

**Shostak N.A.**

a student, National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv

**Petrova O. O.**

a student, National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv

**Babenko O.V.**

PhD in Philology, National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv

## ETYMOLOGICAL AND PHONOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SCOUSE, LIVERPOOL ENGLISH

This article claims to offer a brief analysis on history of Scouse, English dialect, and its linguistic features. Liverpool English is not quite like its neighbours. In the formation of this dialect, speakers of several varieties of English came into contact with each other, and the history of Scouse is to be considered as the history of its speakers.

This phenomenon has been described in some detail in a number of studies, including Knowles (1973), Lyon (1981), Newbrook (1986, 1999), Sangster (2001), Honeybone (2001), Belchem (2000), Sangster (2001), Honeybone (2001), Watson (2002, 2006, 2007).

Originally, the first true inhabitants of the area which later became "Merseyside", were based on the Wirral Peninsula, 200 years before people settled in what was to become Liverpool. Interspaced between the UK mainland and Wales, they steadily created their own dialect and accent. The accent then expanded into local surrounding areas, and truly began to develop thanks to the large numbers of immigrants into Liverpool in the 18th and 19th centuries including those from the Isle of Man, Wales, Scandinavia, Germany, Scotland, and, most substantially, Ireland. The influence of these different speech patterns became apparent in Liverpool and Birkenhead, distinguishing the accent of its people from those of the surrounding Lancashire and Cheshire areas. It is only recently that Scouse has been treated as a cohesive accent/dialect; for many years, Liverpool was simply seen as a melting pot of different accents without one of its own [1, p.22]. Liverpool was granted letters patent in 1207, inviting settlers to what had been a small and largely unimportant fishing village and port. In common with many northern English cities, Liverpool only grew in size to become an important urban centre in the past few centuries. It was granted city status in 1880. Its real population growth started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and exploded in the 19th century, when Liverpool rose to prominence as England's second biggest city and as the single most important port of the British Empire [2, p. 25]. Those events influenced immensely on a new dialect formation. Nowadays Scouse is the accent and dialect of English found in the city of Liverpool and the adjoining urban areas of Merseyside. This is particularly strong within areas of neighbouring boroughs of south Sefton, Knowsley and the Wirral. The Scouse accent of the early 21st century is markedly different in certain respects from that of earlier decades. The Liverpool accent of the 1950s and before was more a Lancashire-Irish hybrid. But since then, as with most accents and dialects, Scouse has been subject to phonemic evolution and change. Over the last few decades the accent is no longer a melange but has started to develop further. Today there are variations on the Scouse accent, with the south side of the city adopting a softer, lyrical tone, and the north a rougher, more gritty accent

[4, p. 31]. Most linguists single out the following specific features of Scouse: TH stopping, non-rhoticity, the absence of contrast between square and nurse, Liverpool lenition [3, p 401-405].

The phoneme contrast exists in most varieties of English between such words as [tɪn] *tin* : [θɪn] *thin* [dɛn] *den* : [ðɛn] *then*. Liverpool English loses this contrast . It leads to neutralizations such as those in [tɪn] *tin*: [tɪn] *thin*; [dɛn] *den*: [dɛn] *then*. Importantly for our purposes, **TH stopping** is hardly reported in the other dialects which contributed to the Liverpool English koine. By itself, this seems to be a case which would speak in favour of the 'swamping' scenario. The use of the glottal stop as an allophone of /t/ can occur in various positions, including after a stressed syllable. It is particularly common amongst the younger speakers of the Scouse accent. /t/ may also be flapped intervocally. /t/ and /d/ are often pronounced similarly to the fricatives /s/ and /z/. The loss of dental fricatives, /ð/ and /θ/, was commonly attributed as being present due to Irish English influence. They were realised as /d/ and /t/ respectively. However, in the younger generation, this feature is being outnumbered by those who realise them as labiodental fricatives. For example, /θ/ becomes /f/ in all environments. [θɪnk] becomes [fɪnk] for "think." /ð/ becomes /v/ in all environments except word-initially, in which case it becomes /d/. [dɪðə] becomes [dɪvə] for "dither"; [ðəʊ] becomes [dəʊ] for "though."

