ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
IMPACT REPORT

The Impact Report should be completed and submitted using the grant reference as the email subject to, reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk on or before the due date.

Please complete each box as fully as possible, adhering to the word counts, please do not include images within the text. Appendices are not accepted.

Principal Investigators are expected to consult with co-investigators on the content of this report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant Reference:</th>
<th>RES-061-25-0458</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigator/s:</td>
<td>Kevin Watson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Phonological levelling, diffusion and divergence in Liverpool and its hinterland</td>
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**Description**

Please include a short overview of the projects impacts (max 2000 characters with spaces).

The project has impacts in (1) sociolinguistics and phonology, (2) methodology, (3) establishing the Origins of Liverpool English corpus [OLIVE], and (4) raising awareness of the structured nature of linguistic variation in Liverpool and its hinterland, and the social stereotypes in the area.

For (1) the project has added to our knowledge of sociolinguistic variation in Liverpool, Skelmersdale and St Helens, particularly in relation to linguistic convergence and divergence in the area. We find evidence of convergence and divergence, but also that speakers in a given locality (e.g. Skelmersdale) do not all behave alike. We argue that work in variationist sociolinguistics should focus on the individual speaker more than is currently the case. The project has also added to our understanding of how phonological issues interact with sociolinguistic variation, particularly how phonological factors can apply differently in different localities and how they diffuse across regions. For (2) we have designed a new way of collecting real time attitude data from listeners, as they hear audio stimuli, offering a new way of exploring the central concept of sociolinguistic salience. For (3), the OLIVE corpus is an important legacy of the project. It is a large collection of spoken data (140 speakers born between 1890-1994, spanning over 100 years in apparent time). It is unique, and will continue to allow work on these
localities to flourish. For (4), we have tackled long standing stereotypes about Liverpool English (e.g. concerning its perceived ‘laziness’) by highlighting its highly structured nature. We have also explored the differences between the three accents, presenting these results in a way accessible to non-specialists.

These impacts have been achieved with (at least) 11 papers at international conferences, 6 invited talks, 3 journal articles (plus 1 currently under review), 1 special issue of a journal, 2 book chapters and 1 magazine article.

1. Scientific impact

A Please summarise below the scientific impact(s) your project has had. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The project has scientific impacts in (1) sociolinguistics, (2) phonology, (3) methodology, and (4) the establishment of the Origins of Liverpool English corpus [OLIVE].

(1) The project had a sociolinguistic focus, and it is in this field where it had the widest impact. First, we have provided an up to date description of levelling and diffusion Liverpool English, Skelmersdale English and St Helens English, particularly in relation to the following variables: the vowels of ‘her’ and ‘hair’, the ‘th’ in ‘bath’ and ‘the’, and the /t/ in ‘what’ and ‘shut up’. For Liverpool, as the main urban centre, we have gone further back in time than has been possible before, documenting the accent in speakers born in the late 1800s. Our sociolinguistic theoretical approach is one of language contact, particularly the relationship between the diffusion of linguistic features across geographical space, and the transmission of features across generations in the same location (see 1B).

(2) Some of our results have been considered from a phonological perspective, where, for example, we have shown that the frequent process ‘t-to-r’ in Liverpool is not easily explained by existing accounts of phonology (see 1B).

(3) We have used a large range of methods, including standard sociolinguistic interview techniques, bespoke elicitation tasks, auditory and acoustic phonetic analysis and corpus linguistic tools. Our main methodological impact is the use of a new way of gauging listeners’ judgements of speech stimuli in real time (see 1C).

