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Dialect as heritage

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Introduction

In his foundational paper on super-diversity, Vertovec acknowledges that “diversity is endemic to Britain”, but argues that the notion of “super-diversity” is “intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced” (2007: 1026, 1024). ‘Superdiversity’ (now sufficiently naturalised to have lost its hyphen) is a recently coined term for a recent phenomenon, but encapsulates a sense of continuity: it is the extent and nature of diversity, rather than the existence of diversity that is unprecedented.

As the majority of chapters in this handbook demonstrate, studies of language and superdiversity usually concern multilingual communities. This chapter, by contrast, deals with dialectal diversity and, more specifically, the effect of superdiversity on attitudes to regional dialects. Dialectal differences within languages reflect earlier diversities, such as the Scandinavian settlement of northern and eastern England, but are often perceived as threatened by present-day superdiversity. Regional dialects are considered as part of the intangible heritage of the areas in which they are (or, most likely, were) spoken, while new varieties such as Multicultural London English (Cheshire et al. 2011) or Kiezdeutsch (Wiese 2012) emerging in superdiverse cities, are popularly dismissed as youth argots threatening to supplant older dialects. In this chapter, I argue that the dissemination of discourse about (and in) regional dialects reflects resistance to a perceived loss of dialectal diversity and regional/local distinctiveness in the face of superdiversity.

The first section of this chapter provides a historical overview of attitudes to dialectal diversity in Britain, and more specifically in England. While evidence for this diversity can be found in the earliest records of what we, with hindsight, call Old English, there is no evidence of speakers’ awareness of dialectal diversity until a standard variety of English emerges against which regional dialects are, at various points in history, viewed as barbaric and degenerate or pure and authentic.

Of course, as Blommaert and Rampton point out “named languages […] are ideological constructions” (2011: 4), and the same can be said about dialects. The second section of this chapter sets out the theoretical approaches most appropriate for investigating the relationship between regional dialect and heritage. The most important of these approaches are concerned with indexicality and enregisterment (Agha 2003, 2007) and with commodification (Fairclough 1992, Heller 2003). These all consider the ways in which forms of language come to be associated with specific qualities such as authenticity, and consequently have the potential to acquire a market value.
The chapter then goes on to discuss a number of case studies involving the commodification of dialect in the context of tourism and heritage. These illustrate the ways in which regional dialects have been re-evaluated in recent years in the wake of superdiversity. The final subsection deals more specifically with the museum sector’s incorporation of dialect into its interpretation of heritage, and the ways in which sociolinguists have collaborated with museum and heritage professionals in these projects.

Historical perspectives

The first citation in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the word *dialect* meaning “variety of a language” is from 1566: before then, the word was used with the meaning “dialectic”. There is early evidence for awareness of regional differences in English, and of evaluative attitudes to these. Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*, written in Latin in the early fourteenth century, and translated into English by John of Trevisa between 1385 and 1387, comments on the differences between northern and southern varieties. Higden’s original remarks on the unintelligibility of northern English to southerners are embellished by Trevisa as follows:

> All the language of the Northumbrians, and especially at York, is so sharp, slitting and unshaped, that we Southern men may that language unnethe (=‘hardly’) understand.
> 
> *(Higden, trans. Trevisa [1385], 1482)*

Nevertheless, such metalinguistic comments are rare before the middle of the sixteenth century. This is because awareness and evaluation of dialect depends on contact between speakers of different varieties and the existence of an elite or standard variety against which others can be judged wanting, and it is not until the sixteenth century that a standard variety of English is fully established. From the mid-sixteenth century, we begin to see comments in which English spoken outside the metropolis is described on the whole in negative terms, but with an acknowledgement that some dialects are older and more authentic. Puttenham, for instance, provides the following advice to the aspiring poet:

> Neither shall he take the termes of Northern-men, such as they use in dayly talke, whether they be noblemen or gentlemen, or of their best clarkeis all is a matter: nor in effect any speach used beyond the river of Trent, though no man can deny but that theirs is the purer English Saxon at this day, yet it is not so Courtly nor so currant as our Southerne English.
> 
> *(1589)*

Further evidence for this early sense of dialect, and particularly northern dialect, as having heritage value is provided by Blank (1996: 100), who cites Gill in *Logonomia Anglica* (1619) declaring that poets “use the Northern dialect quite frequently for the purpose of rhythm and attractiveness” because it is “the most delightful, the most ancient, the purest, and approximates most closely to the speech of our ancestors”. During the seventeenth century, the rise of interest in antiquarianism inspired collections such as Ray’s *Collection of English Words Not Generally Used* (1674), the first English dialect dictionary. Ray presents his collection in two parts: words from the northern and the southern counties, and explains in his preface that, in the course of his travels as a naturalist, he “could not but take notice of the difference of Dialect and variety of Local words” (1674). Another seventeenth-century traveller, Defoe, commented on the strange way in which Northumbrians pronounced the letter ‘r’, noting that “the Natives value
themselves upon that Imperfection, because, forsooth, it shews the Antiquity of their Blood” (1748: 233). Both Ray and Defoe describe dialectal differences encountered as a result of travel and present them as curiosities, but with an emphasis on the antiquity of dialects, especially those of the North.

