 100,000 words.

Word	Raw frequency	Normalised frequency	Cluster %
Gerund verbs	427	1,660.25	6.09%
Words including *thing*	111	431.58	31.54%
Wrong	18	69.98	100%
Long	15	58.32	100%
Nottingham	9	34.99	100%

Table 2: Velar nasal plus cluster with *-ng*

4.1.4. Vocalisation of the /l/ phoneme

In terms of the vocalisation of /l/, the results cannot be considered significant because of the few examples attested in the corpus, with *talk*, *walk* and *old* getting only a total of five utterances. However, these tokens favour vocalisation.

4.1.5. *H*-dropping

Probably, the most interesting phonological result has to do with *h*-dropping, which has been regarded as vulgar and as an indicator of a low social class for over 200 years. In total, there are 38 types of words in the study that start with *h*, with 1,497 overall tokens. From the original types, words like *hours*, *honest* and *honestly* were removed as the *h* is also silent in Standard British English.

Overall, *h*-dropping is less common than pronouncing the consonant, but it seems that the words in which *h*-dropping occurs with the highest frequency are monosyllabic with a short vowel, instead of those including a long vowel sound or a diphthong. As shown in Table 3, the words with the highest amount of *h*-dropping are pronouns, with *he* losing its first sound more than any other (142 out of 382 tokens).

Word	Raw frequency of words with initial *h*	*H*-dropping raw frequency	*H*-dropping normalised frequency	*H*-dropping %
He	382	142	552.12	37.17%
Him	122	37	143.86	30.32%
His	96	29	112.75	30.2%
Her	55	18	69.98	32.72%
Himself	6	1	3.88	16.66%

Table 3: *H*-dropping in pronouns

However, *h*-dropping is not something that is just pronoun-based in the corpus. As shown in Table 4, words such as *house*, *home*, *hands*, *hurt* and *head* exhibit *h*-dropping at least

20 per cent of times, and the word *hospital*, with 80 per cent, shows *h*-dropping four out of five times.

Word	Raw frequency of words with initial *h*	*H*-dropping raw frequency	*H*-dropping normalised frequency	*H*-dropping %
House	36	9	34.99	25%
Home	36	8	31.1	22.22%
Hands	12	3	11.66	25%
Hurt	9	3	11.66	33.33%
Head	9	2	7.77	22.22%
Hospital	5	4	15.55	80%

Table 4: Nouns with highest rates of *h*-dropping

4.2. Morphosyntax results

4.2.1. Verbal ellipsis

Morphosyntactic variations from Standard English are generally not accepted and often viewed as incorrect. One of these variations is verbal ellipsis with question words. In the corpus, all questions with verbal ellipsis were directed to the second-person singular. It seems that this is only applicable when it is a direct question to a person in front of the speaker. The frequencies of question words in interrogative sentences are provided in Table 5.

Question word	No verbal ellipsis raw frequency	Verbal ellipsis raw frequency	Verbal ellipsis normalised frequency	Verbal ellipsis %
What	31	5	19.44	16.12%
Where	15	0	0	0%
When	2	0	0	0%
How	11	1	3.88	9.09%
Why	15	2	7.77	13.33%
Who	4	1	3.88	25%

Table 5: Frequencies of interrogatives with question words

4.2.2. Irregular past tense paradigms

It has been argued (Cheshire *et al*. 1993; Kortmann 2008; Anderwald 2009) that the use of the past participle of irregular verbs as a past simple form is a common northern feature, especially with the verb *do*. As illustrated in Table 6, the figures for the use of the verb *do* as the past participle are considerably higher than those for the past simple.

Tense	Raw frequency	Normalised frequency
Base form	294	1,143.12
Past simple	29	112.75
Past participle	41	159.41

Table 6: Frequencies of the tenses of the verb *do*

There are four instances, out of 41, in which the participle is used as if it was auxiliary *did*. Two examples are provided below (in bold for emphasis):

(2) We **done** it here.

(3) Look at me, who **done** this to you?

The other 131 types of verbs other than *do* were also examined in the corpus to determine whether they behaved like *do*. Of them, only 21 are irregular and contain different forms for the past simple and past participle, but only three are used with the past participle as past simple (see Table 7). Examples (4)–(6) are given below by way of illustration of this (in bold for emphasis):

(4) Evening pal, you **seen** the Joker?

