Going the Pub and Being the Library

A Microparameter in North-West English Prepositional Phrases

Boston University Linguistics Faculty Spotlight
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The United Kingdom
England

The North West of England
Bit of the North West we’re dealing with
Bit of the North West we’re dealing with
Bit of the North West we’re dealing with

Scouse

Woolyback
Scousers, Plastic Scousers (Placcies) and Woolybacks

St Helens, Widnes etc are woolos. Huyton, Kirkby, Bootle etc. are borderline. Birkenhead are the biggest woolos. Woolos want to be Scousers, Scousers don’t want to be woolos.

Stevie Dunn

I AM proud to be classed as a Scouser and here are my definitions.
Scouser: An individual born within eyesight of the Liver Building or adopted by the entire city. Must have a Liverpudlian accent and be proud that we sound Australian to all Americans.
Plastic Scousers: Those born in eyesight of the Liver Building, but have to cross water, or those born and living within the city, but wish to speak differently and live elsewhere.
Woolybacks: Those who sound like they live near sheep – areas like Manchester, Warrington and Widnes.
Lulla

http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/scousers-plastic-scousers-woolybacks--3366630

http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/nostalgia/what-plastic-scouser-paddy-shennan-3370855
Definite Woolybacks

The Lancashire Hotpots
- Comedy folk band from St Helens
- Named after “Lancashire Hotpot”, a traditional stew.
- Note flatcaps, waistcoats etc.
- Sound file from Chippy Tea

Peter Kay
- Stand-up comedian from Bolton
- Does observational comedy, mostly based around working-class Northern themes
- Sound file: discussing which brands of cookies (“biscuits”) are the best and worst for dunking (“dipping”) in your tea.
Woolyback Features

**Hotpots:**
“Well it’s the end of the working week, I’m rushing back home quick/ I’m starving, I’m fair klempt tha knows/ I could eat a buttered brick/ I need stodgy food without the fuss/ then ? wife gives me a plate of cous cous/ I said ‘I’m sorry, love, I want a chippy tea’.”

**Peter Kay:**
“They might be half a point on Weight Watchers, but they’re shit for dipping, Rich Tea. And they’re cocky, they don’t even fit into your cup. You better bite a bit off for t’ get em in your brew, Rich Tea!”
Pan-Regional Features

Hotpots:
“Well it’s the end of the working week, I’m rushing back home quick/ I’m starving, I’m fair klempt tha knows/ I could eat a buttered brick/ I need stodgy food without the fuss/ then ? wife gives me a plate of cous cous/ I said ‘I’m sorry, love, I want a chippy tea’.”

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Definite Scousers

John Lennon
• From *Borrowed Time* (released posthumously in 1984)

Youtube Documentary on Scouse by Kyle Murphy
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHfIAoF8gEc
Scouse Features

John Lennon

“You know lìke, what to wear very serious, lìke, you know. Am I gonna get rid of the pimples? Does she really love me? All that crap. But now I don’t bother about that shit no more, I know she loves me. All I gotta bother about is standing up.”

Documentary

“A: Lend’s a knicker, mate. B: I’ve only got buttons, lad.”

“But where did this dialect come from? Today we will find out and also hear from members of the public with their views and thoughts.”
Pan-Regional Features

John Lennon
“You know like, what to wear very serious, like, you know. Am I gonna get rid of the pimples? Does she really love me? All that crap. But now I don’t bother about that shit no more, I know she loves me. All I gotta bother about is standing up.”

Documentary
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“But where did this dialect come from? Today we will find out and also hear from members of the public with their views and thoughts.”
Lenition and Scouseness

• Lenition of voiceless stops (especially /k/-\>[x]) is one of the most widely-recognized (and mocked) features of Scouse.

Lee Mack
• Stand-up comedian from Southport (near Liverpool but in “Woolyback” territory).
• Nice illustration of someone in the middle of the Scouse-Wool continuum.
• Context: Two Scouse audience members ask Mack about a bit he usually does about his late grandmother (his “dead nan”).
Scouse or Wool?

• People like me or Lee Mack are in the middle of the continuum (though I always thought of myself as a Wool before I went to university):
  – No monophthongized tense mid-vowels, unlike definite Woolybacks.
  – No definite article reduction, use of *thā*, or use of the “for to” construction, unlike definite Woolybacks.
  – Only rarely lenite stops like definite Scousers
  – Recognize, but don’t normally use certain definitely Scouse lexical items (*the busies* for “the police”)
  – BUT: we call an alleyway an *entry* (as they do in Liverpool) rather than a *ginnel* (as definite Woolybacks do).

• I’ve been (mis)perceived as Scouse by people further east within Lancashire and elsewhere in Britain, but anyone from Liverpool will instantly peg me for a Wool.
Scouse or Wool?