The eighteenth century is renowned as a period of linguistic prescriptivism, when guides to “correct” grammar and pronunciation proliferated. The elocutionist Thomas Sheridan declared regional dialects to be “sure marks [...] of a provincial, rustic, pedantic or mechanical education” and to have “some degree of disgrace attached to them” (1761: 29–30). At the same time, however, antiquarian interest continued unabated, as the publication and subsequent success of Percy’s Reliques (1765) demonstrates. In his preface, Percy often apologises for the roughness of the ballads in his collection, but in terms which foreshadow those of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romantics:

The old Minstrel-ballads are in the northern dialect, abound with antique words and phrases, are extremely incorrect, and run into the utmost licence of metre; they have also a romantic wildness, and are in the true spirit of chivalry.

(1765: 2).

This ambivalent attitude towards dialect continued into the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the one hand, the Romantic Movement along with the rise of philology as a discipline led to an enhanced appreciation of dialect as embodying the values of antiquity and authenticity, as Burke points out:

This new and more positive attitude to the culture ‘of the people’ dwelt upon language as perhaps the central means by which the historical unfolding of cultures was to be revealed. The scholars of the German Enlightenment were crucial [...] in Herder, language is the revelation of the spirit of the ‘folk’. There was a new interest in spoken as well as written language, in the illiterate, and in dialect.

(1978: 9)

On the other hand, English Romantic writers tended to eschew dialect in their own compositions. Wales (2006: 113) notes that Wordsworth described the language of the Lyrical Ballads as “purified [...] from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting causes of distaste or disgust” (1800: 336), while Coleridge advocates language “purified from all provincialism and grossness” (1817).

In the nineteenth century, scholarly interest in dialect increased and dialect writing was at its peak. Dialect was increasingly associated with a rural way of life perceived to be rapidly disappearing in the wake of modernisation. Local heritage, folklore and topography became the focus of interest for professional and amateur scholars alike, and dialect was often included in these studies. Thus Hunter collected many of the words that appear in his Hallamshire Glossary (1829) in the course of research for his monumental work of topography Hallamshire (1819). The introduction to Hunter’s glossary consists of a lengthy apologia in which the author stresses the importance of dialect for the nation’s literary and linguistic heritage. Hunter argues that “the rustic and the mechanic will speak as his father spoke before him” and that “amongst them may be found fragments of our antient (sic.) tongue, relics of what, three or four centuries ago, constituted the language, not of the common people only, but of all ranks from the king to the peasant” (1829: xiii–xiv). Hunter’s glossary includes references to local folklore and customs, such as barghast, a kind of spectre or bogey-man; and somas cake or soul-mas-cake “a sweet cake made on
the second of November, All Souls’ Day” (1829: 83). Other glossaries specifically use the term *folk speech* in their title, an example being Darlington’s (1887) *The Folk-Speech of South Cheshire*.

Although many of these dialect glossaries were written by clergymen and gentleman-scholars, academic philologists also appreciated the heritage value of dialect. Comparative philology focussed on discovering the family trees of languages, with dialects viewed as branches of these trees, worthy of scientific study. Indeed, dialects were considered to provide better evidence for the historical development of languages than standard varieties, since they were closer to their ancient roots. The English Dialect Society was founded in 1873 with the aim of producing a definitive English dialect dictionary. In soliciting funds for this project, Skeat stressed its urgency: “The dialects are dying, and the competent helpers who understand them are waxing old. In a few years it will be too late” (cited in Görlach 1999: 213). This sense that dialects are on the brink of extinction is ubiquitous in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In terms of heritage, dialects are like crumbling castles: not practical for everyday use, but in desperate need of shoring up in order to preserve the nation’s sense of its own history and identity. The following extract from Morris’s *Yorkshire Folk-Talk* is typical of the rhetoric used at this time:

> Railways and certificated schoolmasters, despite their advantages, are making sad havoc of much that is interesting and worth preserving in the mother tongue of the people. This is to be regretted. It is with the object of collecting any such relics of the past, which would otherwise be doomed to oblivion, that I make the following appeal to my brother Yorkshiremen. (1892: 5)

