

‘I would say [k]ar, yeah. [kʲ]ar, yeah’

Phonological variation and change in Portadown

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Abstract

Denne masteroppgaven tar for seg variasjon og endring i dialekten funnet i byen Portadown i Nord-Irland. Tidligere studier har vist at enkelte dialekttrekk i Belfast er i endring, og at disse endringene har spredt seg til områder i The Lagan Valley og North Armagh, blant annet Lurgan, som en nabobyen til Portadown. Oppgaven har undersøkt tre fonologiske variabler. Den første er heving av den tradisjonelt lave nord-irske /æ/-lyden i ord som *wet* og *eleven*, der den innovative nye formen /ɛ/ i hovedsak har tatt over i Portadown. Den andre variabelen er palatalisering av /k/ og /g/ før åpne frontvokaler, der ord som *car* og *gas* kan bli uttalt [kʲ]ar og [gʲ]as. Slik palatalisering er også et tradisjonelt trekk i Nord-Irland, som det viser seg er på vei ut, og er helt forsvunnet blant den yngre generasjonen. Den tredje og siste variabelen er sentralisering av (ɛr), som er et nytt trekk i nord-irsk, der vokalen [ɛ] i ord som *there*, *hair*, og *experience* blir uttalt med den sentraliserte og rotiske [ɜ̞]. Sentralisert (ɛr) er et økende fenomen i Portadown, spesielt blant unge. I tillegg viser Portadown seg å ha en overraskende stor andel av sentralisering i uventede kontekster. Endringene i disse trekkene blir diskutert opp mot etablert sosiolingvistisk teori og resultater fra tidligere studier, og studien viser at disse endringene blir tolket og behandlet annerledes i Portadown enn i nabobyen Lurgan.

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List of abbreviations

CDS - Child-directed speech

MUE - Mid Ulster English

NIE - Northern Irish English

SIE - Southern Irish English

NORM - Non-Mobile Older Rural Male

ROI - Republic of Ireland

SUE - South Ulster English

SVLR - Scottish Vowel Length Rule

US - Ulster Scots

OM - Older Male

OF - Older Female

YM - Younger Male

YF - Younger Female

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and scope

This thesis seeks to investigate accent variation and change in the town of Portadown, Northern Ireland. It is therefore a study in the field of sociolinguistics. Northern Ireland is known to be linguistically conservative compared to areas where other varieties of English are spoken (Milroy 1981: 2), and as such it is an area of interest for sociolinguistic studies. Furthermore, accents in Northern Ireland are considered to be quite varied (Milroy 1981: 15–16). In this study, three different phonological variables have been examined and analysed with a view to uncover if, how and why they vary. Central to the analysis of these variables is a study done by Ann H. Pitts (1982), who investigated several variables in the neighbouring town of Lurgan. The present thesis analyses three of the variables examined by Pitts, and uses a similar framework in analysing them. The purpose of this comparison is to provide not only an overview of variation and change in Portadown, but also to create an apparent-time comparison between the two speech communities to find out whether there are similarities or differences between them.

1.2 Research questions

The goal of the study is to provide answers to the following four research questions:

1. To what degree do the phonological variables investigated in this study vary between speakers?
2. Does the difference between age groups indicate language change in any way?

3. If variation and change is found, to what extent is sex a determining factor?
4. Does any variation and change indicate influence from Belfast English?

1.3 Research hypotheses

The four research hypotheses stated below are predictions of what the results of the study will show. They are working hypotheses, i.e. they are what we expect will be the case. They will be revisited in Chapter 6, where their validity will be assessed.

1. The consonantal feature of /k, g/ palatalisation, which has in previous studies been shown to be a feature on the wane, will be primarily used by older speakers, indicating language change.
2. The innovative vowel features of (ɛ) raising and (ɛr) centralisation will vary according to age and sex, with females and younger speakers leading the change in both features.
3. The changes in all the variables are a result of Belfast influence spreading into the Lagan Valley and North Armagh.
4. Due to their geographical proximity, Portadown and Lurgan are similar speech communities, but have different interpretations of features associated with social prestige.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview, as well as the research questions the study concerns itself with, and the working hypotheses the thesis seeks to answer.

Chapter 2 explains the theoretical background for the study. This theoretical background consists of information concerning Northern Ireland, Portadown itself and its surrounding areas. This information also includes an overview of the features of Northern Irish English and Mid Ulster English. It also brings up relevant issues within sociolinguistics and the field of variation and change, such as social variables in

analysing language and how they influence speech. Previous studies performed in Northern Ireland are also mentioned here.

Chapter 3 contains information on the methodology used in the writing of this thesis. It details the process of conducting the fieldwork on which the material used in this study is based, and how the material was analysed. Chapter 3 also discusses the implications of using recorded speech as a representation of a speech variety, and presents in detail the three variables examined in this study.

Chapter 4 presents the results found in the recorded data, and is divided into separate sections for each variable. The results are described statistically, and are also represented graphically. In Chapter 4 we find that (ɛ) raising is more prevalent than expected, that palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ is almost obsolete, and that the centralisation of (ɛr) follows a different pattern in Portadown than in Lurgan.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings from Chapter 4 and explains them by means of currently known sociolinguistic phenomena, as well as by comparing them with similar phenomena found in previous studies. It finds that the variation found in Portadown can be explained by a number of different theories.

Chapter 6 summarises and concludes all the previous chapters, in particular the discussions from Chapter 5. Here the research questions and hypotheses are answered and assessed.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relation between language and society, or as Chambers (1995: 2) puts it, “the study of the social uses of language”. It seeks to uncover the social facets of language use which laypeople and regular speakers are typically unaware of. There are several subfields of sociolinguistics, but the largest subfield is the study of language variation and change. This thesis is a study within that subfield.

This chapter presents the relevant theory that forms the foundation for this thesis. It gives an overview of the field that is accent variation and change, and the social variables that are of relevance to the present study. It also provides the dialect background for Portadown in the form of Mid Ulster English, and Northern Irish English in general.

2.1 Accent variation and change

The study of language variation and change was pioneered by William Labov, and is also known as *variationist* sociolinguistics (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 1). Variationist or quantitative sociolinguistics is concerned not only with investigating how language varies and changes, but also why. This subfield of sociolinguistics first gained international recognition in the 1970s (Chambers & Schilling-Estes 2013: 2), and succeeded traditional dialectology. Traditional dialectologists were often more concerned with discovering and describing the oldest, broadest and most rural forms in an attempt to find varieties that were the most “pure” (this often meant the most rural) than describing how most people actually spoke, and were more interested in geographical than social variation. The old dialectologists did not always use tape recorders, and were not concerned with language change in the same way as variationists, instead studying change by finding features in rural dialects seen as representative of older stages of a language. In contrast, modern-day variationists are

more interested in features that involve variation, and focus more on finding patterns of linguistic variation and change, as well as describing the factors that guide these changes. Variationists also typically investigate much more recent changes than the dialectologists, who were more interested in language history than current change.

In describing language variation, we often talk about *the linguistic variable*. A linguistic variable involves a choice, be it conscious or unconscious, between two variants. This variation can manifest itself in many aspects of speech, such as in lexical items, grammar, or, as is most often the case in studies of variation and change, speech sounds. Furthermore, choices of variants often carry with them social meanings. These are referred to as *sociolinguistic variables* (Tagliamonte 2001: 6). The different variant realisations of a given linguistic variable do not involve different referential meanings, however. Instead they covary with one or more other factors, such as style, setting, or social category (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 88). Describing variation in this manner allows for the use of quantitative statements, so that a speaker or a group can be said to use a variant *more* or *less* than another speaker or group (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 88).

In variation and change research, the research samples are commonly stratified in terms of traditional demographic categories, such as age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Schilling 2013: 47). The present study concerns itself primarily with age and sex (more on the distinction between *sex* and *gender* below), whilst ethnicity is a smaller factor in the background.

2.2 Social factors

The use of language, consciously or unconsciously, reveals and conveys information about who we are. Much like how the sum of a person's possessions, mannerisms and clothing can betray their background, so can language. Speech, however, is less changeable and controllable, and may therefore allow us to say something about speakers' backgrounds (Chambers 1995: 7). Chambers (1995: 7) lists age, sex (or rather gender) and social class as the three major determinants of a person's social role, as well as the most important factors in influencing behaviour, including speech. While age and sex are mostly categorical, the nature of social class is more ambiguous.

2.2.1 Social class

The use of social class as a variable in sociolinguistics has been critiqued by sociologists, and especially the fact that the framework for analysing class has more or less been provisionally borrowed from sociology without the meticulous detail used in that field (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 95). The nature of this appropriation therefore involves a simplification of its theoretical background. However, sociolinguistics is not sociology, and as such, some simplification must be allowed for. The problem with using social class as a social factor in studies of variation and change derives from its elusive nature. Social class is comprised of a variety of factors, such as income, education, area and type of housing, occupation, as well as the fact that in some cultures class may be defined from birth. Cultural orientation or lifestyle may also define a person's class in some communities. The difficulty in determining which factors are most relevant for a person's social class in a given community, as well as the issue of where to draw the line between two classes (the boundary between upper middle and lower middle class, for example) makes using class as a social variable difficult. Indeed, in some communities, there may be other social factors that are more important in determining speakers' linguistic tendencies. Studies have shown social networks to be an important factor, such as the one performed by Milroy & Milroy (1972: 36). Watt (2002: 57–58) found regional identity to be of importance, and Fridland (2003: 296) mentioned cultural identity as a catalyst for language change.

2.2.2 Age

Age is one of the most important social factors in terms of language variation and change. Since change in language is most often led by young speakers using new forms, identifying change in language requires information about the difference between current and previous use. Ideally, language change is measured in real time, by comparing old data to current data. However, since we rarely possess such data, we often have to make do with so-called *apparent time* (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 35). The apparent-time hypothesis is based on the idea that the language of individual speakers

does not change drastically after the so-called *critical period* (around puberty), and that older speakers therefore are representative of the language of their youth. An apparent-time study is then a study that investigates language change by looking at differences between younger and older speakers. The alternative method of investigating change, the real-time study, compares old data to new data.

Along with gender, age is a social factor that is easily measurable and quantifiable. This allows for a straightforward classification of speakers (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 38). In our modern society, age has become the most immutable of all the social factors (Chambers 1995: 146). With age being the important and unchangeable factor that it is, in order to study language change, age has to be included in the equation.

2.2.3 Gender

After age, gender is the second most immutable social factor, and almost all studies of variation and change include a representative sample from both genders. One of the most recognised sociolinguistic facts is that there is almost always variation between genders in language use (Chambers 1995: 102), and that almost all sound changes involve some degree of gender differentiation (Labov 2001: 319). A distinction has to be made here between the definitions of *sex* and *gender*. Where sex is seen as the purely physical description of a person, gender is considered a social construct, which can be independent of biological factors (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 100). The manner in which gender plays a role in linguistic variation has been debated for quite some time. Initially formulated by Labov (1972: 243) as “In careful speech, women use fewer stigmatized forms than men, and are more sensitive than men to the prestige pattern”, he later wrote as his second principle of language change that “For stable sociolinguistic variables, women show a lower rate of stigmatized variants and a higher rate of prestige variants than men” (Labov 2001: 266). While there is a debate over the definition of the difference between the genders, there is a general consensus that women tend to use forms that can be considered to be more prestigious in the speech community. Watt (2002) found that while both genders in Tyneside seemed to shy away from the national

standard in long FACE and GOAT monophthongs, females seemed to prefer supralocal forms more than boys, who used the local forms more. There is also what Labov calls the *gender paradox* to consider. The gender paradox is that while women use higher rates of prestige forms, they also seem to lead linguistic change. Labov (2001: 292) formulates this as principle 4: “In linguistic change from below, women use higher frequencies of innovative forms than men do”. In the present study, the social category *sex* is used, as the debate around the definition of gender is beyond the scope of this thesis.