• With respect to the syntactic features we are about to discuss, I am definitely a Wool.
AND NOW:
AND NOW:

SYNTAX!!!
Rest of Today

1. Introduction to Scousers vs. Wools
2. Going the pub and being the library: the basics, and some hypotheses
3. Testing the hypotheses (the silence of the prepositions)
4. Conclusion
Alison Biggs

- The data on Liverpool English are due to work by and/or discussions with Alison Biggs (Ph.D. Cantab., now starting a Post-Doc at Oxford University)

http://alisonbiggs.com/
Basic Patterns

1. I’m going to the pub.
2. I’m at the library.
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1. I’m going to the pub.
2. I’m at the library.
3. I’m going the pub. (OKScouse, OKWool)
4. I’m the library. (OKScouse, *Wool)

Cf. *Home, there* (keep these in the back of your mind- interestingly, *home* and *there* don’t behave any differently in the North West than they do in other dialects, as far as I can tell)
Basic Patterns

1. I’m going to the pub.
2. I’m at the library.
3. I’m going the pub. \(^{(OK\text{Scouse}, OK\text{Wool)}}\)
4. I’m the library. \(^{(OK\text{Scouse}, *\text{Wool)}}\)

(3) = the come the pub construction (Myle 2011, 2013)
(4) = the be the library construction
Basic Patterns

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Haddican (2010)- Also attested in Manchester (which appears to pattern like Wool dialects)
Come the pub: Basics

• Usable with at least go, come, run, drive, jog, nip, swim, take, and send.

5. He swam the other side of the river.
6. Me nan sent me the shops.

Note: the object (the thing following the verb) can be anything- this is not an idiom.
Come the pub: Semantics

• Readings incompatible with “to” are not available to either Scousers or Wools.

7. He came England. (=to, *from)
A Semantic Difference

• Where “to” means something other than “to a location”, it cannot be absent in Woolyback English. But it can in Scouse.

8. This belongs Sam. \((\text{OK}_{\text{Scouse}}, \text{*Wool})\)

9. He spoke the woman. \((\text{OK}_{\text{Scouse}}, \text{*Wool})\)

10. He came the teacher. \((\text{OK}_{\text{Scouse}}, \text{*Wool})\)

11. He went the ball and danced. \((\text{OK}_{\text{Scouse}}, \text{OK}_{\text{Wool}})\)

12. He went the ball and kicked it. \((\text{OK}_{\text{Scouse}}, \text{*Wool})\)
Be the library: basics

- Scouse judgments:
  13. She’s staying John’s tonight. (Biggs 2013:6 (22a))
  14. I’m working the library today. (Biggs 2013:6 (22a))
  15. I did my homework the library. (Biggs pc.)

BUT- adjunct (“modifier”) cases like (14) and (15) are highly restricted in ways that are poorly understood, and are not generally grammatical. The analysis I end up with will not explain this fact.

  16. *I met my friends the corner of the road. (Biggs pc.)
Be the library: a change in progress?

• The data from Biggs (2013) is based on a survey of 9 Scouse millennials

• A survey of 6 Scousers over the age of 60 by Biggs (2013:9) reveals that they generally reject “be the library”.
Pinpointing Syntactic Variation

• The aim: pinpoint what aspects of people’s mental grammars are varying between dialects.

Hypothesis: I

• “The prepositions aren’t there in all dialects, and the verbs are different”
  – Wools and Scousers: *go*, *come* etc. just don’t need a preposition, they can take a noun phrase directly
  – Scousers: *be*, *stay* also don’t need a preposition.
  – Other dialects: *go*, *come*, *be*, *stay*, etc. always need a preposition next to them.
Hypothesis: II

• “The prepositions are there in all dialects, but silent in some of them”
  – Wools and Scousers: *to* can be silent (under certain conditions)
  – Scousers: *at* can also be silent (under certain conditions)
  – Other dialects: *to* and *at* cannot be silent (under those same conditions)
The Term “Microparameter”

• Both of these hypotheses are stated in terms of syntactic differences between different lexical items:
  – “Verbs X, Y and Z {do/do not} take a noun phrase as an object”
  – “Prepositions X and Y {can/cannot} be silent under conditions Z.”

• Such “choice points” in the syntactic specifications of particular lexical items are called “Microparameters”.

•
A non-syntactic (and non-correct) Hypothesis

• “It’s just phonology”

• Can’t be right, because syntactically distinct items with the same phonology can’t be deleted in the same way:

17. *I want eat sushi.

Haddican (2010:2426, fn 4)
Two Hypotheses

come the pub vs. come TO the pub

• A distinction without a difference?
Two Hypotheses

come the pub  vs.  come TO the pub

• A distinction without a difference?
• No way! Noun Phrases like “the pub” and and prepositional phrases like “to the pub” have very different structural signatures which we can test for.
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Testing the Hypotheses
Testing the Hypotheses

This section:-

• The silent preposition analysis is correct (both for *come the pub* and *be the library*).

• BUT: for *come the pub*, it’s correct in different ways in the two dialects.

• This is revealed by subtle differences between the construction in each dialect.
The Analysis

• Woolyback: has ordinary *to* and a silent TO. When silent TO is used, the object (*the pub*) has to be as “close” to the verb as a noun phrase object would be.