(5) She **come** round here.

(6) I **rung** my ex-wife, you see.

Past participle	Raw frequency	Used as past simple raw frequency	Used as past simple normalised frequency
Come	68	3	11.66
Seen	24	1	3.88
Rung	3	1	3.88

Table 7: Frequencies of *come*, *seen* and *rung*

4.3. Lexis results

In terms of lexicon, 210 types of nouns are documented in the series, with a total of 2,788 tokens. Due to the TV show capturing moments before, during and after suspects or members of the general public are arrested, most of the topics of the conversations are rather trivial and vary between each person. There is, however, a pattern that is persistent, with most talking about the reason for their arrest. Some of these reasons include theft of technological items, domestic abuse or being in possession of illegal drugs (especially marijuana and cocaine). As previously mentioned, the show is based on the daily activities of police officers and this is reflected in the most recurrent nouns (*car*, *police*, *door*,

house, *address*, *drugs*, *officer*, *road* and *home*, among others). Nevertheless, a few regional words have been retrieved from the corpus and are discussed in what follows.

4.3.1. Mining vocabulary

As mentioned in Section 2.4.2, the history surrounding the region of Nottinghamshire has had an impact on the vocabulary, including the professions from previous generations, which had created a mining vernacular in the county. This was true at the time when mining was important to the East Midlands in general, but it seems that the progressive decline of the jobs in which this lexicon was used has meant that the vocabulary has also been lost/forgotten. Of the words dealt with in Section 2.4.2 (*stint*, *scruffs*, *rammel*, *gobbins*, *cob* and *snap*), only *snap* is attested once in the corpus.

4.3.2. Greetings and affectionate vocabulary

As far as greetings are concerned, even though *Ey up mi duck!* is generally regarded as the most common greeting in the county, the data show otherwise. As shown in Table 8, *Ey up* is still the main opener to the greeting (with *hello*, *good morning/afternoon/evening*, all scoring under 10 tokens), but the way in which it relates to the affectionate noun seems to have changed with the times like the mining vocabulary, with *mate* being the new go-to term.

Ey up collocation	Raw frequency	Normalised frequency
Ey up (ø)	13	50.54
Ey up (mate)	7	27.21
Ey up (duck)	2	7.77
Ey up (Sir)	2	7.77

Table 8: Frequencies of *Ey up* with nouns

In relation to affectionate nouns without the opening *Ey up*, some of them are shown in Table 9. Something of importance here is the number of occurrences of *mate*, more than eight times that of *duck*. Moreover, with the absence of *lass*, the term *Mrs* appears when referring to women. It should also be stated that *duck* is used four times for men and five times for women.

Noun	Raw frequency	Normalised frequency
Mate	75	291.61
Lad	28	108.86
Duck	9	34.99
Cock	5	19.44
Mrs	5	19.44

Table 9: Frequencies of affectionate nouns without *Ey up*

5. CONCLUSIONS

Even though several conclusions may be reached in the analysis reported in this paper, the restrictions imposed by the type of corpus, in which the group of speakers share profession, must be borne in mind. Thus, the findings are limited to a specific register of the Nottinghamshire subdialect, namely spoken, informal and dialogic.

As far as phonology is concerned, the claim that the /æ/ phoneme is one of the best indicators of a northern dialect is in line with our results. In terms of the velar nasal plus cluster, the data have shown that, depending on whether there are compound words involved, the velar may or may not be pronounced. Moreover, verbs in the continuous form oppose the general idea of all the letters being pronounced in the north. Another finding has to do with the elision found when the single form *thing* is part of a compound word.

Regarding *h*-dropping, this has traditionally been considered vulgar and pertaining to the speech of the lower classes of English society for centuries, but it is shown to still be in use. The discovery that monosyllabic words are less reluctant towards *h*-dropping needs further investigation; what is clear, however, is that *h*-dropping is not a phenomenon that will likely decrease or fade in the future.

As for the morphosyntactic issues analysed, the use of past participles like *done* as past simple tenses has been corroborated, although the data suggest that the phenomenon is not very common. On the other hand, the findings related to the formation of questions with verbal ellipsis are inconclusive, with the only real observable point of interest being that, in our corpus, all questions made with interrogatives are always addressing the second-person singular in a direct way. Although further investigation would be required, this could possibly indicate preferences involving the formation of adverbial interrogative questions in northern dialects and subdialects.