2.2.4 Ethnicity

In contrast to age and gender, ethnicity is a far less quantifiable social variable. Often connected to and confused with the idea of skin colour and race, the very definition of ethnicity can vary. We can consider an ethnic group to be “persons who share, or believe they share, common cultural characteristics” (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 108). By this definition, the influence of ethnicity on language can manifest itself in several ways. When ethnic distinctions are involved, there is usually a social imbalance in terms of discrimination and social status, and as numerous sociolinguistic studies before have shown, there is usually a correlation between social status and language variation.

Ethnicity is also society-specific. What constitutes an ethnic background in one society, may not do so in another. In Northern Ireland, the distinction between Protestants and Catholics can be considered a matter of ethnicity (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 113), but it would not be considered so in the United States, where ethnicity is seen more as a matter of ‘race’ or genetic background based on skin colour (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 109). Ethnicity does concern the current study to a degree, as it should be taken into account when investigating language variation and change in Northern Ireland (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 114).

2.3 The notion of prestige

In the discussion of gender in relation to linguistic variation above, it was mentioned that women tend to use prestige forms more often than men. Prestige in this context refers to so-called *overt prestige*, in which linguistic forms are given a higher status. Higher status is typically characteristic of standard varieties (Chambers & Trudgill 1980: 98–99). The opposite form of prestige, *covert prestige*, was first described by Labov when attempting to explain why speakers who thought negatively of their own way of speaking still used stigmatised forms (Chambers & Trudgill 1980: 99). Covert prestige is not prestige in the sense of approximating a higher status standard, but “in the sense of being favourably regarded by one’s peers, and signalling one’s identity as a member of the group” (Chambers & Trudgill 1980: 99). A dialect or features may be given covert prestige by some speakers, who might use such features even though they believe these to be ‘inferior’ to more standard ones. Covert prestige features are typically used by working-class males (Chambers 1995: 224).

2.4 Portadown

Portadown is a town in the north of County Armagh in Northern Ireland. It is situated in the Lagan Valley, approximately 40 km southwest of Belfast, and about 10 km southwest of the neighbouring town of Lurgan. During the 1960’s, the authorities initiated a project to merge the two towns and create a planned settlement called Craigavon in the area between the towns. The project was not successful, however, as Craigavon was never settled in the way intended, and today most people live in either Portadown or Lurgan. Around 22,000 people live in Portadown as of the 2011 United Kingdom Census (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, accessed 1 December 2015). Finding accurate numbers for the religious makeup of Portadown in the census is difficult, as the town is not counted on its own, but included in the greater Craigavon area, which also includes Lurgan. However, by combining numbers from the electoral wards that are in Portadown, we can arrive at an estimated 61% Protestant and

32% Catholic population in Portadown. While these numbers may not be as accurate as we would like, they do give an indication of the town's religious demographic profile when compared to the Craigavon area, which consists of roughly 46% Catholics and 48% Protestants. The Protestant to Catholic ratio is also higher than Northern Ireland in general, which has approximately 41% Catholics and 42% Protestants. Therefore, compared to its surrounding areas, Portadown can be said to be a predominantly Protestant town.

The geographical situation of Portadown also lends itself to the ease of Belfast influence. A motorway from Belfast to Portadown enables Portadown inhabitants to commute to Belfast for work, as well as railway and bus connections. Hickey (2007: 333) notes that there is a similarity in the accents in Belfast and those in the Lagan Valley, and Pitts (1982) found Belfast to have considerable influence on the Lurgan accent.

2.5 Northern Irish English

This section presents the history and current state of English as spoken in Northern Ireland. First, the division of the North into different dialect zones is presented, then the different dialects are described, as well as an overview of the Northern Irish vowel system and important features of Mid Ulster English.

2.5.1 Northern Irish dialect zones

Northern Irish English (NIE) is generally regarded as a distinct variety from Southern Irish English (SIE). In 1921, Ireland was partitioned into North and South (also referred to as the Republic of Ireland), following the enactment of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 (Corrigan 2010: 1). Seeing as one of the most influential correlates of an accent is *regionality* (Wells 198: 8), we would expect SIE and NIE to diverge after partition. Wells also writes that Northern Ireland stands apart from the Republic of Ireland (ROI) 'not only politically but also linguistically' (Wells 1982: 436). This is a simplification on Wells' part, however, as the dialect zones of Northern Ireland are not

isolated from those of the south. Instead, much like the communities there, the dialect zones exist independently of and across the border (see Figure 1.1).

The partitioning of Ireland is probably not influencing differences between Irish accents at all however, as there are older regionalities at play here. Historically, Ireland has been divided into the provinces of Munster, Leinster, Connacht and Ulster, the latter of which is the most relevant to this study. Ulster makes up the northern part of Ireland, and the name Ulster is often used interchangeably with Northern Ireland (Hickey 2007: 85). While the historical province of Ulster encompasses the entirety of Northern Ireland, there are also three counties within the Ulster area that are located in the ROI, namely Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan (Hickey 2007: 85). These three counties are, according to Hickey, still linguistically northern (Hickey 2007: 85), suggesting that the partitioning of Ireland may not have influenced their accents at all. Indeed, the major influence on accent differences in Northern Ireland is the language of the different peoples who settled there hundreds of years ago (Harris 1984: 14).

Within Northern Ireland, there are 6 counties; Fermanagh, Tyrone, Derry, Antrim, Down and Armagh (Corrigan 2010: 3). As this study is on English in Portadown, county Armagh will be the main focus.

The 6 counties in Northern Ireland can not be said to necessarily have their own distinct dialects, however. Corrigan (2010: 17) and Harris (1985: 14–15) describe three major dialect zones in Northern Ireland, based on their substratal settlement influences: the Ulster Scots area, the South Ulster English area, and the Mid Ulster English area. The locations of these zones are illustrated in Figure 2.1.

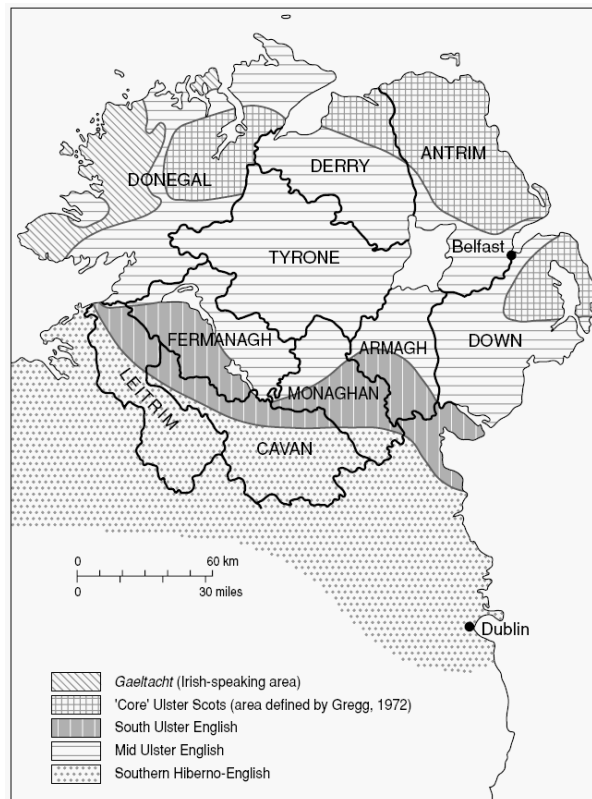


Figure 2.1 Approximate boundaries of northern Hiberno-English dialects (Harris 1985 :16)

The map shows county Armagh clearly divided in two by the boundary between South Ulster English (SUE) and Mid Ulster English (MUE). Portadown, lying in the north of county Armagh, is then situated in the MUE zone, whereas the county town, Armagh City, lies in the SUE zone in county Armagh. Corrigan (2010: 17) points out that SUE is spoken in the parts of the geographical zone known as ‘the Drumlin Belt’ which are in Northern Ireland. The Drumlin Belt, then, separates the dialect regions of Ireland between those north of it, which are influenced by Scots, and those south of it, which are not (Corrigan 2010: 14). This geographical separation between Portadown and Armagh City can be expected to have linguistic implications in terms of language influence, which will be explored in more detail below.

Portadown, and indeed the Craigavon area, is also situated in an area which has historically been on a dialect border between northern and southern features. Among these are two which are examined in the present study, (ε) raising and the palatalisation of /k/ and /g/. Figure 2.2 shows the contact zone between the northern palatalised

variant /kʲ/ and the southern velar variant /k/. The map is limited to the palatalisation of /k/, and does not include data for /g/. In both figures the approximate localisation of Portadown is marked with a red dot. In the map for CAT, which shows the distribution of palatalised and non-palatalised variants in Northern Ireland, Portadown lies more or less right on the border of a small zone stretching in from the northern boundary, in which older speakers seemingly retain the palatalisation of /k/.

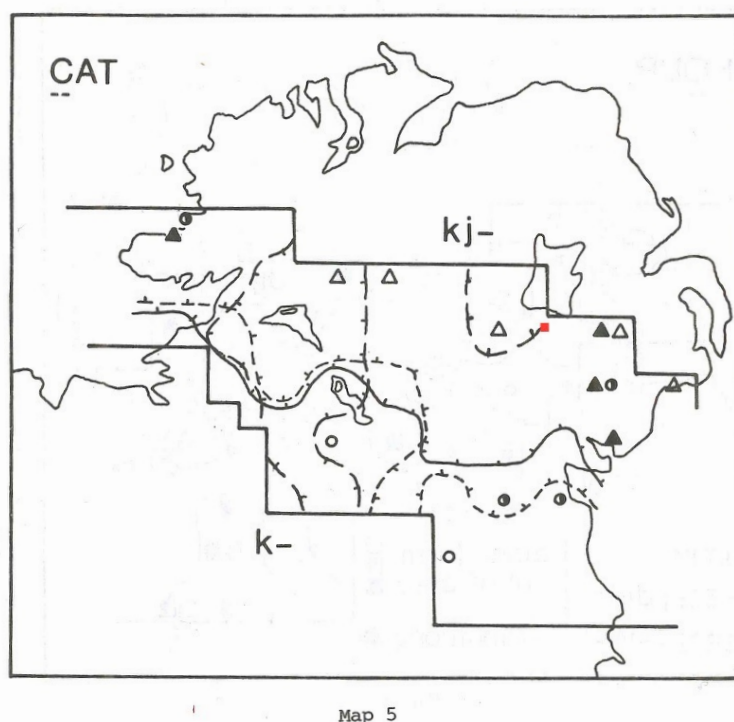
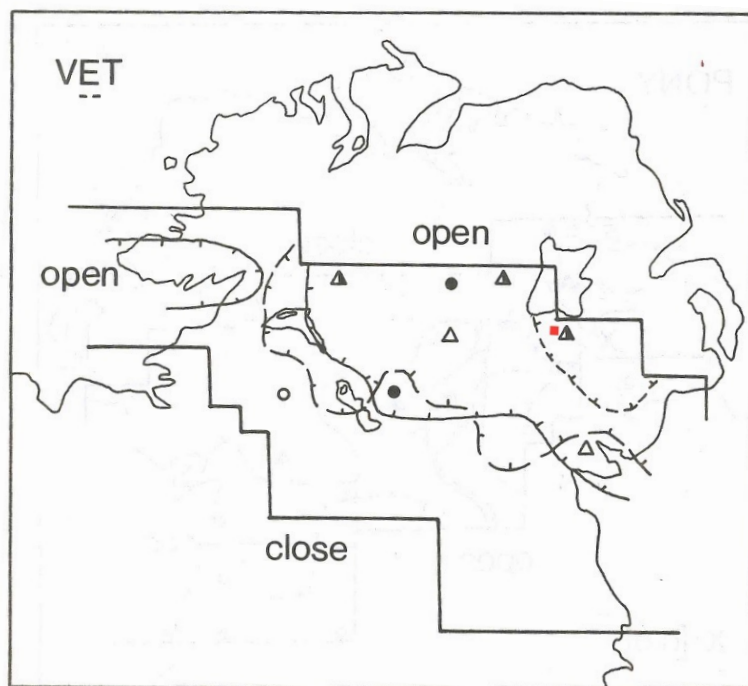


Figure 2.2 Dialect boundary for /k/ palatalisation (Barry 1981: 89; my emphasis)

Figure 2.3 shows that Portadown is also on the border for (ε) raising, being between the lowered (in the figure marked as *open*) northern variant and the southern raised (*close*) variant. The map also shows that as with palatalisation, Portadown is in an area where older speakers retain the northern form. The semi-filled triangle right next to the red dot marking Portadown indicates a southern form in a northern area. This can be seen as indicative of an area in which there is variation.