(4) The data from the project is housed in the Origins of Liverpool English Corpus [OLIVE] which is the largest collection in the world of speech data from Liverpool, Skelmersdale and St Helens (see 1C). The corpus is timealigned to the segmental level and fully searchable, so linguistic patterns can be easily extracted and, in some cases, automatically analysed. OLIVE has already been used by other researchers (see 1D).
B Please outline the **findings and outputs** from your project which have had the scientific impact(s) outlined in 1A. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

(1) **Sociolinguistics:**

(a) **Levelling:** TH-fronting has spread to all our localities. In Liverpool, TH-fronting has nearly replaced the local feature, TH-stopping. However, it is not straightforward to claim that these accents are converging, because the patterning of the linguistic and social constraints shows that Liverpool and Skelmersdale behave more similarly than do Liverpool and St Helens. **Output:** Clark/Watson/West (2011). We have also shown this for the pronunciation of /t/ in words like ‘what’. **Output:** Clark/Watson (2013a). (b) **Divergence:** We find divergence, less widely reported in the literature. We show that pronunciation of /t/ as [h] has extended in Liverpool, also spreading to Skelmersdale, where it behaves similarly to Liverpool for some speakers but not all. **Output:** Clark/Watson (2013a). (c) **Transmission and diffusion:** the results in (b) have led us to argue that variationist sociolinguistics should look more closely at individual speakers, which is an uncommon practice. **Output:** Clark/Watson (under review).

(2) **Phonology:** we have shown that the process ‘t-to-r’ in Liverpool is not governed by expected phonological factors and does not have the expected effects of lexical frequency. **Output:** Clark/Watson (2011).

(3) **Methods:** we designed a website which records listeners’ real-time reactions to accent stimuli. After conducting a pilot study with naturally occurring speech we explored the perception of NURSE/SQUARE words (e.g. 'her/hair'). We manipulated the vowels to give the impression that the speaker was from Liverpool or St Helens, and asked listeners to judge ‘poshness’. We found that reactions correlated with these words, suggesting they are salient. **Output:** Watson/Clark (2013).

(4) **OLIVE:** this is the largest collection of spoken data in this region, with data from 140 speakers spanning 100 years in apparent time. We have thus been able to take our understanding of these accents further back in time. **Output:** Watson/Clark (forthcoming).

C Please outline how these impacts were achieved. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

For (1) and (2) findings were communicated to academic target audiences, for example:

- **Invited talks** (York, Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool Hope, Birmingham City, Victoria University of Wellington)

Book chapters (Listening to the Past forthcoming).

For (3), we were invited to present at a workshop on experimental methods in sociolinguistics at the Poznan Linguistics Meeting (2011), and we organised a workshop at the conference of the International Society of the Linguistics of English (2011). This workshop was published as a special issue of English Language and Linguistics, in which our study of NURSE/SQUARE appears. The introduction to the special issue was the most downloaded paper of in the previous 12 months for this journal, and all other papers in the issue are in the top 10.

For (4) the audio data collected was transcribed and used to established a new corpus. The data is time aligned to the segmental level and coded for various additional factors (e.g. phoneme, word frequency, part of speech). Once uploaded into the corpus, the data becomes easily searchable, which means OLIVE can be used by other researchers and students (see 1D).

D Please outline who the findings and outputs outlined above had an impact upon. This can include specific academics/researchers through to broader academic groups. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The main general audience includes the delegates at the conferences and the readership of the journals outlined in 1C. A specific example is that the the 2011 paper in English Language and Linguistics has been cited 10 times. This includes citation by D Erker and G Guy in Language (2012), the premier Linguistics journal, and by Buchstaller et al in English Language and Linguistics (2013). The paper has also been cited in textbooks (e.g. Hughes, Trudgill, Watt 2013).

OLIVE has already been utilised by researchers at other institutions. References to that work are:

- Cardoso, Amanda (2013) PRICE and MOUTH Raising Patterns in English: An Investigation of Liverpool English. ISLE (Post-)Doctoral Spring School, Freiburg, Germany.
- West, H (2013) A town between dialects: accent levelling, psycho-social orientation and identity in Merseyside, UK. In Auer, Peter, Javier Caro Reina and Göz Kaufmann (eds.) Language Variation - European Perspectives IV. Selected papers from the Sixth International Conference on Language Variation in Europe (ICLaVE 6), Freiburg, June 2011. John Benjamins
2. Economic and societal impact

A Please summarise below the economic and societal impact(s) your project has had. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

An important societal impact of the project was a raised awareness of the structured nature of Liverpool English. All regional varieties are highly structured of course, but Liverpool’s accent constantly rates badly in terms of prestige, and this can lead speakers to comment on its ‘laziness’ or ‘sloppiness’. It was important to highly the structure of the accent as a response to this common popular perception. A second aim was to raise awareness of the social and linguistic stereotypes which surround the accents of Liverpool and its hinterland region. Often, people from Skelmersdale and St Helens are misidentified as being from Liverpool (that is, as being ‘Scousers’), but the exact similarities and differences between the accents were not known, particularly for Skelmersdale, which had not been studied in detailed before this project.