Morris blames railways and schoolmasters for the impending death of dialects, as do many other authors of dialect dictionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Railways facilitate geographical mobility and education promotes social mobility, both factors which promote contact between speakers of different varieties and thus lead to what we now call dialect levelling. In the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, further social and demographic changes likewise created concerns about the impending loss of linguistic heritage. Stanley Ellis, writing in the middle of the twentieth century about his fieldwork for the *Survey of English Dialects*, echoes the view of his nineteenth-century counterparts:

> The effect of the upheaval of two world wars, the broadening of national education and the improvement in transport and various other factors are breaking down the social and geographical barriers, and in fact with the younger generation have already done so. Very often in visiting a village to-day, a fieldworker will be told that he has arrived too late, for old so-and-so, who was the right man to answer questions about old times, has recently died, and there are no more natives like him left. (1953: 12)

Similar threnodies can be found in later accounts of the loss of traditional dialects in the wake of “Estuary English” (Rosewarne 1994) and Multicultural London English. From an analysis of newspaper articles dealing with the subject of Multicultural London English (or *Jafaican* as it is popularly termed), Kerswill concluded that “the most frequently-occurring theme is the notion that ‘Jafaican’ is pushing Cockney out of its East End heartland” (2014: 441). In order to understand the ideological factors behind this tendency to view established dialects as heritage,
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and newer varieties as a threat to this, we need to consider the theoretical approaches outlined in the next section.

Core issues and topics

Ideology, indexicality and enregisterment

All the comments cited in the previous section take it for granted that dialects are entities that can be threatened by social and demographic change, but this view has been challenged by scholars working in the field of language ideology. In their exploration of the potential for research on language and superdiversity, Blommaert and Rampton argue that “the traditional idea of ‘a language’ […] is an ideological artifact with very considerable power” (2011: 4). This chimes with Agha’s definition of accent as a “folk-term” which “does not name a sound pattern alone, but a sound pattern linked to a framework of social identities” (2003: 22). The same could be said about dialect: in contrast to the traditional philological view that dialects are sub-divisions of languages and that every place has a dialect, scholars working within the framework of language ideology argue that dialects, like languages, are ideological constructs. The historical account in the previous section demonstrates how the concept of ‘dialect’ in English is not named until the varieties concerned begin to have ideological associations. Although historical linguists write about the “dialects” of Old English, there is no evidence that speakers in Northumbria had any awareness that their “dialect” differed from that spoken in Wessex, or, indeed, that what they were speaking was “English”.

Silverstein (1976, 2003) introduced the notion of successive orders of indexicality, whereby linguistic forms are indexed, or associated with, social categories. At the nth order of indexicality, there is a correlation between a particular linguistic form and a social category, observable by an outsider such as a linguist, but not noticed by speakers themselves. At the n +1th-order the feature has been given “an ethno-metapragmatically driven native interpretation” (2003: 212): speakers come to rationalise and justify the link between the linguistic form and the social category in terms of native ideologies such as correctness of speech. At the (n +1) +1th order of indexicality, forms which have been indexed at the n +1-order become associated with another ideological schema. In Silverstein’s model, each increase in order is a meta-level interpretation of the one below. We can see these levels of indexicality operating in the remarks cited in the previous section. At the nth order, Higden notices the differences between northern and southern varieties of English; in his translation, Trevisa rationalises these differences in terms of an ideological schema whereby the North is viewed as barbaric, thus operating at the n +1th-order. In later centuries, these differences are further re-interpreted at the (n +1) +1th order according to the ideological schema of Romanticism. The case studies in the following section will illustrate how linguistic features are first noticed and then re-interpreted according to schemas of local identity.

Agha develops Silverstein’s ideas of indexicality with his work on enregisterment, defined as the identification of a set of linguistic norms as “a linguistic repertoire differentiable within a language as a socially recognised register” which has come to index “speaker status linked to a specific scheme of cultural values” (Agha 2003: 231). Enregisterment is thus the process whereby registers are defined and identified, and register – as opposed to dialect – recognises that these repertoires are not something a speaker has by virtue of being born in a certain place, social class etc., but something that can be used to achieve communicative purposes. The process of enregisterment depends on the transmission of metapragmatic messages which draw attention to the indexicality of the repertoire of features concerned: “the dissemination
or spread of a register depends on the circulation of messages typifying speech” (2003: 243, emphasis in original). The comments cited in the previous section are examples of such messages, but in the twenty-first century these messages can be conveyed rapidly and disseminated more widely than ever before. The multimodality of modern media facilitates the association of linguistic features/repertoires with images and personae, so the process of enregisterment can be rapid. Typing the popular name of any regionally indexed variety such as Geordie, Pittsburghese or Ch’ti into a search engine will result in numerous ‘hits’, ranging from scholarly articles such as those cited in this chapter to humorous websites and advertisements for various kinds of merchandise exploiting these enregistered repertoires. The next sub-section demonstrates how commodification theory has been used to interpret this literal marketisation of dialect.