Map 12

Figure 2.3 Dialect boundary for (ε) raising (Barry 1981: 92; my emphasis)

2.5.2 Northern Irish English dialects

As we have already seen, Northern Ireland is divided into rather distinct dialect zones. Bearing that in mind, there are some similarities and differences that need to be discussed. The categorisation of the three different dialects found in Northern Ireland (US, MUE, and SUE) are based on which language they are most influenced by (Harris 1985: 14–15). According to Harris (1985: 14–15), the dialects are mostly distinguished based on their vowel length system. Ulster Scots has a full Scots vowel length system, where vowel length is not phonemic, but instead dependent on the vowel's phonetic environment. This variation in vowel quantity is governed by a certain set of rules, commonly known as the Scottish Vowel Length Rule or *Aitken's Law*, named after the linguist credited with first discovering it (Corrigan 2010: 17). South Ulster English, on the other hand, is distinct from US in that it maintains the phonemic vowel length system used in dialects found in the SIE region, as well as other dialects of English

(Harris 1985: 15). Mid Ulster English is described by Harris (1985: 15) as a ‘mixed’ dialect, combining the SVLR of Ulster Scots with English elements.

2.5.3 The Northern Irish English vowel system

Wells (1982: 438) describes the lexical incidence of the vowels in what he calls an ‘Ulster Accent’:

KIT	-	/ɪ/	DRESS	-	/ɛ/	CLOTH	-	/ɔ/
TRAP	-	/a/	BATH	-	/a/	PALM	-	/a/
LOT	-	/ɔ, ɒ/	STRUT	-	/ʌ/	FOOT	-	/u/
NURSE	-	/ʌɪ/	FLEECE	-	/i/	THOUGHT	-	/ɔ/
FACE	-	/e/	GOAT	-	/o/	GOOSE	-	/u/
PRICE	-	/aɪ/	CHOICE	-	/ɔɪ/	MOUTH	-	/aʊ/
NEAR	-	/ɪr/	SQUARE	-	/ɛr/	START	-	/ar/
NORTH	-	/ɔr/	FORCE	-	/or/	CURE	-	/ur/

Wells’ description seems to generalise the entirety of Northern Irish English. While this is perfectly legitimate for the purposes of an overview, there are several variables that differ regionally and socially within Northern Ireland. Furthermore, it should be noted that the work done by Wells is by now over 30 years old, and the data he used in his book might be even older still. Corrigan (2010: 33) notes that “the degree of divergence between this rather generalised system and the vowel qualities recorded in previous research on US/SUE/MUE is clear...”. Therefore, the information provided by Wells is not necessarily accurate today. Nevertheless, from Wells’ descriptions we can observe the following phenomena relevant to this study.

Wells (1982: 444) notes that the so-called NURSE merger has applied in the ‘Anglo-Irish area’ (by which he means MUE) in which SQUARE words have the original /ɛr/ pronunciation replaced with the NURSE pronunciation, described by Wells as /ə:/. He also notes that “in Belfast the vowels are on the whole merged” (Wells 1982: 444). According to Wells’ descriptions, palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ are “widespread in Ulster, particularly word-initially before a front or open vowel” (Wells 1982: 446). This is the full extent of his description of this phenomenon, however.

Wells (1982: 442) also writes that /ɛ, a, ɔ/ “all tend to be fully open front or central, if short, but closer and/or backer and diphthongized, if long. In the short

environments, in fact, one has the impression of a complete three-way neutralization of sets such as *pet-pat-pot* as [pa-t].” This type of merger is also mentioned by Pitts (1982: 65): “Adams [no written source - Pitts notes that this was mentioned in a personal discussion – MS] believed that it is possible, in some Mid-Ulster speech varieties (specifically Portadown, west of Lurgan) to get a merger of pet, pat, and pot.” It is uncertain how likely this is to be a full merger in all contexts, however. While the vowels seem to merge in some contexts, they have not merged completely, according to Wells (1982: 442). Pitts (1982: 65) also reports that this is probably not a true merger, but that native speakers still tend to struggle in distinguishing the different variants auditorily. This is suggestive of a so-called *near-merger*.

The DRESS vowel is the most relevant for the present study, as it concerns the variable realisation of short /ɛ/. Corrigan (2010: 36–37) notes that the vowel in DRESS is most often reported as /ɛ/, as also seen in Wells’ descriptions, but that it can also be lowered to vowel qualities close to /a/ and /æ/ in Working-Class Belfast speech. This lowering is, according to Corrigan, especially common in velar contexts. According to her, the quantity of /ɛ/ is often somewhat longer than the shorter RP variant.

2.5.4 Features of Mid Ulster English

Mid Ulster English is the term used for the English spoken in the northern regions of County Armagh, Monaghan and Fermanagh, in the south of County Derry, in the south and central parts of County Down and in all of County Tyrone (Hickey 2007: 93), as well as in most of Donegal and south Antrim. As evident from this description and the previously mentioned map of Northern Irish English dialect zones (see Fig. 1.1), the boundaries of MUE, or lack thereof, are not clear-cut. Indeed, Hickey (2007: 111) describes it as being a “blanket term for English which is not Ulster Scots, English in contact with Irish, or English in the transition area to the south”. The following features are specific to the MUE area and therefore relevant to the present study.

Of the consonantal features of MUE, both Hickey (2007: 114–116) and Corrigan (2010: 40–47) list several. However, the only one relevant to the present study is the

palatalisation of velar plosives, where initial /k/ and /g/ can become palatalised, leading to pronunciations like [kja.ɹ] or [kʲa.ɹ], and [gjas] or [gʲas] in words like *car* and *gas*. This palatalisation only occurs before low vowels (Hickey 2007: 15). This feature seems to be receding, however. Milroy (1981: 94) notes that palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ “seems to be virtually confined to West Belfast and then only to the older male group”, and that “there seems to be a generational difference in the speed with which it is dying out”.

In terms of vowels, Hickey lists no MUE specific features which concern this study. Instead, the vowel of DRESS seems to be supraregional in nature, with most of the NIE region typically having an /ɛ/ realisation.

As previously mentioned, Mid Ulster English has a vowel length system similar to the one found in Scots, called Aitken’s law. According to Pitts (1982: 50), in Scots, “the high vowels and the /ai/ diphthong are short except when occurring before a morpheme boundary, word-finally, or before /r/ or a voiced fricative”. The difference is that in Mid Ulster English, the mid and low vowels are also lengthened in these environments, as well as before voiceless fricatives and voiced stops (1982: 50). Hickey supports this claim, and adds that lengthening also seems to occur before sonorants, and often before all voiced obstruents (2007: 118).

2.6 Previous studies

Ann H. Pitts (1982) did a study on Belfast’s linguistic influence on Lurgan. The study was intended as a study in geographical diffusion, meant to “relate the findings of an urban sociolinguistic study of Belfast to a survey of dialect geography being conducted in surrounding districts” (1982: v). What she found was that Belfast influence was not a case of straightforward influence from a larger community to a smaller one. Instead, it was a more complex case of there being two different model varieties in Belfast. These two model varieties were, in turn, adapted by different types of speakers in Lurgan because they provided “systematic alternatives to the stigmatized vernacular which these speakers wish to avoid” (Pitts 1985: 82).

Pitts' study of Lurgan is the one with the most relevance to this study. Due to the geographical proximity between Lurgan and Portadown, it is reasonable to assume that the two towns should also be linguistically close. However, there may still be certain other differences between the towns. These differences could be in terms of religious demographics, as well as inhabitants' attitudes towards not only the other town, but also towards the two Belfast model varieties. Different attitudes towards the latter could also have implications for how any eventual changes are adopted, due to the way in which features were adopted in Lurgan.

Her study focused on five phonological variables. The variable realisations of the vowels (a) and (ɛ), involving backing of the former and raising of the latter, were found to vary along a continuum. The three other variables were the centralisation of (ɛr), variable dental realisation of /tr/ in words like *drink* and *shelter* and the palatalisation of /k, g/ before mid and low front vowels (Pitts 1982: 21–22). My current study will focus on the variable raising of (ɛ), the centralisation of (ɛr), and the palatalisation of /k, g/.

Pitts' investigation of the raising of (ɛ) was limited to short environments. Her study used percentage scores for the variable, to reflect how often /æ/ was raised to /ɛ/. The low realisation [æ] is considered the rural and conservative variant, whereas the open-mid [ɛ] is an innovation in MUE (Pitts 1982: 166–7). This means that a higher percentage score reflects less frequent usage of the vernacular variant [æ] and more frequent usage of [ɛ]. In addition to this, Pitts also operated with two different environments in which /ɛ/ occurred, which she labelled (ɛ¹) and (ɛ²). (ɛ¹) contains tokens from the monosyllabic -T environment, while (ɛ²) contains tokens from the polysyllabic -TS and -DS environments (Pitts 1982: 168). These environments were first mentioned by Milroy & Milroy (1978: 29–31), who found following phonetic environment to influence the realisation of (ɛ) in Belfast. The differences between these two environments are explained below in section 3.3.1.

Given what we know about gender differences in sociolinguistic theory, some of the results Pitts found should come as no surprise. The greatest (a) backing scores were found in conservative rural speech or in the vernacular of low-prestige inner-city Belfast

communities (Pitts 1982: 166). Backing of (a), then, is considered by Pitts to be tied to “vernacular values and especially covert prestige among males” (1982: 166), and the scores reflect this - men had consistently higher backing scores than women across all speech communities. Furthermore, in all areas, Protestant communities had higher backing scores than Catholic communities (Pitts 1982: 166). The assumption was that young Catholic males in Lurgan would have high backing scores, but this turned out not to be the case (Pitts 1982: 165). The scores for (ɛ) also corresponded with expectations. Given that raising of (ɛ) is associated with more formal contexts and social prestige, it should come as no surprise that the results showed that women had overall higher raising scores across all communities surveyed (Pitts 1982: 180). Religion was also found to be associated with (ɛ) raising, but only in Lurgan, where Protestants were found to have a somewhat higher probability of raising (Pitts 1982: 180). The results from the study of these two variables gives us a clear view of two variants with opposing values. Raised (ɛ) is associated with a formal style of speech, and is used more by females and in the ‘prestigious’ (read: Protestant) outer city of Belfast. Backed (a) is used more by males, is the more preferred variant in the predominantly Catholic inner city of Belfast, and is more frequently used in casual style (Pitts 1985: 79).