B Please outline the findings and outputs from your project which have had the economic and societal impact(s) outlined in 2A. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The results from the project which feed into the societal impact, and the outputs which describe them, are those that are documented in 1B.

C Please outline how these impacts were achieved. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The results of the project have been disseminated to non-academic audiences in a number of ways: (1) in a chapter in a book aimed at school students (Watson 2013), where we discuss accent variation in general but also give concrete examples from Liverpool English (concerning variation in pronunciation of /t/) and (2) an article in eMagazine, a subscription magazine intended for English and English Language school students.

We also gave two workshops in schools, to students of A Level English Language:

These workshops specifically tackled (1) the structured nature of Liverpool English, in a location where it is typically most strongly criticised (i.e. Greater Manchester), and (2) the stereotypes surrounding Liverpool’s English, in a location where speakers are typically misidentified as Scousers (i.e. Skelmersdale).

More generally, some of the results of the project were reported in the media. Watson was interviewed for an article published in the *Economist* (2-5-2011), and the findings of the project informed an item broadcast on the BBC’s *The One Show* in January 2013. The project has also been mentioned in *The Telegraph* (3-1-2010), *Daily Mail* (4-1-2010), and the *Sunday Times* (5-5-2011).

Please outline who the findings and outputs outlined above had an impact upon. This can be at a broad societal level through to specific individuals or groups. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The main impact has been on school students and teachers, specifically those who attended the workshops we gave, and those who are studying English Language (or other related subjects).
3. Unexpected and potential future impacts

A Unexpected Impacts
Please note which, if any, of the impacts that your research has had were unexpected at the outset of the project, explaining where possible why you think this was the case. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

N/A

B Potential Future Impacts
If you have a clear idea of the impact your project is likely to have in the future please detail these below. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

One of the main advantages of the OLIVE corpus is that the data will continue to be mined for years to come. We have only scratched the surface of the corpus, which will continue to advance our understanding of the varieties of English spoken in Liverpool, Skelmersdale and St Helens, and also of sociolinguistic theory. Below is an outline of some of the projects currently being worked on. It is anticipated that they will be complete in the next year, and outputs will continue to be added to the online system as they appear.

- A large scale study of vowel variation and change. This project examines vowel changes across a 100 year period in each of the three localities.
- A large scale study of plosive lenition. Currently we have looked only at utterance-final /t/, but other phonological environments and other plosives are ripe for investigation.
- An innovative exploration of speakers’ identities using corpus linguistic methods. We are using tools from corpus assisted discourse analysis to explore speakers’ identities in their interviews.

We also plan to submit an article to Babel, a linguistics magazine for a general audience, detailing some of the project’s findings.

In addition, a book proposal is underway, for the Dialects of English series, published by Mouton de Gruyter.
4. Impact limitations

A Limited scientific impact
Please state below any major scientific difficulties that have limited the scientific impact of your project. The statement should refer to an effect on impact rather than simply detail research difficulties or other project activity problems. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

N/A

B Limited economic and societal impact
ESRC recognises that some of the research it funds will not have an economic or societal impact in the short term. Please explain briefly below if this is the case for your project, and refer to your grant application where relevant. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

N/A

Declarations

Please read the statements below. Submitting this Impact Report confirms your agreement.

- This Impact Report is an accurate statement of the impacts of the research to date. All co-investigators named in the proposal to your Research Council or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.
- Details of any subsequent activity, outputs and impacts will be recorded and added to the new output system which will replace the Research Outcomes System (ROS) from September 2014.