**Commodification**

Fairclough defines commodification as “the process whereby social domains and institutions, whose concern is not producing commodities in the narrower economic sense of goods for sale, come nevertheless to be organized and conceptualized in terms of commodity production, distribution, and consumption” (1992: 207). This term has been used in connection with the value assigned to competence in certain languages or varieties in the employment market, such as in Heller’s study of the commodification of French in Canada, where the process “renders language amenable to redefinition as a measurable skill” (2003: 474). More recently, studies of enregisterment, including the case studies discussed in the following section, have noted the emergence of a more literal commodification of dialect, whereby tokens of the dialect add value to items such as T-shirts, car bumper stickers, mugs, mouse mats etc., which are marketed on the internet and in souvenir shops.

Commodification of language presupposes enregisterment, since it is the association of linguistic features with personal qualities or social factors that makes the language or variety marketable. Appadurai defines the “commodity situation” of any item as “the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature” (1986: 13). Johnstone notes that, according to Appadurai, “[i]n order to enter into a commodity situation, a ‘thing’ […] must, historically, be in a ‘commodity phase’, it must be a potential ‘commodity candidate’, and it must be in a viable ‘commodity context’” (Appadurai 1986: 13–15, cited in Johnstone 2009: 161). In all the case studies discussed in the next section, the variety of speech concerned enters a commodity phase when specific features are indexed as “local”. It becomes a commodity candidate when these forms are indexically linked with qualities that are valued, such as authenticity, and the commodity context becomes viable when a market exists for goods branded with linguist tokens of the variety and the production of such goods is a viable economic proposition. The commodification of dialect is not entirely new: publications in and about dialect have had a market value from the time of Ray’s (1764) glossary and music-hall acts of the nineteenth century made their living portraying local “characters” and performing in dialect (Hermeston 2011). However, the circumstances of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been particularly propitious for the marketing of dialect-themed commodities. The decline of industry has created a new economy, in which tourism has become an important source of employment and revenue; the mobility of the workforce has created an ex-pat market for products trading on nostalgia; and the availability of cheap methods of manufacture and printing has made the production of items such as T-shirts, mugs etc. viable. The next section presents case studies which demonstrate the processes of enregisterment and commodification in a number of locations.
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Case studies

Geordie

Geordie is the popular term for the urban dialect of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the North-east of England. Of all the varieties discussed in these case studies, Geordie has the longest history of enregisterment and commodification. The term Geordie has been used as an ethnonym for citizens of Newcastle since the 1830s (Pearce 2014), but the Oxford English Dictionary’s first citation of Geordie used adjectivally with reference to a distinct linguistic variety (“broad Geordie accents”) comes from 1903 (www.oed.com). The collocation broad Geordie also occurs in the OED’s first citation (1928) for the nominal form: “I turned the conversation to Newcastle … ‘They canna unnerstan’ plain English there—naething but broad Geordie!’” The implication here is that the variety spoken in Newcastle is difficult for outsiders to understand. This point had been made about northern dialects of English centuries earlier (see above p. 166), but by the early twentieth century, specific urban dialects are being named (and therefore enregistered), and, as the semi-phonetic spelling in the second OED citation suggests, they are recognised as different by speakers of other non-standard varieties.

The Scottish speaker in this citation had obviously visited Newcastle, and such cross-border interaction had been common for many years, but the urbanisation and industrialisation of Britain, beginning in the eighteenth century but accelerating rapidly in the course of the nineteenth, led to a more mobile and diverse population in cities. The resulting dialect contact prompted fears for the survival of traditional rural dialects, as discussed above (pp. 167–169), but it also led to the emergence of urban dialects which in turn became indexed with attributes associated with specific locations. It is not surprising that the ethnonym Geordie was used with reference to the people of Newcastle before its meaning was transferred to their dialect, since, in the process of enregisterment, linguistic repertoires become associated with what Agha (2007: 177) terms “characterological figures” or personae. Awareness of the Geordie as a figure or persona thus predates that of the dialect. Writing before Agha’s ideas had been published, Joyce (1991: 172) refers to the role played by dialect literature in the creation and propagation of these characterological figures:

Dialect literature created its own symbolic working heroes, with the characters of the Weaver in Lancashire and Yorkshire, the pitman and keelman in the North-east, embodying the symbolic virtues of the ‘gradely’ or the ‘canny lad’.