Finally, the lexical analysis has led to what we consider to be the biggest breakthrough. It is reasonable to say that the younger generations (the most likely to commit crimes or work against it as police officers and, therefore, appear in the series) have put aside the traditional mining vocabulary of the area and, in its place, have adopted the more expansive and multicultural words from bigger cities like London, Manchester and Bristol. The lack of terms related to mining could be a direct consequence of the fact that the activity has not occurred in the area for several decades, meaning that the language has evolved at the same pace as the demand for jobs in different sectors, but it could also be due to the type of register analysed.

The increased use of *mate* to refer to someone in a non-threatening way was seen from both police officers and suspects, proving that it was not just one-sided but an integral part of the conversation to build trust. The absence of words referring to women can be explained by the scarcity of women involved in the series more than by linguistic reasons.

REFERENCES

Anderwald, Lieselotte. 2009. *The Morphology of English Dialects: Verb Formation in Non-Standard English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beal, Joan C. 2010. *An Introduction to Regional Englishes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Beeton, John. 2005. *Origins of Nottinghamese*. Nottingham: BBC Nottingham. http://www.bbc.co.uk/nottingham/content/articles/2005/01/04/features_about_nottinghamshire_nottinghamese_by_john_beeton_feature.shtml (15 April, 2021.)

Braber, Natalie. 2015. *Nottinghamshire Dialect*. Sheffield: Bradwell Books.

Bragg, Melvyn. 2011. *Archive on 4: RP RIP?* Manchester: BBC Radio 4. https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b012zy1c (15 April, 2021.)

Britain, David. 2009. One foot in the grave? Dialect death, dialect contact, and dialect birth in England. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 196–197: 121–155.

Burbano-Elizondo, Lourdes. 2008. *Language Variation and Identity in Sunderland*. Sheffield: The University of Sheffield dissertation.

Cheshire, Jenny, Viv Edwards and Pamela Whittle. 1993. Non-standard English and dialect levelling. In James Milroy and Lesley Milroy eds. *Real English: The Grammar of English Dialects in the British Isles*. London: Routledge, 53–96.

Dobson, Eric John. 1957. *English Pronunciation 1500–1700.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Falkus, Malcolm and John Gillingham eds. 1989. *Historical Atlas of Britain*. London: Kingfisher Books.

Kilgarriff, Adam, Vít Baisa, Jan Bušta, Miloš Jakubíček, Vojtěch Kovář, Jan Michelfeit, Pavel Rychlý and Vít Suchomel. 2014. The Sketch Engine: Ten years on. *Lexicography* 1: 7–36.

Kortmann, Bernd. 2008. Synopsis: Morphological and syntactic variation in the British Isles. In Bernd Kortmann and Clive Upton eds. *Varieties of English 1: The British Isles*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 478–495.

Middle English Dictionary. 1952–2001. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn and Robert E. Lewis eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Online edition available at the *Middle English Compendium*. 2000–2018. Frances McSparran *et al.* ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med.

Petyt, Keith Malcolm. 1985. *Dialect and Accent in Industrial West Yorkshire*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Shaw, George Bernard. 1912. *Pygmalion*. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3825/3825-h/3825-h.htm (15 April, 2021.)

Trudgill, Peter. 1990. *The Dialects of England*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Trudgill, Peter. 2004. *New-Dialect Formation: The Inevitability of Colonial Englishes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Wales, Katie. 1996. *Personal Pronouns in Present-Day English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, John Christopher. 1982. *Accents of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wright, Joseph. 1898–1905. *The English Dialect Dictionary: Being the Complete Vocabulary of all Dialect Words still in Use, or Known to have Been in Use, during the last two hundred Years*. London: Henry Frowde.

Wright, Joseph. 1905. *The English Dialect Grammar: Comprising the Dialects of England, of the Shetland and Orkney Islands, and of those Parts of Scotland, Ireland & Wales Where English Is Habitually Spoken*. London: Henry Frowde.

Corresponding author
Laura Esteban-Segura
University of Málaga
Faculty of Philosophy and Arts
Department of English, French and German
Campus de Teatinos
29071 Málaga
Spain
Email: lesteban@uma.es