Pitts’ findings on the palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ were to some degree surprising. Rather than avoid palatalisation in its most stigmatised context, before /a/, females were actually palatalising more than males in this environment. She explains this as a case of a reinterpreted feature, where the usage of a markedly rural feature seems to have covert prestige for females, while it is a conservative rather than innovative feature for Lurgan males (Pitts 1982: 227–228). The variable centralisation of (ɛr) was found by Pitts to be an innovative feature, where women, and young women in particular, lead the change to centralise [ɛr] to [ɜ] (Pitts 1982: 204).

The two Belfast models influencing Lurgan were the Belfast Vernacular Model and the Belfast Prestige Model, from the inner and outer city, respectively. The Vernacular model was amongst other features found to favour the backing of (a) and the retention of the low (ɛ) variant [æ] (Pitts 1982: 224). The Vernacular model did not

seem to favour palatalised /k, g/, as the Belfast vernacular is primarily an urban variety, and palatalisation is considered a rural feature. On the other hand, the Prestige model was associated with higher frequencies of raised (ɛ) and centralised (ɛr), as well as the avoidance of palatal realisations of /k/ and /g/ (Pitts 1982: 226).

Lesley and James Milroy's study of variation and change in Belfast is one of the most famous sociolinguistic studies, and is rather relevant to the present study. Their study was among other variables concerned with the variable backing of (a) and the raising of (ɛ) (Milroy & Milroy 1972: 27–32). They found backing of (a) to be a feature spreading from East Belfast, which was a predominantly Protestant area, to the more Catholic West. They also found gender graded variation in the realisation of (ɛ), with females tending to raise more often than males.

2.7 Summary

As seen in this chapter, Northern Ireland seems to be a prime candidate for a study in language variation and change, especially when considering the different accents found there, and the possibility for dialect contact. In addition, the relatively low number of previous studies performed in Northern Ireland enables us to explore accents and places which have not yet been studied. Portadown also seems to be situated in an area which has been found to be a contact zone between northern and southern varieties. Since Pitts (1982) found the accent of neighbouring Lurgan to be involved in a number of changes, we should expect to see similar changes happen in Portadown as well.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the approach and methods used in the gathering and analysis of the data used in this thesis, as well as issues related to performing a study based on recorded data. First the fieldwork is described, then the data analysis, followed by an introductory overview of the three variables the study deals with.

3.1 Data gathering

No sociolinguistic study of variation and change can be done without some form of data on which to base the analysis of variables. I elected for the most common method of data collection, which is simply recorded speech. All the speech data in the study was recorded using a Zoom H2n handheld audio recorder, which allowed me to record high quality stereo sound at a sampling rate of 44.1 kHz. Having a good quality recorder also allowed me to adjust the direction the sound was recorded from, including 360° sound. This proved a useful tool when interviewing both lone and multiple informants in different interviews. I also opted not to use a lapel microphone, as I felt that it would add another obtrusive element to an already unfamiliar situation for the interviewees. It would also have made recordings that involved multiple people moving around more difficult to do. In this sense, not using a wired microphone was advantageous, as it allowed the informants to relax and move about as they pleased, creating a more relaxed setting. This was especially the case in interviews with informants who had children, as they could either move around to attend to their child, or leave the room as they pleased.

3.1.1 Fieldwork

Before the interviews, all the informants were informed about what would happen to the recorded data, as per standard research ethics. All participants were given a consent form containing all this information, which they were encouraged to read and sign. The

consent form also contained contact information for me, the fieldworker, and my supervisor. Some informants elected not to sign the form, instead giving me their verbal consent. All informants were explicitly informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they at any time during or after the interview could withdraw from the study, meaning that all recordings and information about them would be deleted. Sociolinguistic researchers often have to walk an ethical tightrope, however, as revealing too much of the nature of the study to the informant before the interview might cause them to pay more attention to the variables being investigated. Therefore, I decided to be honest but general in informing them; all informants were told that I was investigating the Portadown accent, as well as how it differed from the Lurgan and Belfast accent, and how older people spoke in comparison to younger people. The informants who were curious as to what the exact nature of the study was, were told so after the interview was concluded.

As Portadown was selected as the place of study primarily because I had contacts there, part of the preparation for my fieldwork was informing my contacts of what I was doing and how. Luckily they were more interested in helping than I had anticipated, and helped me arrange interviews with some of their acquaintances. My initial intention was for the fieldwork to be a so-called “friend of a friend” survey (Schilling 2013: 191), in which I would base my network on my contacts and their acquaintances, and then expand from there by asking informants to name others who might be interested in participating. This did not materialise, however; many of the acquaintances of my contacts were not from Portadown, and the few they did know were not available to be interviewed. I was able, however, to obtain interviews with 5 informants based on my contacts’ network (and indeed some of my contacts themselves).

Another idea I had was to visit a local church in search of informants. Schilling (2013: 184–5) mentions that institutions and leaders can be a valuable way into a community. I managed to get a meeting with the rector of the local church, and after explaining what I was doing and why, he was more than happy to assist me with, as he put it, “my education”. I was invited to attend church on the following Sunday, during

which I was able to present my project to the congregation (to much laughter - in fact, many of the people I interviewed during my time in Portadown found it very odd that I would choose to study their town, of all places). The rector encouraged all members of the church to help me out by talking to me, and I got to meet with several interested members of the community afterwards, with whom I made arrangements. In total, 6 of my informants were found through the church. This proved advantageous in the sense that I got a chance to introduce myself and my project to the informants before the interview took place. Having done so may well have enabled these informants to relax more around me, as I was at that point not a complete stranger to them.

Three of my informants were found by simply walking around town, and trying to talk to people at cafés and other workplaces. My intention was originally not to do the fieldwork in this manner, but after a few days of not getting anywhere through the social network of my contacts, I decided to force the issue instead. At this point it should be mentioned that I was interviewed by the local newspaper, who did a story on me doing research in Portadown. While awkward at first, having been in the newspaper proved to be a valuable factor in getting interviews. Some of my informants had read about me in the paper before I talked to them, and the ones who hadn't showed great interest when I showed it to them. It is my belief that having been exposed to the community in this manner was not harmful at all. In fact, it might even have given my project some much needed legitimacy, as many people seemed dubious or suspicious about my intentions beforehand.

Another potential problem I faced before I left, was whether I would be able to get enough young informants. As my contacts were around or even older than my own age, I contacted the local college in an attempt to arrange some interviews with students aged 18 and above. They were, however, not able to facilitate my request. Therefore, the "younger" group in my study consists of informants who are mostly in their late twenties.

3.1.2 The Sociolinguistic Interview and the observer's paradox

When conducting the interviews, I was constantly trying to combat the *observer's paradox*, which is the issue of trying "to observe how people speak when they are not being observed" (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 49). The assumption is that when people are being observed, they behave differently, and this applies to language as well. In an attempt to work against people's natural tendency to pay attention to their language in a formal, recorded setting, I employed several techniques, which are described below.

A technique developed by Labov called the "danger of death" question (Labov 1972: 113) is one of the most famous ways of eliciting natural speech: the idea is that by asking a question in which you expect the interviewee to relive an emotional experience, he or she will pay less attention to their language (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 49). The assumption going in to the fieldwork was that many people, especially those in the older age group, might have had experiences that could be considered dangerous during "The Troubles". However, the interviewees who did talk about those times, did so without emphasising the dangerous aspects of them. One interviewee, when talking about riots involving guns, nail bombs and grenades, concluded by saying "you just had to be careful, and that was it". This coincides with the experiences described by Milroy & Gordon (2003: 66), who describes "the characteristic response of Belfast people was a matter-of-fact account of what were often quite unpleasant and dangerous experiences". Whether there is a tendency for people in Northern Ireland to downplay these kinds of dangerous incidents or if this was just limited to the people I spoke to cannot be said for sure, but talking about danger of death scenarios did not seem to elicit emotional responses from my informants.

Another technique mentioned by Milroy and Gordon (2003: 66) is changing the dynamic of the interview situation by simply having more people in the room at the time of the interview. This was something I consciously attempted to do in as many of the interviews as possible. Six of the eleven interviews were done with more people involved than me and the interviewee. In three of these cases, the interview consisted of me, the interviewer, and two interviewees, and in the other three cases, the interviewee was joined by another friend who was not a subject of the study. Some interviews also

include small children in the background, as some of the interviewees were parents. I consciously made the decision to let the children be around, in the hopes that having young children to think about, the adults being interviewed might be less speech-conscious. Having a recorder with good enough quality to be able to discern vowel features in the presence of noisy children was helpful in this regard. This tactic seemed somewhat successful; in many of the interview situations, having multiple people in the room allowed them to talk not just to me but also amongst themselves, in effect making the interview less like an interview and more like a recorded conversation, allowing me to take more of an observer's role. It should be noted that there is a difference in the language adults use when talking to each other and the language adults use when talking to small children, so-called child-directed speech, or CDS (Gleason & Ratner 2013: 39). While CDS is most known for its prosodic features, the difference between normal speech and CDS in terms of vowel sounds eludes the scope of this thesis. Therefore, as a precaution, utterances used when addressing children in the recordings were not used for analysis.

3.1.3 Style and the implications of group recordings

The information gathering techniques used for the material in this study is varied somewhat, consisting of 6 group recordings and 5 where only I and the informant were present. While all the interviews were conducted with the common goal of eliminating speakers' attention to their own language, having two distinct recording situations creates a small problem in terms of style. While the change in group dynamic when conducting interviews with two or more people at a time seems to counteract the tendency for informants to use careful, standardised styles (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 67), there is also the issue of how to quantify the difference in speech style, if it can be quantified at all. We can use the following guidelines for determining speech style:

If the fieldworker, in the role of the interviewer, addressed questions to a single self-conscious informant, the style was designated Interview Style. If the fieldworker stayed out of the conversation altogether, or played only an inconspicuous part, while

two or more informants chatted among themselves, the style was called Spontaneous Style. (Pitts 1985: 69)

In fact, even the interview which had the most casual setting did not seem to capture a natural conversation. One informant even started directing other people in the room to “sit closer to the microphone”, a clear indication that the presence of me as a fieldworker and my recorder was not at all forgotten. Furthermore, I, as the fieldworker, was almost always involved in the conversations taking place. That being said, some interviewees obviously seemed more relaxed in the interview situation than others. One speaker’s usage of the vernacular feature TH-deletion hints at the fact that he may have been paying less attention to his speech than other speakers.

This study looks to compare its results to those of Pitts by using similar criteria for analysis. However, since Pitts had between 1–2 hours of data per informant (Pitts 1985: 69), and the data used in the present study amounts to on average 30 minutes per informant, depending on the interview there might be either too few tokens to represent the Spontaneous Style, or none. Because of all the factors mentioned above, all of the recorded speech in the present study has been labelled as being representative of Interview Style.

3.2 Data analysis

Before any analysis of the speech data was done, all the recordings were transcribed orthographically. This was a time-consuming process, taking about a month and a half. In order to ensure accuracy, many parts of the recordings had to be listened to several times. Any length of speech that was deemed unintelligible was marked as such and not used for analysis, as it is necessary to know which lexical set a word belongs to in order to say anything about its vowel qualities. Having proper audio processing software was an enormous boon in this regard; I had the opportunity to slow down certain stretches of speech that were so fast as to make it difficult to discern which words were actually said. It should also be noted that the recordings used for analysis were always the original ones, as using stretched audio might warp the sound and skew results.

3.3 Tokens used for analysis

In analysing linguistic variables, it is vital to have a consistent process which is followed. Prior to counting instances of a token, we need to establish the nature of the sound we are analysing, as well as the context in which it appears, the latter applying to both lexical items and phonetic environment, as will be explained below. Here the exact classification of the tokens used for analysis in this study is detailed.