In the music-halls of Newcastle, performers took on the persona of the Geordie pitman and, in their patter, addressed audience members as “Geordie” (Wales 2006: 134). Their performances were, of course, spoken and sung in dialect. The dialect literature and music-hall performances of the nineteenth century both reflected and played an active part in the enregisterment of Geordie. Analysis of texts written between this period and the late twentieth century (Beal and Cooper 2015) reveals exactly the kind of stable repertoire referred to by Agha. Each reading or performance of a dialect text constitutes a link in the “speech-chain” (Agha 2007: 64–67) by means of which messages about the indexicality of linguistic repertoires are transmitted and reinforced.

Although “heritage” is perhaps too much associated with nostalgia to describe the values attributed to music-hall performances by nineteenth-century audiences, Joyce emphasises their importance for the construction of local, working-class identity. He writes that the use of dialect “spoke to ‘working folk’ of all occupations and geographical locations, conferring on them citizenship in the nationalities of ‘Lanky’, Yorkshire ‘Tyke’ or northeast ‘Geordie’” (1991: 172). While the compilers of traditional dialect dictionaries were frantically shoring up the linguistic heritage of the pre-industrial age, a new, urban heritage was being created.
The Geordie miner is now a figure of the past, thanks to the pit closures of the 1980s and 1990s, but the characterological figure of the Geordie, albeit transformed into the party-loving stereotype of broadcasts such as *Geordie Shore*, lives on. The dialect is also still highly salient: perceptual dialectology studies reveal that Geordie and Scouse (the urban dialect of Liverpool) are the varieties most often named by participants asked to list the dialects of British English that they know (Montgomery and Beal 2011). In a sense, the dialect was already commodified when nineteenth-century music-hall performers made their living by portraying Geordie characters. However, although this early enregisterment of the dialect put Geordie into what Appadurai (1986: 13–15) terms a “commodity phase”, the “commodity context” for the large-scale marketing of goods branded with Geordie slogans and thus carrying the values associated with this dialect came much later.

The triggers for the commodification of Geordie in the late twentieth century were de-industrialisation and the subsequent creation of a service economy in which varieties of English indexed as “friendly” or “trustworthy” became marketable assets. The 1990s saw the creation of large call-centres in the North-east of England (and in other de-industrialised areas), and their openings were usually accompanied by media stories about surveys showing that the (in this case Geordie) accent was perceived as the most friendly. These could be interpreted cynically as showing what the companies concerned wanted to find, but scientific studies such as Coupland and Bishop (2007) reveal the same positive attitudes towards Geordie. This period also brought a massive expansion and marketisation of higher education, bringing large numbers of students from other parts of the UK (and beyond) to Newcastle’s two universities, and the rise of urban tourism. In both cases, Newcastle’s reputation as a party city proved an attraction: indeed, the antics of the *Geordie Shore* cast, far from proving a deterrent to tourists as local dignitaries feared, seem to have increased the appeal of the city and the nearby seaside resort of Whitley Bay. A report in *The Independent* on 25th February 2012 relates that *Geordie Shore* “was the PR nightmare that tourist officials always dreaded” and that, when the programme was first aired, “civic leaders in the North–east complained that the show was promoting ‘outdated stereotypes that [the region] has worked hard to shed.’” However, the article goes on to report that booking enquiries had increased “more than fourfold” over the same period a year ago (www.independent.co.uk accessed 10th December 2015).

The civic leaders’ reported use of the phrase “outdated stereotypes” is interesting here. Stereotype is in many ways a lay version of Agha’s “characterological figure”, and, while local politicians no doubt have good reasons for wanting to dissociate Newcastle from the stereotypical drunk and disorderly Geordie, there is a sense in which stereotypes are always outdated. Labov defines a linguistic “stereotype” as “increasingly divorced from forms which actually occur in speech” (1978: 180). By the time a linguistic repertoire has become enregistered, the variety concerned has moved on. This is inevitable because the very circumstances of diversity and contact which draw attention to linguistic differences also lead to dialect levelling. In Newcastle, the levelling of the dialect towards a pan-northern regiolect has been reported (Watt 2002), but the production of artefacts bearing slogans in this “outdated” and “stereotypical” version of the dialect continues unabated. Visitors to the North–east clearly see the dialect as part of the experience which they want to take home with them.

An early example of this kind of dialect souvenir can be seen in Figures 12.1 and 12.2 below.