Liverpool English is resolutely **non-rhotic**, pronouncing /r/ only at the beginning of a syllable and between vowels, but not at the end of a syllable: floor [flɔːr] (Rhotic) and [flɔː] (Scouse). No trace of rhoticity has been reported for any speaker of the variety. If we compare this with the dialects which came into contact in nineteenth century Liverpool, it is immediately obvious that many of them *were* rhotic. There are two possibilities to explain the fact that Liverpool English is now nonrhotic. Either it never became rhotic when it was being formed, or it did and has since become non-rhotic. The majority of speakers in Liverpool during the period of dialect mixture were rhotic – all the speakers from Ireland, Scotland and North-West England, at least – and this variant should therefore have been taken up into the koine. Any continuity with earlier forms of English spoken in the area would be in favour of rhoticity, too, given the general resilience of rhoticity in the North-West. On this assumption, the subsequent loss of rhoticity would be a case of 'drift', where the new dialect has changed in the same way as other, older varieties in England.

The resulting **absence of contrast in SQUARE and NURSE** likely derives from the facts that the children could not accurately create two phonological categories. The nurse-square vowel merger leads to identical pronunciation 'fur' and 'fair'. A final 'er' is a sound whilst pronounced 'schwa' in surrounding Lancashire and Cheshire is emphasised strongly as the 'e' in 'pet' /pet/.

**Liverpool lenition** is a synchronic, variable process whereby underlying plosives are realised as affricates and fricatives in certain specific prosodic and melodic environments. It means that the plosives which are emboldened in the words in might be pronounced as follows: *crime* [kxra:m]; *expect* [ɛxspɛxt]; *deep* [dði:ϕ]; *time* [tθa:m]; *night* [naɪθ]; *stop* [stɒϕ]; *lead* [li:ð]. In a strong Scouse accent, the phoneme /k/ in all positions of a word except the beginning can be realised as /x/ or sometimes /kx/ [5, p.196; 6, p.54-63].

**Table 1. Differences in pronunciation**

RP Pronunciation	Old Scouse	Modern Scouse
[ɜ:] as in 'fur'	[ɜ:]	[ɛ:]
[ɛə] as in 'square'	[ɜ:]	[ɛ:]
[ri:d] as in 'read'	[i:]	[i:]
[sli:p] as in 'sleep'	[i:]	[i:]
[bʌtə] as in 'butter'	[bʊtə]	[bʊtɛ]
[fɔ:k] as in 'fork'	[fɔ:x]	[fɔ:x]

**Other Scouse features include:**

- The use of 'giz' instead of 'give us'.
- The use of the term 'made up' to portray the feeling of happiness or joy in something. For example, 'I'm made up I didn't go out last night'.
- The term 'sound' is used in many ways. It is used as a positive adjective such as 'it was sound' meaning it was good. It is used to answer questions of our wellbeing, such as 'I'm sound' in reply to 'How are you?' The term can also be used in negative circumstances to affirm a type of indifference such as 'I'm dumping you'. The reply 'sound' in this case translates to 'yeah fine', 'ok', 'I'm fine about it', 'no problem' etc.
- [k] pronounced as [x] at the ends of some words.
- Scouse is noted for a fast, highly accented manner of speech, with a range of rising and falling tones not typical of most of northern England.
- Irish influences include the pronunciation of the name of the letter 'h' as /heitf/ and the 2nd Person plural (you) as 'youse/yous/use' /ju:z/.

**In conclusion** we may emphasize the following. When Scouse had been formed, it had something in common with neighbouring Northern Englishes, and something in common with Englishes from further afield, such as those from Ireland. It was not a direct continuation of any dialect that existed before, but had been created from a mixture of dialects. The four features considered in this article did not all pattern in the same way. **TH stopping** is due to the Hiberno-English input, almost as if it had swamped the other dialects. The fact that Liverpool English is **non-rhotic** seems to suggest exactly the opposite, however, and either the minority non-rhotic English varieties from south and east of Liverpool won out, or non-rhoticity was introduced by 'drift', or by the general spread of the change as it moved across England. The absence of a **SQUARE~NURSE** contrast was possibly predictable on a majority-wins basis, as both South Lancashire and some Hiberno-English varieties were unhelpful to the establishment of a contrast. Finally, Liverpool lenition would not have been predicted to have the pattern that it has today, which is unique to Liverpool. Liverpool English is indeed not quite like its neighbours. But some of its linguistic features come from a mix which owes much to them, and to other dialects, such as the Hiberno-Englishes. It has

also innovated new features or entirely redeveloped existing ones to form new traits. Among the many cultural achievements of the people of Liverpool, the formation of a completely new dialect – although not a unique feat – must count as one of the greatest.

### References

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