3.3.1 (ɛ) raising

In analysing the (ɛ) variable, it was deemed important to be able to compare the results to those found in previous studies, specifically those of Milroy & Milroy (1978) and Pitts (1982). Both studies focused on the variability of the low mid vowel /ɛ/ in short environments, corresponding to the lexical set DRESS (Corrigan 2010: 36), and the same can be said of the present study. The Milroys described the variability of /ɛ/ with respect to the following consonantal environment. Furthermore, Pitts operates with the same environments, but with a distinction between two different groups of environments in which /ɛ/ is found. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these are known as (ɛ¹) and (ɛ²). The first environment consists of monosyllabic words with a word-final voiceless stop. The second environment consists of all other short DRESS words. The present study will focus mainly on the analysis of (ɛ²), as instances of (ɛ¹) occur more rarely, and the data set in the present study is smaller than those of Pitts and the Milroys.

This analysis operates with the same assumption as that of the two previously mentioned studies, which is that the original MUE DRESS vowel is a low front vowel, something around the phonetic environment of [æ]. This is a decision of practicality, as Pitts' analysis centres around the issue of *raising* of (ɛ). Therefore, in order to better compare the results from the present study to those found in Pitts' study, a similar framework is adopted. Pitts (1982: 238) assigned each occurrence of /ɛ/ one of seven variants, with any variant higher than [ɛ]¹ counted as raised, and my analysis uses more or less the same criteria. Tokens of (ɛ) are therefore analysed as either *low* or *raised*. In

¹ Pitts uses a symbol presumably meant to indicate a lowered [ɛ].

the auditory analysis, only those tokens which could clearly be identified as being of a lower quality, that is [æ], were marked as low. All other tokens from [ɛ] and all the way up to even [e] were marked as raised.

Furthermore, there were a selection of words omitted from the analysis. Pitts (1982: 104–106) excludes the following:

- Words belonging to the /e/ class of words, which due to a phonological MUE rule are lowered to /ɛ/ and lengthened before fricatives, word-finally, and “before a morpheme boundary preceding inflection for the plural of a noun or for the past tense of a verb” (Pitts 1982: 105). Examples of these words include *laid*, *paid* and *days*.
- The lexical item *yeah*, as well as *any*, *many* due to “ambiguous class membership” (Pitts 1982: 105).
- Any instance of /ɛ/ before /r/, which is analysed as a separate variable (ɛr).
- A list of words with a history of realisations as /ɪ/, including but not limited to words like *never*, *get*, *ever*, *every*, *next*, *yesterday*, *twenty* (Pitts 1982: 72). Furthermore, Pitts notes that for the words *together*, *yet*, *yes*, *yesterday*, *next*, *get*, *ever*, *every*, *never* and *clever*, the /ɪ/ realisation is “still the norm” (1982: 72), and “can be heard in Belfast and Lurgan pronounced either with [ɪ] or close [ɛ], but almost never [æ]” (1982: 73).

All the words mentioned above were omitted in this analysis, with the exception of the lexical item *together*, which was found to be variably raised in Portadown.

3.3.2 Palatal /k/ and /g/

In the auditory analysis of /k/ and /g/, all occurrences of the two consonants before certain vowels were counted. They were categorised by following phonetic environment into three categories. The first category is /æ/, in words like *cat*, *can*, *gas* and *Catholic*. The /ar/ class of words is most frequently the word *car*, but also *garden*, *guard* and *carpet*. The /ɜ:/ category consists of words like *girl*, and *curse*, but also words like *care* and *scary* in speakers who pronounce these words with /ɜ:/. This involves a merger of the SQUARE and NURSE lexical sets variably for some speakers, a phenomenon which

is discussed further in the following section. The analysis does not distinguish between palatalisation in /k/ and /g/. They are instead considered part of the same category, /k, g/.

The analysis distinguishes only between the velar variants /k, g/, and those variants which are considered to have a full glide, /kⁱ, gⁱ/. Previous analyses done by Pitts (1982: 192) also included a glideless palatal variant, considered to be somewhere in between a velar variant and a palatal glide. These variants were not distinguished in my analysis.

3.3.3 (ɛr)

The /ɛr/ environment is also known for variable realisation in Northern Ireland. Originally a Belfast innovation (Corrigan 2010: 39), the [ɛ] vowel in SQUARE words can be centralised to an r-coloured central vowel [ɜ] to form a merger with NURSE words. This is a relatively new feature, as evident in James Milroy's comment that especially younger speakers in Belfast pronounce the words *fir*, *fair* and *fur* the same way (Milroy 1981: 32). For the purposes of this study, SQUARE words can be distinguished into three separate categories based on phonetic environment which in turn influence the frequency of centralisation. These three environments are adopted from the work of Pitts (1982: 200), who showed different centralisation scores for the monosyllabic and polysyllabic environment, as well as for the lexical item *there*.

The categorisation of the three environments is relatively simple in nature. The polysyllabic environment consists of all instances of /ɛr/ in which the segment is followed by another syllable. Included in this environment are words like *scary*, *area*, *generic*, *ferry*, *airport*, and *America*. The monosyllabic environment is then all SQUARE words where /ɛr/ is word-final. Lexical items in this category include, but are not limited to *care*, *fair*, *where* (and other words ending in *-where*), *atmosphere*, *hair*, *compare* and *nightmare*. The final environment, *there*, was introduced as a separate environment by Pitts (1982: 200) because of its high frequency and tendency to be less centralised than the other two environments. The homophonous lexical items *their* and *they're* were also included in this category, but were also shown to have different rates of centralisation than *there*. As the auditory analysis was concerned with stressed

syllables only, the lexical item *there* was limited mostly to its adverbial usage. Existential *there* was deemed to be too often unstressed to be included in the analysis. The lexical item *very* was also omitted from the analysis, due to it rarely being centralised, as well as having been omitted by Pitts (1982: 200). In the auditory analysis of the variable, tokens were classified as having either the ‘standard’ vowel [ɛr], or being centralised, in which [ɜ̣] is used.

3.3.4 The representativeness of tokens

When analysing variation and change, it is important that the data used in the analysis is representative. In order to ensure that the results from an analysis most accurately reflect the way an informant actually speaks, and are not just due to random fluctuation, it is vital to have enough tokens of the variable (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 163–4). Saying that a variable is realised as a specific variant 100% of the time does not mean much if we only have two tokens of that variable. Statistically, the optimal number of tokens is around 30 or more. The statistical reliability does not seem to increase in a meaningful way beyond this number, peaking at 100% reliability at 35 tokens (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 164). However, when operating with either a small set of data, or tokens which are not very common, both being the case in the present study, 30 tokens for each variable may not be achievable. In cases like this, we can make do with fewer tokens, but numbers lower than 10 are considered unreliable (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 164).

Chi-square tests were carried out on some of the results presented in Chapter 4 to emphasise the statistical reliability (or lack thereof) of my findings. These tests were performed by means of a simple chi-square calculator online (Social Science Statistics). The findings were categorised as statistically reliable at either $p < .01$ or $p < .05$. Findings with a p -value of over .05 were labelled as such, and the p -value mentioned. It should be emphasised that these statistical tests are meant as supplementary additions to the results found in this study, and not as definite proof that they are true.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has given a thorough account of the fieldwork as done by me, as well as the issues encountered in recording and analysing the data. In addition, clear definitions for the classification and analysis of the variables have been established.

4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the data collected from speakers in Portadown. This data has been extracted via the auditory analysis performed on the informants' interviews. The results for each variable are presented individually.

4.1 Informants

Before presenting the results of the data analysis, it is important to first have an overview of the informants from whom the data was gathered. Table 4.1 below presents a list of informants as well as information about their age and sex.

Table 4.1 List of informants

	Speaker #	Pseudonym	Sex	Age
Younger Males	1	J.B.	M	18
	2	J.M.	M	27
	3	J.J.	M	27
Older Males	4	G.F.	M	54
	5	J.L.	M	58
	6	H.G.	M	62
n.a.	7	V.V.	M	74
Younger Females	8	C.N.	F	27
	9	R.C.	F	27
	10	D.N.	F	32
Older Females	11	J.C.	F	57
	12	S.Q.	F	58
	13	H.F.	F	52
n.a.	14	V.O.	F	88

The informants consist of 7 speakers of each sex, with 3 informants per group, the groups being younger males, younger females, older males, and older females, respectively. The ‘younger’ category consists of speakers aged 18–32, with the mode and median age being 27. The ‘older’ category ranges from 54–62. Two speakers, #7, V.V. (male) and #14, V.O. (female) fall outside these age brackets, as they are 74 and 88 years old, respectively. Their scores are therefore not used for the purpose of calculating group scores, but serve instead as points of comparison for each variable, being taken to represent an older dialect stage, much like non-mobile rural males (NORMS).

4.2 The variable raising of (ϵ^2)

The main area of interest in this study is the variable realisation of (ϵ) in stressed and short environments. As previously mentioned in chapter 3, the (ϵ) variable is split into two separate environments. The first environment, (ϵ^1), is in monosyllabic words with a word-final voiceless stop, like *let*, *check*, *set*, *met*, and *step*. The second environment, (ϵ^2), consists of all other occurrences of stressed short / ϵ /. Included in this environment are words like *eleven*, *electric*, *seventy*, and *went*. As seen in table 4.2, the total scores for (ϵ^2) raising shows that across all informants, (ϵ^2) is raised 84% of the time.

Table 4.2 Total (ϵ^2) raising for all informants

Raised		Low	
n	%	n	%
513	84	100	16

There are 613 tokens in total, which gives an average of 51 tokens per informant. The majority of informants have more than 30 tokens, which should be more than sufficient to ensure that any pattern in the data is not a result of random fluctuation. While two speakers come in at 21 and 22 tokens, respectively, some statistical reliability should still be maintained, as they are well above 10 tokens. In addition, both of these speakers have 100% raising of (ϵ^2), and as such, their percentage scores are not directly influenced by the number of tokens.

Table 4.3 (ϵ^2) raising by sex ($p=.051$)

	Raised		Low	
	n	%	n	%
Male	283	81	68	19
Female	209	87	32	13

Prior to analysing the data, the assumption was that sex would be the biggest factor influencing (ϵ) raising, especially since previous studies also found that females raised (ϵ) more than males (Milroy & Milroy 1972: 31; Pitts 1985: 78). Table 4.3 shows (ϵ^2) raising by sex. The data points to there being a clear difference between the sexes in raising, with females raising more than males, but the degree to which they differ seems less than anticipated, with only a 6% difference between the two sexes. This difference is especially small compared to the larger age difference. The results for (ϵ^2) raising by sex are not considered statistically significant since the p value is .051, but they are pretty close to being significant at $p < .05$.

Table 4.4 (ϵ^2) raising by age ($p < .01$)

	Raised		Low	
	n	%	n	%
Older	323	93	26	7
Younger	190	72	74	28

Another assumption prior to the study was that raising would be led by younger speakers, much like the results found by Pitts (1982: 180). This is not reflected in the data. Table 4.4 shows near categorical raising in the older group, while the younger speakers collectively had a significantly ($p < .01$) lower percentage score. When compared in this manner, age seems a bigger constraint on raising of (ϵ^2) than sex. However, both factors seem to be influencing raising.

Table 4.5 (ϵ^2) raising by age and sex group ($p < .01$)

	Raised		Low	
	n	%	n	%
Older Females	108	100	0	0
Older Males	215	89	26	11
Young Females	122	79	32	21
Young Males	68	62	42	38

It is when splitting the sample into age and sex groups that a clearer image is formed. Table 4.5 shows the older female group to have the most raising, while the young males raise least.