This is a mug purchased in the 1990s, when the trade in Geordie souvenirs was less widespread than it is today. The black-and-white colour scheme was chosen not only because it would be cheap to reproduce, but because it represents the colours of Newcastle United FC, an
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Figure 12.1 Geordie mug (back)

Figure 12.2 Geordie mug (front)
iconic football club which is strongly associated with the identity of Newcastle and its citizens. The slogans make use of the enregistered repertoire of Geordie in semi-phonetic spellings such as <reet> indicating the traditional pronunciation of right as /riːt/ and <aal> for all pronounced /aːl/, both pronunciations notably absent from the levelled variety described by Watt (2002) as more typical of modern Tynesiders. They also include lexical and grammatical features from this repertoire, such as divvent for Standard English don’t and telt for told. The text on the mug conveys a discourse of authenticity: the phrase “Genuine original Geordie” appears on both sides. As we shall see in the discussion of Pittsburghese merchandise in the next case study, this combination of stereotypical features of the dialect concerned with claims of authenticity is typical. More recently, as media propagation of the Geordie dialect and persona has proliferated and manufacturing techniques have become more sophisticated, we find T-shirts, key rings etc. on which reduced forms of the dialect involving word-play appear. A stereotypical Geordie phrase “Why aye”, meaning simply “yes, of course”, is reduced first to the letters <YI>, and most recently to a rebus <Y ø>. This requires a high level of recognition and therefore of enregisterment of the phrase concerned in order to work.

The rebus described above was seen in September 2015 on a key ring for sale in the Chantry, Morpeth, Northumberland, alongside a wide range of crafts and souvenirs celebrating the heritage of Northumberland, from watercolours depicting the scenery to a poster commemorating pit closures. It is evident that the enregistered repertoire of Geordie has a part to play in the tourism and heritage industries, and that tokens of dialect add value to items (such as key rings) which would otherwise be mundane.

Pittsburgh

The enregisterment of a variety of American English called Pittsburghese is a much more recent phenomenon than that of Geordie. Johnstone (2009, 2013) relates how, apart from dialectologists with an interest in the “Scotch-Irish” origins of speech in this part of Pennsylvania, there was little awareness that Pittsburgh had an accent or dialect until the second half of the twentieth century. Johnstone goes on to describe how, from the 1980s onwards, the decline of the steel industry which had dominated working-class life in the city led to out-migration, bringing exiled Pittsburghers into contact with speakers of other varieties, who commented on the idiosyncrasies of Pittsburgh speech.

A key factor in the enregisterment and subsequent commodification of Pittsburghese was the appearance of a small book called How to Speak Pittsburghese (McCool 1981). This presents tokens of local speech in dictionary form in a parody of a learner’s dictionary or phrase book. This format is ubiquitous in popular publications on dialect: folk-dictionaries such as Larn Yersel Geordie (Dobson 1969) and Learn Yourself Scouse (Shaw et al. 1965) appeared much earlier in the UK and continue to be published today. According to Johnstone, McCool thought it was the “right moment” to publish as “economic development initiatives were going to bring corporate outsiders to Pittsburgh who would be curious about local speech and [...] insiders might find a booklet about it amusing” (2013: 159).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the arrival of the World Wide Web and social media led to the appearance of sites such as www.pittsburghese.com, where visitors were invited to submit items of Pittsburgh dialect. Although, as Johnstone (2013) states, the interactive part of the site was shut down in 2003, it is still available for consultation. The submissions to the online glossary came from as far away as Australia, demonstrating the importance of the diaspora in the dissemination of discourse linking linguistic forms to local identity. These diasporic Pittsburghers are aware that the dialect of their former home is different and have a positive,
nostalgic attitude to it. Demonstrating knowledge of the dialect, along with other activities such as support for local sports teams, is a way of maintaining contact with their heritage.

Pittsburghers living away from home also make up an important sector of the market for the commodities discussed in Johnstone's work (2009, 2013). Johnstone relates how, when conducting fieldwork in Pittsburgh, she was shown mugs and T-shirts printed with examples of Pittsburghese. One participant is reported as saying:

Oh yes, I mean, there's that store over on the Southside, in Station Square, that has the Pittsburghese shirts. In fact, I remember when my friend Karen moved out of state […] I remember sending a couple Pittsburghese shirts. (2009: 158)

The Pittsburghese shirts are typically white, with images of the city in black and gold (the colours of the Pittsburgh Steelers football team). One side of the T-shirt pictured in Johnstone's (2009) paper has a dictionary-style list of Pittsburghese words with jocular definitions. The words chosen, and the style of their definitions, evoke the heritage of Pittsburgh as a blue-collar steel-manufacturing city whose inhabitants’ main interests are beer and football. Examples are:

- blitzburgh: n. a drinking town with a football problem;
- iron: n. the beer of champions;
- stillers: n. four time superbowl champs with unfinished business;
- stillmill: n. a factory where steel is produced;
- yunz: n. 'yous' to the east and 'y'all' to the south (Johnstone 2009: 158).