• Scouse: has ordinary *to* and *at* and silent TO and AT. Scouse TO and AT are just like ordinary *to* and *at*, and the object (*the pub*) does not need to be as “close” to the verb as a noun phrase direct object would need to be.
For Syntacticians (safely ignorable)

Scouse

Vp

Vp

come

come

Pp

Dp

TO

the pub

Woolyback

Vp

Vp

come

dp

the pub

V

Pp

Dp

TO

the pub
A PP is Present: Co-ordination

• The word “and” can join two things of the same type, but (usually) not two things of different types.
18. I saw [the pub]. (Noun Phrase)
19. I saw [through the window]. (Prepositional Phrase)

20. I saw [the pub] and [the shops]
21. I saw [through the window] and [into the shop].

But you can’t mix two different categories:
22. *I saw [the pub] and [through the window].
A PP is Present: Co-Ordination

• So, given that “and” can’t mix-and-match what it combines, what do our competing hypotheses predict about this sentence in Scouse and Woolyback?

23. He went the pub and to the shop.
A PP is Present: Co-Ordination

23. He went the pub and to the shop.

Hypothesis 1: There is no preposition in front of the pub, therefore (23) is mixing-and-matching, and it should be impossible.

Hypothesis 2: There IS a preposition in front of the pub, but it isn’t pronounced. Therefore (23) involves joining up two prepositional phrases, and it should be fine.
A PP is Present: Co-Ordination

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Hypothesis 1: There is no preposition in front of the pub, therefore (23) is mixing-and-matching, and it should be impossible.

Hypothesis 2: There IS a preposition in front of the pub, but it isn’t pronounced. Therefore (23) involves joining up two prepositional phrases, and it should be fine.

→ Hypothesis 2 makes the right prediction!
In Woolyback, “The pub” has to be as close to the verb as a Noun Phrase direct object would be. Not so in Scouse.

Noun phrases want to be right next to the verb:
24. See [the film] with me! (Noun Phrases)
25. *See with me [the film]!
26. He baked [the cake] for me.
27. *He baked for me [the cake].
In Woolyback, “The pub” has to be as close to the verb as a Noun Phrase direct object would be. Not so in Scouse.

Prepositional phrases are less picky- they can be further away.

28. Come [to the pub] with me! (Prepositional Phrases)
29. Come with me [to the pub]!
30. He talked [about the Simpsons] with me.
31. He talked with me [about the Simpsons].
In Woolyback, “The pub” has to be as close to the verb as a Noun Phrase direct object would be. Not so in Scouse.

So we know noun phrases want to be right next to the verb, but prepositional phrases are less picky. Keeping this in mind, look at these facts:

32. Come the pub with me! (\text{OK} \text{Scouse}, \text{OK} \text{Wool})
33. Come with me the pub! (\text{OK} \text{Scouse}, * \text{Wool})
In Woolyback, “The pub” has to be as close to the verb as a Noun Phrase direct object would be. Not so in Scouse.

So we know noun phrases want to be right next to the verb, but prepositional phrases are less picky. Keeping this in mind, look at these facts:

32. Come the pub with me! (OK Scouse, OK Wool)
33. Come with me the pub! (OK Scouse, * Wool)

→ So, for Woolybacks, we can see that the pub acts like a direct object of the verb in that it has to be near it.
The Analysis

• Woolyback: has ordinary *to* and a silent TO. When silent TO is used the object (*the pub*) has to be as “close” to the verb as a noun phrase object would be.

• Scouse: has ordinary *to* and *at* and silent TO and AT. Scouse TO and AT are just like ordinary *to* and *at*, and the object (*the pub*) does not need to be as “close” to the verb as a noun phrase direct object would need to be.
Teasing Envoi for the syntacticians among you: Scouse AT needs its direct object next to it

34. I’m the library. (OK Scouse, *Wool)
35. I’m staying this hotel. (OK Scouse, *Wool)

36. The library I am is on the corner. (*Scouse, *Wool)
37. The hotel I am staying is near here. (*Scouse, *Wool)

• I don’t know yet if Scouse TO is also incompatible with extraction. The results for Woolyback TO are mixed in a way that suggests it depends on the verb in that dialect- see the appendix.
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Conclusion

• We can ask (and answer) questions about differences between people’s mental grammars scientifically— that is, by generating hypotheses and then testing them.

• A “Microparametric” approach to syntactic dialectal differences can prove fruitful in pinpointing these differences.
Conclusions

• By pinpointing the differences in this way, we can fill in the picture of exactly what can vary and how (crucial if we want to discover what the universal inventory of syntactic features is).
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• Thanks for listening!
Acknowledgements

Thanks especially to: Alison Biggs, Chris Collins, and Marcel den Dikken.


Appendix: Extracting from under Woolyback TO (my judgments)

1. That’s the pub we went.
2. That’s the only pub he’ll come with us.
3. These are the shops we nipped.
4. These are the shops we drove.
5. *These are the shops we popped.
6. *These are the shops we jogged.
7. *This the shop me nan sent me. (on the relevant reading)
8. This is the pub me dad took me after graduation.