In addition, we can see that in our sample, older people and females tend to have more raising. This tendency is more clearly visualised in Figure 4.1.

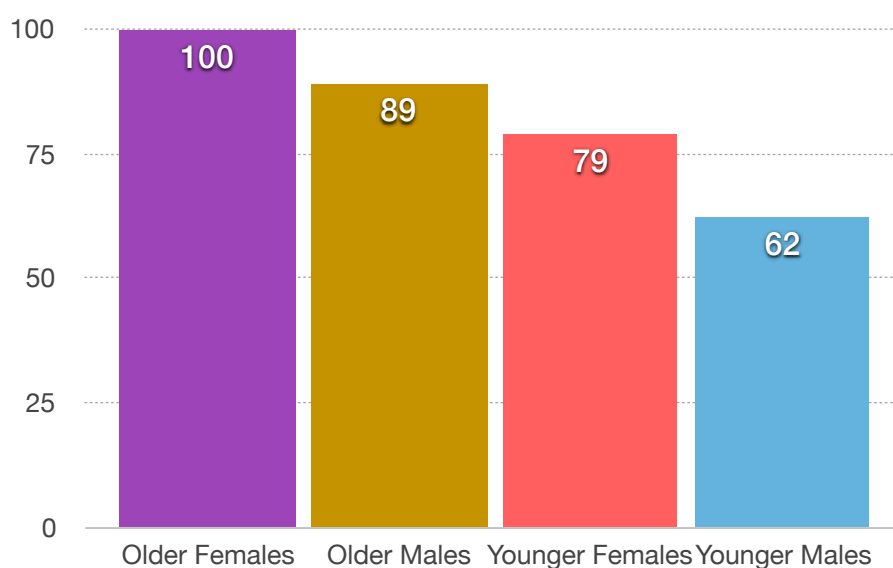


Figure 4.1 (ϵ^2) raising by age and sex group

In using such a small sample as in the present study, inter-speaker variation must also be accounted for. The four groups presented in Fig. 4.1 consist of only 3 speakers each, and as such, one member of a group has the potential to drastically influence the scores of the group. Looking at the individual percentage scores in Figure 4.2, we can see that all the females apart from D.N. have 100% percent raising scores for the (ϵ^2) environment.

However, young female speaker D.N.'s score (60%) affects the overall scores for both females and young females. We can also see that only one of the men, H.G., has 100% (ϵ^2) raising. These two factors point to the fact that in this data set, sex still seems to be the biggest factor influencing raising. The individual scores also seem to show a tendency for the younger speakers recorded in this study to raise less than the older speakers, especially the males.

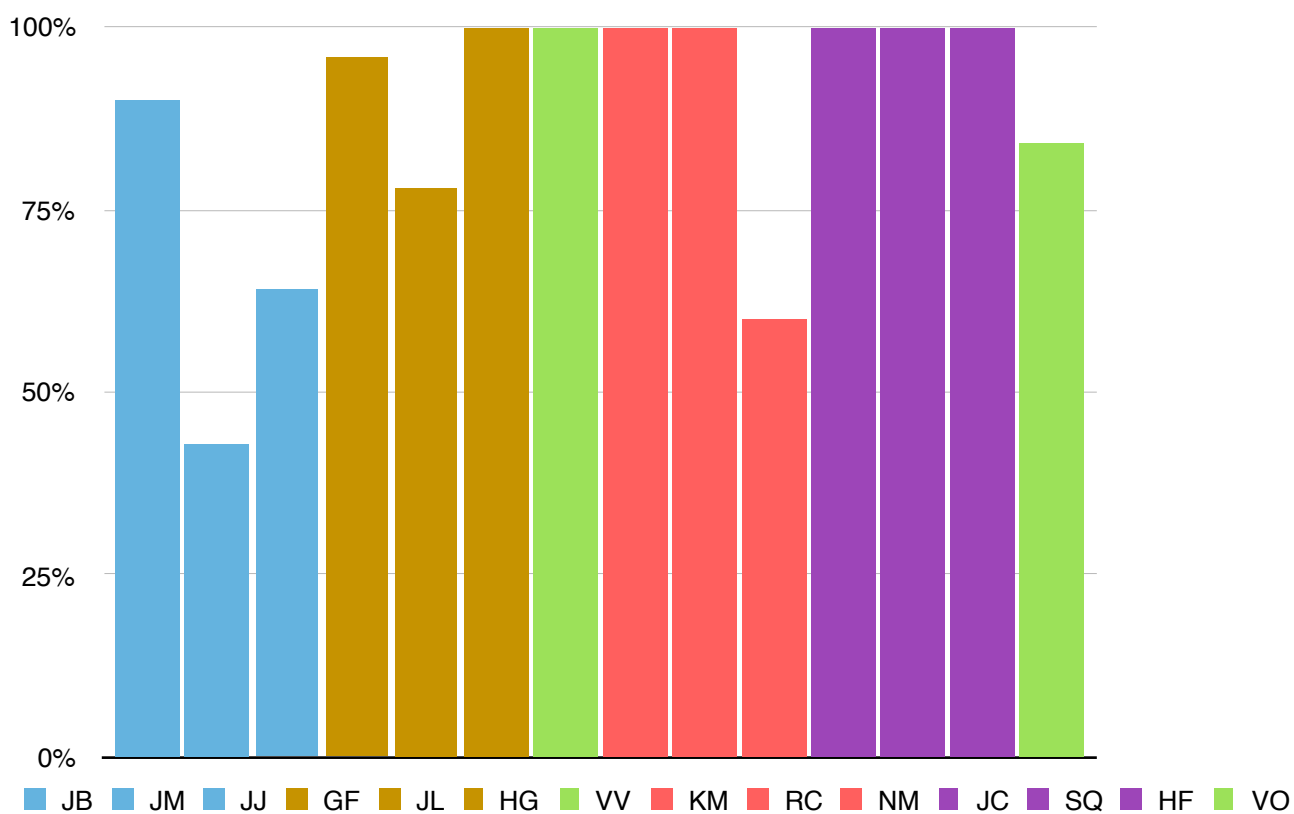


Figure 4.2 Individual percentage scores for (ϵ^2) raising

4.3 The variable raising of (ϵ^1)

The decision to split (ϵ) into two distinct environments was based on the work of Milroy & Milroy (1981) and Pitts (1982), who found that the two environments had different raising scores, with (ϵ^1) tending to be raised more often than (ϵ^2). However, since the (ϵ^1) environment occurs in fewer lexical items, there were far fewer tokens for (ϵ^1) in the recordings than there were for (ϵ^2).

Table 4.6 Total (ϵ^1) raising for all informants

Raised		Low	
n	%	n	%
45	82	10	18

In total, there were only 55 tokens for (ϵ^1), due in large part to the omission of words like *get* and *yet*, which occur more often than words like *let*, *check*, *set*, *met*, and *step*. While there are only two speakers with 10 or more tokens for (ϵ^1), we can still try to use the data to observe tendencies similar to those for (ϵ^2). Table 4.6 shows that the total (ϵ^1) raising scores for all speakers at 82% is almost identical to that of (ϵ^2) at 84%.

Table 4.7 (ϵ^1) raising by sex ($p=.83$)

	Raised		Low	
	n	%	n	%
Male	30	81	7	19
Female	15	83	3	17

Table 4.8 (ϵ^1) raising by age ($p=.33$)

	Raised		Low	
	n	%	n	%
Older	21	88	3	13
Younger	24	77	7	23

In terms of percentages then, (ϵ^1) closely mirrors (ϵ^2), the former having a 2% lower score for raising than the latter. The same similarity can be observed in tables 4.7 and 4.8. Compared to the corresponding group scores, the (ϵ^1) scores are within 5% for raising by age and raising by sex compared to (ϵ^2) (see tables 4.3 and 4.4 above).

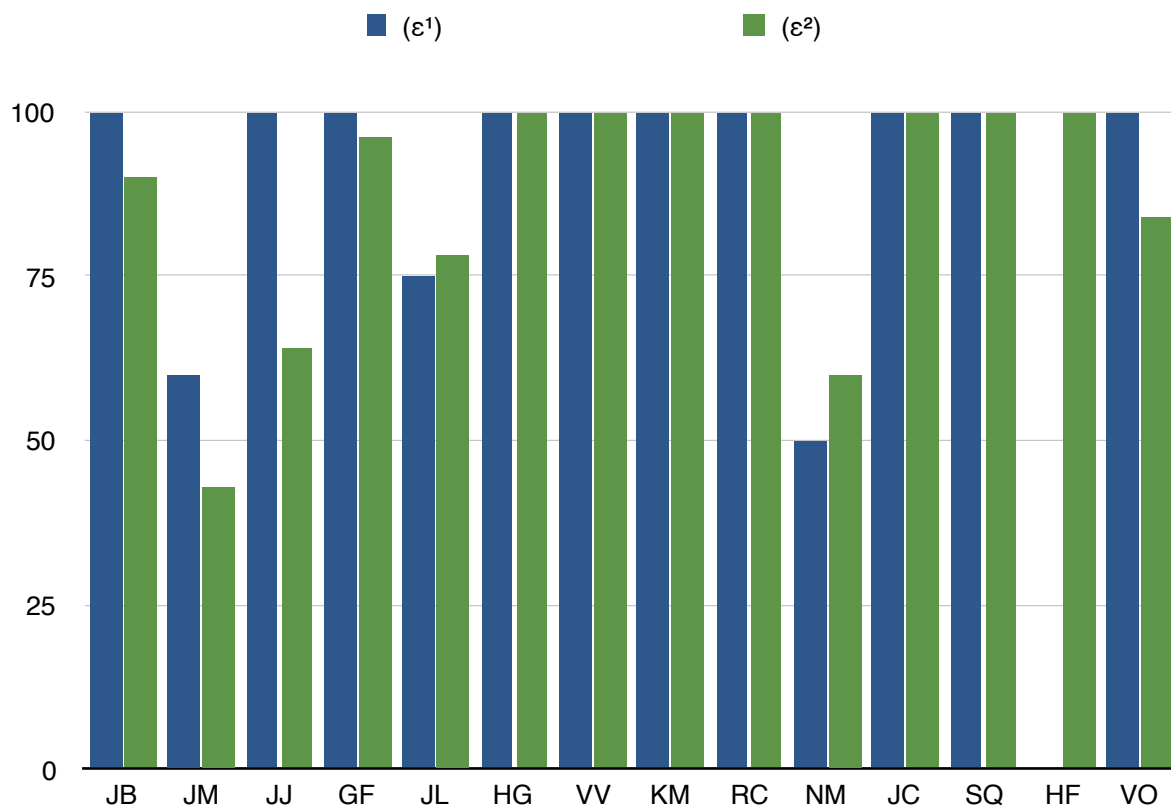


Figure 4.3 Individual percentage scores for (ϵ^1) and (ϵ^2)

Figure 4.3 shows individual percentage scores for both (ϵ) environments. Here it can be observed that all informants with 100% (ϵ^2) raising also show 100% raising in (ϵ^1), apart from speaker H.F, for whom there were no tokens of (ϵ^1). Speakers D.N (YF), J.M (YM), and J.L. (OM) also show comparable raising scores for both environments. These were also the three speakers with the highest number of tokens for the (ϵ^1) environment. Three male speakers with variable (ϵ^2) raising also showed 100% raising for (ϵ^1). However, speaker J.J. (YM) only had 2 tokens for (ϵ^1), and J.B (YM) and G.F (OM) only had 4, as seen in Table 4.9, which shows the individual percentage scores and number of tokens for (ϵ^1). As such, these results can not be said to be statistically reliable, and it cannot be inferred from the data whether these three speakers will always show 100% raising in the (ϵ^1) environment.