The last term in this list is more typically spelt <yinz>, and is so strongly indexed as local to Pittsburgh that the ethnynym yinzer has been coined to refer to Pittsburghers. Like the phrase why aye discussed above, this term is so well known that it can be reduced to <YNZ> in imitation of a vehicle nationality plate.

The shop referred to in the participant’s story also sells a range of football memorabilia, so visitors attending Steelers matches are also important customers for the T-shirts. As Johnstone explains, buying and wearing the T-shirts constitutes an affirmation of identity or badging. Those who live in the city permanently are less likely to need such a badge than those who visit and like the city or those who live away and return for football matches. Johnstone also gives a very concrete example of the extent to which tokens of dialect literally add value to these cheap T-shirts. “A men’s plain white Hanes T-shirt is available for retain purchase for as little as $2.19 but will sell for $5.00 or $8.00 with Pittsburghese printed on it” (2009: 161). Johnstone also makes the important point that, as well as reflecting the enregisterment of Pittsburghese, these artefacts contribute to the ongoing process whereby features of dialect are indexed as local and evoke the persona of the blue-collar Pittsburgher.

The items that most vividly evoke this characterological figure are the “Yappin’ Yinzers”, a pair of dolls with the names Chipped Ham Sam and Nebby Debby (chipped ham and neby [“nosey”]) both taken from the repertoire of Pittsburghese words appearing on T-shirts, etc.). These dolls have clothes and hair-styles that evoke a late-twentieth-century working-class identity: Sam has a mullet, Debby a scraped-back ponytail and large hooped earrings and both are dressed in black and gold. This is confirmed in the biographies that accompany the dolls and appear on their website (http://yappinyinzers.com). Most importantly, the dolls talk. Squeezing their stomach results in one of a number of recorded phrases, all in a stereotypical Pittsburgh accent, and all consistent with the persona of the doll concerned. Johnstone (2013: 184–195) provides a full account of the Yappin’ Yinzers and their role in the enregisterment of Pittsburghese. Her conclusion makes a telling point which could be applied to all the case studies in this section:
People buy the Yappin’ Yinzer dolls because they make fun of the Yinzer’s crudeness and lack of sophistication, but also, I suggest, out of nostalgia for a time when people could speak their minds and sound like whoever they were: an imagined time when there was no need for the kind of persona management that is now required in the new economy.

(2013: 195)

Although Geordie Shore dolls have yet to appear, the success of the MTV programme probably has a similar explanation.

Ch’ti

This final case study is included in order to show that enregisterment and commodification of dialect is by no means confined to the Anglophone world. There are many other examples of this throughout Europe, as the collection of papers in Anderwald and Hoekstra (eds. 2017) demonstrates. Ch’ti and ch’timi are terms used to refer to the urban dialect spoken in the Hauts du Nord region of France. Like Geordie, ch’timi was originally coined as an ethnonym, as Pooley explains:

Originally a pejorative nickname given to northern soldiers by their comrades in the 1914–18 War, based on a combination of two patois words heard in their conversations, i.e. ch’ti ‘celui’ and mi ‘moi’, Ch’timi or its shortened form Ch’ti has become a designation which signals pride in the region.

(1996: 10)

What Pooley describes here is a typical example of enregisterment occurring as a result of dialect contact. Awareness of Ch’ti as a distinctive variety increased towards the end of the twentieth century when, as was the case in Pittsburgh, the major industry of the region, coal mining, declined, and workers from Nord-Pas de Calais had to move elsewhere for employment. Pooley comments on the commodification of Ch’ti/ Ch’timi in the 1990s, writing that the term “has been used on bumper stickers and a brand of local beer also bears the name” (1996: 10). However, national awareness of the urban dialect and the characterological figure of the Ch’ti was massively increased with the release of the comedy film Bienvenue Chez les Ch’tis in 2008. The film was a huge success, breaking French box-office records, so its role in the enregisterment of Ch’ti cannot be overestimated.