Table 4.9 Individual percentage scores and # of tokens for (ε¹)

		n	%
	JB	4	100
YM	JM	10	60
	JJ	2	100
	GF	4	100
OM	JL	12	75
	HG	5	100
n.a.	VV	4	100
	KM	3	100
YF	RC	6	100
	NM	6	50
	JC	1	100
OF	SQ	2	100
	HF	0	n.a.
n.a.	VO	1	100

4.4 The palatalisation of /k/ and /g/

The word-initial palatalisation of the velar plosives /k/ and /g/ before low front vowels is a well-known feature of Mid Ulster English. However, it has been suggested that this feature is receding (Corrigan 2010: 46). Pitts (1982: 197) found that in Lurgan, palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ varied not only with respect to age and gender, but also the following phonetic environment. One example of how this manifests itself is one speaker's pronunciation of *kit kat*, which is realised as [kʲɪt kʲæt]. The two words are identical except for the vowel quality. The close vowel *kit* does not encourage palatalisation, while the open-mid vowel in *kat* does.

Table 4.10 Total /k, g/ scores for all speakers by phonetic environment

Total scores	Glide	Velar	Glide %
[æ]	15	101	13
[a]	3	49	6
[ɜ]	1	40	2

As seen in Table 4.10, which shows total scores for all speakers by following phonetic environment, /k/ and /g/ show the most palatalisation (here marked as glides) before /æ/ in words like *kat*, but also *can't*, *Catholic*, and *gas*. Palatalisation can also occur in *can*, but only when stressed, as the unstressed realisation [kən] does not have a low front vowel. The low number of glides before /ar/ words is surprising, considering the fact that it is supposedly a very salient MUE feature, most notably in the lexical item *car*, but also occurring in words like *carpet*, *garden*, and *guard*. The /ɜ/ class of words had only one full glide, as shown in Table 4.10. This is a class that Pitts (1982: 193) found to mostly consist of the single lexical item *girl*, with all of 88.35% of the class being instances of this word. In the present study, 30/49 tokens for the /ɜ/ class consisted of the lexical item *girl*, or about 61%. Furthermore, the one token with a glide in this class is the lexical item *care*. More glides were also expected from this class than were found, as Pitts (1982: 193) found this class to have full glides in 56% of the tokens for all speakers.

Table 4.11 /k, g/ scores by age group and phonetic environment

	[æ]		[aɪ]		[ɜ]	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YM	0	0	0	0	0	0
YF	0	0	0	0	0	0
OM	14	40	3	20	1	7
OF	1	3	0	0	0	0

The reason for the apparently low total scores becomes evident upon examining the group scores in table 4.11. Apart from one palatalised token in the /æ/ class of words by older female speaker S.Q., the only group that displays the feature is the older males. This is consistent with the fact that older males were the group with most palatalisation in Pitts' study, as well as confirming the assumption that palatalisation of word-initial /k/ and /g/ is a feature that appears to be declining.

Table 4.12 All tokens of /k, g/ for speakers with palatalisation

	[æ] glide	[æ] velar	[a _ɪ] glide	[a _ɪ] velar	[ɜ~] glide	[ɜ~] velar	[ɛ] glide
GF	4	6	0	6	0	7	0
JL	10	8	3	5	1	3	2
SQ	1	11	0	0	0	0	0
VV	0	8	0	1	0	3	1
VO	19	4	1	2	0	7	0

Table 4.12 provides a detailed overview of all the /k/ and /g/ tokens for all the 5 speakers who showed palatalisation. Note that as with previous variables, speakers V.V. and V.O. are too old to be included in any group scores. The table also shows that the only speaker included in the study with palatalisation before [a_ɪ] is J.L. (OM). Table 4.12 also includes a fourth environment not previously mentioned, [ɛ]. Originally the decision was made to not analyse whether palatalisation occurred before /ɛ/ and /ɪ/, as the vowels were deemed to be too high to show palatalisation. During the auditory analysis, however, three palatalised tokens before [ɛ] were found, all instances of the lexical item *kept*. All three instances also had the raised variant of (ɛ²), and therefore did not belong to /æ/ either, although *kept* can be lowered to /æ/, as shown by YF speaker D.N. It is possible that the older low realisation of *kept* has allowed it to be palatalised, and that the raised /ɛ/ realisation has followed later. Due to the small data set and limited number of tokens, the possibility of a lexical bias can not be excluded.

4.5 The centralisation of (ɛr)

As mentioned in chapter 3, the analysis of the (ɛr) variable was separated into three categories; monosyllabic tokens, polysyllabic tokens, and the lexical item *there*. The monosyllabic category consists of word-final instances of /ɛr/, as in *care*, *spare*, and *where*, whereas the polysyllabic environment is comprised of words in which there is a following syllable after /ɛr/, as in *wherever*, *stereotype*, and *fairly*. The third category was supposed to consist only of the lexical item *there*, limited to the adverbial usage.

However, due to the identical pronunciation of two other lexical items, *their* and *they're*, these were also included in this category.

Table 4.13 Total scores for (ɛr) centralisation

Monosyllabic		Polysyllabic		<i>There</i>	
n	%	n	%	n	%
156	73	68	88	305	62

Table 4.13 shows total scores for all speakers by category. In total there were 529 tokens, with *there* having the most tokens. It is also apparent that the polysyllabic environment seems to favour centralisation most, followed by the monosyllabic environment. *There* has the least centralisation with 62%. This is surprising given that Pitts (1982: 202) found polysyllables to have the lowest rates of centralisation.

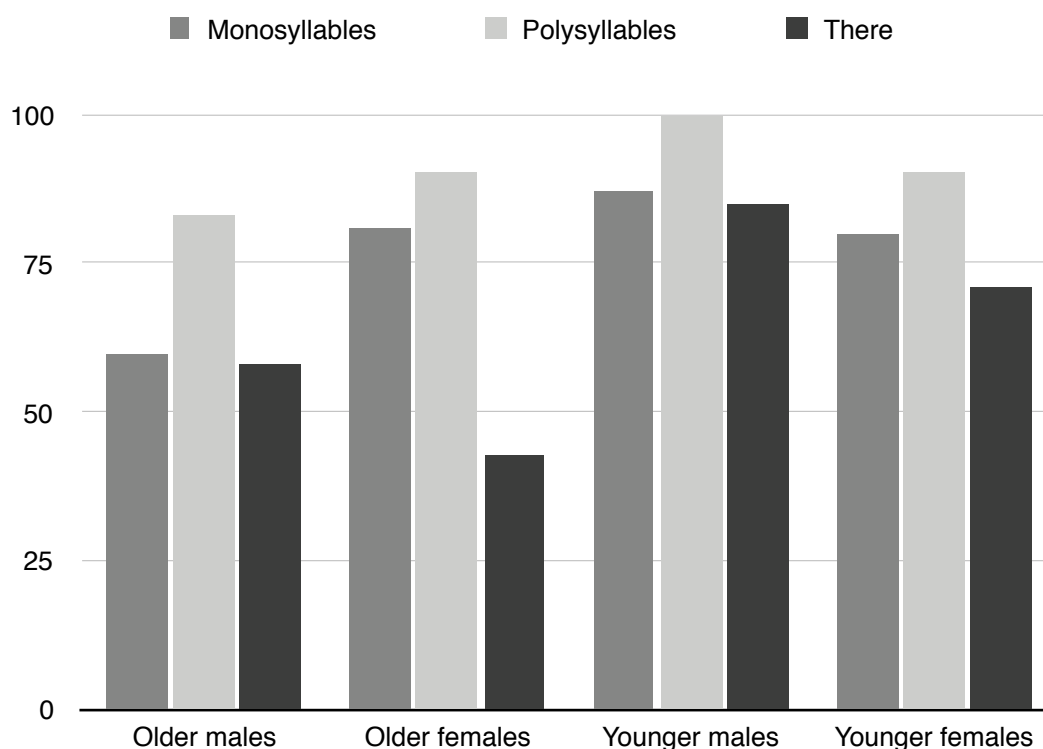


Figure 4.4 (ɛr) centralisation by phonetic environment, by age and sex groups

Age seems to be the biggest factor influencing the centralisation of /ɛr/. As seen in Figure 4.4, the centralisation scores are higher across most environments for the

younger speakers. *There* appears to show the biggest difference between the age groups, with the younger speakers on average centralising 23% more often than the older group. Sex does not appear to be as big an influence on centralisation as age. However, males seem to centralise *there* more often than females, if only by a small degree. Polysyllables do not show much variation between age and sex groups, but there are also very few tokens for this environment. While younger males have 100% centralisation in polysyllables, there are only 3 tokens, so this percentage can not be considered statistically reliable. The monosyllabic environment also offers some interesting tendencies. While *there* shows clear variation across both age and sex, monosyllables are centralised almost equally often by all groups with the exception of older males, who only centralise in this environment 60% of the time.

Table 4.14 *There* centralisation by lexical item

/θɛr/		their+they're		Restricted <i>There</i>	
n	%	n	%	n	%
305	62	135	44	170	77

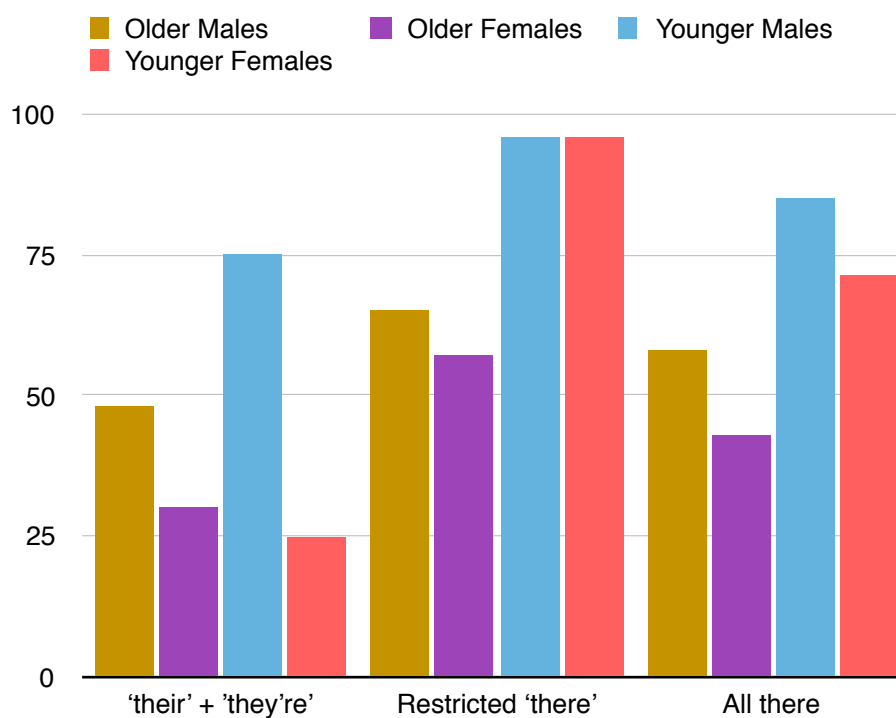


Figure 4.5 Centralisation of *there* by lexical item and age/sex group

While the words *their* and *they're* were included in the *there* environment due to their identical phonetic realisation, a more careful analysis reveals that they are not as similar when it comes to centralisation. As seen in Table 4.14, the words *their* and *they're* are centralised 44% of the time, compared to *there* (referred to in the table as 'Restricted *There*'), which has a centralisation rate of 77%. While this vast difference in centralisation does not mean that the three lexical items cannot and should not be grouped together, it should be kept in mind that the inclusion of *their* and *they're* has decreased the overall centralisation rate by 15%. Figure 4.5 shows that the choice of lexical item seems to have an impact on the centralisation rate regardless of the fact that they are in theory homophonous. The lexical item *there* is centralised more often than its homophones *their* and *they're*, especially so for the younger speakers. This is most notably the case with the younger females, who have a centralisation rate of 25% in *their* and *they're*, and 96% centralisation in the lexical item *there*.