The plot of Bienvenue Chez les Ch’tis relies heavily on stereotypes of Nord-Pas de Calais, but eventually subverts the received “grim up North” image of post-industrial dereliction. The co-star and director of Bienvenue Chez les Ch’tis, Dany Boon, is a native of Nord-Pas de Calais and presents the film as a homage to his native region. This is an example of the recycling and creative reappropriation of stereotypes described by Reyes (2004): negative stereotypes are replaced by positive ones, and the originally derogatory ethnonym Ch’ti has clearly been reclaimed by the natives of this region. This is confirmed by the growing number of commodities which provide badging, notably T-shirts with slogans such as “Je suis Ch’ti et j’en suis fier” (I’m Ch’ti and proud of it). There is also a Sauce Ch’timi, advertised as an ideal condiment for frites (a stereotypical Ch’ti food). The linguistic feature most clearly indexed as local to Nord-Pas de Calais is the palatalisation of /s/ as in Ch’ti, and this appears in the sauce advertisement in the spelling <ché> for c’est in “ché super bon” and “ché nouveau” (= “It’s super good”, “it’s new”).
What all three of these case studies have in common is that the locations concerned are post-industrial. The decline of traditional industries (coal-mining in the North-east of England and Nord-Pas de Calais, steel in Pittsburgh) has led to out-migration and a new economy in which tourism and service industries dominate. For natives of these places, whether at home or away, the enregistered urban dialects have acquired value as nostalgic reminders of blue-collar industrial heritage. For newcomers and tourists, the association of this heritage with positive blue-collar values such as friendliness and joie de vivre proves an attraction. In his study of urban tourism, Law points out that “cities will only attract visitors if they can offer something different, special or unique” but that they are “becoming more and more alike, their individuality confined to a few historic buildings” (2002: 195, 189).

In this context, dialect which is enregistered as local provides a unique selling-point for the destination. The next section considers the growing recognition on the part of museum professionals of dialect as intangible heritage, and the involvement of linguists in heritage projects.

Dialect in the heritage sector

Until relatively recently, museums and heritage sites have tended to concentrate on visual displays, but there is a growing tendency to incorporate audio material into interactive displays as a way of engaging visitors. This has coincided with a move in academic institutions towards “impact” as a criterion for the funding and evaluation of research projects. Museum professionals and academic linguists have a shared interest in promoting dialect to the public as part of their intangible heritage. Lawson and Sayers (2016) and Corrigan and Mearns (2016) provide excellent examples of projects in which linguists have engaged with non-specialists to maximise the impact of their research, and several chapters in each of these volumes concern dialect as heritage. Two of the locations discussed as case studies above provide good examples of sociolinguists and museum professionals working together to raise awareness of dialect as heritage. In Pittsburgh, the staff of the Heinz History Center have published a new dictionary of Pittsburghese (2016), to replace McCool’s (1982), which had gone out of print but had been a best-seller in the museum gift shop. There is an endorsement on the back cover by Johnstone, who took part in a panel discussion at the book launch, and the introduction to the dictionary is clearly indebted to Johnstone’s work. In Newcastle, the Talk of the Toon website (Mearns et al. 2016; http://research.ncl.ac.uk/decte/toon/) provides another excellent example of such collaboration. Partners from the museum sector were included in this project from the outset, with representatives from the Beamish Museum of the Living North and the Newcastle Discovery Museum. The home page presents the site as “an archive of local language and stories” and the site includes extracts from the more academically oriented Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English DECTE corpus (http://research.ncl.ac.uk/decte/) presented as oral history and organised into themes such as entertainment, sport etc. with illustrations taken from creative commons or supplied by the museum partners. The site also includes dialect quizzes and a schools section with information for student activities and projects.

Of course, there is nothing new in the recognition by linguists, and especially sociolinguists, that they have a debt to the communities from which they extract their data. Labov’s articulation of the “principle of debt incurred” (1982) and Wolfram’s “principle of linguistic gratuity” (1993) provide early evidence of this, and Wolfram, in particular, has been a pioneer in working with communities to preserve and maintain their linguistic heritage. In doing so, sociolinguists also take an active part in the enregisterment of the varieties concerned.
Conclusion

This chapter presents an account of increased awareness of regional dialectal diversity and the re-evaluation of urban dialects as “heritage”. The often nostalgic representation of dialects such as Geordie, Pittsburghese and Ch’ti, each of which was created in the context of relatively diverse industrial cities, is a reaction against the perceived “levelling” effect of more recent superdiversity. These more established dialects are presented as more “authentic” than prestigious standard varieties and the new varieties, such as Multicultural London English, emerging in superdiverse cities. The recycling of formerly negative stereotypes and the multimodal dissemination of representations of regional dialects celebrates diversity in the sense that it focuses on the salient, distinctive features of the dialect concerned, but coexists with the multiculturalism and superdiversity of twenty-first-century megacities.

Notes

1 Hallamshire is a district within the present-day city of Sheffield.
2 Geordie Shore is a scripted reality show first broadcast on MTV in May 2011, portraying the lives of young men and women from the North-east of England. It is (in)famous for its portrayal of young Geordies as hard-drinking, foul-mouthed and lascivious. Cast members have become celebrities, living out the stereotype of the party-loving Geordie lad and lass.
3 Thanks to Barbara Johnstone for supplying this information.

Further reading


A collection of papers discussing examples of enregisterment and commodification, including papers in English by Beal and by Johnstone.


A collection of case studies providing examples of public engagement projects.


A comprehensive case study.


A collection of case studies providing examples of public engagement projects.

References