4.6 Summary

Chapter 4 has presented the results from the auditory analysis of the recorded data. Here we can clearly see tendencies among Portadown speakers to raise (ε) and centralise (εr), as well as the apparent obsolescence of /k, g/ palatalisation.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter seeks to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1, and confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses introduced there. Here I will discuss and interpret the findings presented in Chapter 4. The data, having already been analysed, will be explained using established sociolinguistic theory, as well as comparisons with previously published works.

5.1 The raising of (ɛ)

This section discusses the raising of the DRESS vowel from /æ/ to /ɛ/ in stressed, short environments. As seen in Chapter 4, (ɛ) is involved in both age and sex variation. This discussion will focus mainly on (ɛ²), as it is the variable with the most tokens and the most variation, but also because there is a lack of statistical significance in the (ɛ¹) data. (ɛ) raising has been described as an “innovative feature in Mid-Ulster English” (Pitts 1982: 166). What this means is that the low front vowel [æ] is considered the old realisation, and that the raised variant [ɛ], and sometimes even [e], is the new one. This should lead us to expect a clear age differentiation, where younger speakers raise (ɛ²) more than older speakers. However, as shown in the results in Chapter 4, the reverse is the case. The older Portadown speakers have a raising score of 93%, which is very high compared to the younger speakers, who raise (ɛ²) 72% of the time. In order to figure out why this is, there are a few factors which must be considered.

As explained in Chapter 4, while there is quite a difference between the age groups, the scores for age and sex combined paint a somewhat different picture. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the females raise more than the males in their respective age groups. But while the scores for (ɛ²) by age and sex do seem to indicate a change back towards the old standard led by the males, a more realistic assumption is that the change to the raised realisation [ɛ] has more or less taken place, and that the low realisations by

the males in Portadown are due to the phenomenon called *covert prestige*, in which males orient themselves towards features that are typically non-standard, more regional, or even stigmatised. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the individual scores in Figure 4.2 show that all the females in the study have a 100% raising score, except D.N. Since this is a very small scale study, her score of 60% (ϵ^2) raising has a disproportionate influence on the scores for both the female group and the younger female group. The tendency in Portadown seems to be that females raise more than men. Similarly, the percentage scores for older men are also influenced by speaker H.G. being the only male with a 100% (ϵ^2) raising score. While these two speakers are not in any way omitted from the study, we should be aware of the effect they have on the scores. H.G. seems to be a very corrected speaker, with scores approximating more that of the older females than the older males. H.G. is a middle class business owner. He also has the lowest scores for (ϵr) centralisation, which is a clear indication of corrected speech, since he seems to prefer conservative features.

Having taken these two speakers into account, the general tendency seems to be for females to orient themselves towards the more prestigious raised (ϵ), and for males to raise less.

Another factor possibly influencing the raising of (ϵ) is the fact that many of the informants in this study seem to be very corrected speakers. Six speakers had 100% raising, and two others had over 90%. Whether this is a consequence of the interview situation, the speakers' normal speech patterns, or a combination of both is uncertain. However, most informants seem to adhere to a somewhat corrected speech pattern. The two younger males with the least raising, J.M. and J.J., both belong to the working class, and young female D.N.'s low scores for raising may well be connected to her social network, in being close friends with J.M. An interesting point to note is that D.N. and C.N. are sisters close in age, but with radically different scores for (ϵ) raising and (ϵr) centralisation. This may stem from a difference in social motivation, as well as different educations, the latter, C.N., being a university graduate.

At this point I do not consider it unreasonable that the data for this study is influenced by a measure of selection bias, and that if the fieldwork was done

exclusively on working class speakers, the results might be quite different altogether. Unfortunately, this is one of the downsides of such a small scale study. The goal of the project was not to investigate the working class speech of Portadown, however, and therefore a random (or as random as possible) selection might be more representative than if the study had been done with the aim of selecting certain types of speakers.

Nevertheless, the data for (ϵ^2) raising in Portadown does not point to language change in the way first assumed, where young females are leading a change towards raised (ϵ^2). Instead, it appears as if the raised variant [ϵ] has been established as the prestige variant, and that the older realisation, [æ], is used by younger males and one younger female due to *covert prestige*.

The style of speech used in the recordings also has potential to influence the scores. Pitts specifically notes that in some cases, the recording situation seemed to be a more influential factor in (ϵ) raising than the demographic profile of the speakers (1982: 177–8). This observation was based on a number of seemingly corrected speakers having surprisingly low raising scores in casual speech. She also found that the probability of raising in Lurgan was highest in formal style (Pitts 1982: 175), which is the style in which all of my recordings are categorised. Therefore, we should expect to see higher raising scores in my Portadown data, since there can hardly be said to be any instances of true casual speech. While this is not an issue in and of itself, it must be kept in mind when considering the results of the data that the ‘real’ level of raising in Portadown might be lower than what is observed in my recordings. Furthermore, any comparison to Pitts’ Lurgan data should be made on a similar basis, i.e. the Portadown data should be compared to the data from the Formal Style in Lurgan.

In terms of language change, then, the change towards the raising of (ϵ) seems to have already taken place in Portadown, with the raised variant being the new standard. This is a change seen in apparent-time when compared to the data from Lurgan in 1982, as even the older speakers in my study have near-categorical raising, especially the females. In contrast, (ϵ) in Lurgan in 1982 seemed to be moving towards raising, with the younger speakers raising most. As such, this conclusion is based on the assumption that Portadown and Lurgan are similar enough speech communities that they can be

considered to have more or less the same accent. There is a slight problem with this assumption, however, in that the apparent-time comparison of Portadown older speakers with Lurgan's younger speakers in 1982 still shows quite a difference in raising, with the older Portadown speakers raising much more frequently than their apparent-age peers. This does not mean that the accents are not very similar, however, but may point to other factors, such as differences in the interpretation of this feature between the two towns.

At any rate, (ε) raising in Portadown, as in Lurgan, seems to be a case of geographical diffusion wherein the innovative Outer City Belfast feature has spread westward to nearby towns. This Belfast innovation seems to have been first adopted by the Portadown females, and then established as the norm for Portadown. The apparent resistance to this change by Portadown males can be explained by covert prestige - that certain males in Portadown adopt more non-standard features. Meanwhile, the women seem to orient themselves to a more supraregional standard. While this study employs no ethnic differentiation, the fact that Portadown is a predominantly Protestant town may have enabled this change to have happened more easily and possibly faster than in Lurgan.

To conclude, while my data for raising of (ε) is probably influenced by factors like style, speakers correcting in the direction of the standard, and few informants, these factors alone cannot account for the change in the vowel's quality over the past generation, as well as the striking difference between present-day older Portadown speakers and their apparent-time Lurgan peers. All signs point to the fact that raised (ε) is now the norm in Portadown, and that its status as such has led to a reinterpretation of its prestige for some speakers.

5.2 The palatalisation of /k/ and /g/

The assumption prior to the analysis was that palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ was a feature that would primarily be used by older speakers, indicating a declining feature. The data more than confirms this hypothesis: palatalised tokens are found exclusively among the older speakers in the study. Even among the older group, only three speakers had

palatalised tokens. In addition, the two speakers deemed to be too old to fit into the older group also show palatalisation. These results clearly show that there is a change away from the [k^j] and [g^j] realisations in Portadown, and if my data is anything to go by, this looks like a dying or even dead feature. The change does not appear to be led by any one sex in the data, in the sense that none of the younger speakers have palatalisation. However, the feature does seem to be most resilient among the older males, indicating that the change was at first led by the females. This is shown in that of the three speakers with palatalised tokens, only one, S.Q., was female. Furthermore, she only had one palatalised token. This is consistent with Pitts' observation that males had the highest frequency of palatalisation (1982: 198). Moreover, she observed that the males palatalised most before /æ/ and /ar/, a tendency that is also found in this study. The older males in Portadown had a palatalisation score of 40% and 20% for the /æ/ and /ar/ environments, respectively. The comparatively higher palatalisation rates among males are no surprise, considering that palatalisation is considered a feature to be avoided (Hickey 2007: 335). This is consistent with the idea of covert prestige, in which rural, non-standard features are often preferred by males, even when stigma is attached to them.

In comparing the present-day Portadown data to Pitts' Lurgan data from 1982, there are some striking differences. While she does note that the boys use "relatively few [k^j] or [g^j] variants" (1982: 199), the percentage scores listed for palatalisation for this group are still quite high compared to even the older men in Portadown. This is the group who, if we are to observe this variable in apparent time, would have been at around the same age as Pitts' younger male group in 1982. In the Formal Style, Lurgan boys' percentage scores for palatalised tokens are 71% before /æ/, 53% before /ar/, and 0% before /ɜ/. In contrast, the older Portadown men's scores for palatalisation in the same environments are 40%, 20% and 7%, respectively. If we were to assume that the age of older men in Portadown roughly corresponds to that of the boys from Lurgan in 1982, this points to a difference in palatalisation between the two towns. Note also that the comparison between the two towns' percentage scores is based on the Lurgan study's Formal Style, which is the one in which boys were found to have the *least*

palatalisation. In the Casual Style in Lurgan, palatalisation rates go up to 100% across all environments. As there is no such style category in my data, it makes most sense to compare it to Pitts' Formal Style, especially since most of my data comes from interviews. Pitts defined her Formal Style as "any speech produced in response to the presence of a fieldworker" (Pitts 1982: 144), a description which fits most of my interviews, with the possible exception of two, neither of which were with any of the older males. If anything, comparison with the Formal rather than the Casual Style downplays the striking difference between the two speech communities in apparent-time.

While the variable realisation of word-initial /k/ and /g/ is definitely influenced by the following phonetic environment, there does seem to be an element of intraspeaker variation. An example from the 58 year old male speaker J.L. illustrates how the same word can have differing realisations in quick succession: "...they don't [k^j]are. You know, they just don't [k]are." In this example, the first instance of *care* is palatalised, while the second is not, as J.L. appears to correct himself. Intraspeaker variation like this hints at the possibility that palatalisation might be more frequent when speech is not being paid as much attention to, in other words in a more casual style. In the utterance, J.L.'s repetition of the phrase emphasises the word *care* the second time. The same is true of the only palatalised token by older female speaker S.Q.: "but you [k^j]an't, you [k]an't survive with that." Here, too, the first instance of the word is palatalised, while the second, emphatic repetition is not. It is entirely possible that the repetition of the phrase influences the style in which it is uttered. As Labov (2006: 47–48) found, speakers were more likely to use a more prestigious feature in an emphatic repetition of a phrase. It is possible that a similar phenomenon is at work here, since non-palatalised pronunciations of /k/ can be said to be considered prestigious.

As with the raising of (ɛ), the reduced palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ can be viewed as a trend either originating in Belfast, or simply based on speakers not wanting to associate themselves with more rural accents. Likely both are the case. The total lack of palatalisation among females points to the conclusion that this change was originally led by females, but as opposed to (ɛ), there seems to be no sex differentiation among the

younger speakers. Pitts (1982: 199) notes that females seemed to interpret palatalised variants as “carrying some prestige”, indicated by their somewhat high scores, especially in environments other than before /æ/ and /ar/. There is no indication in the data that this is happening in Portadown. While there was one older female with a palatalised token (S.Q.), this is hardly an indication of overall values in Portadown. Interestingly, when asked whether she herself said [kʲ]ar (which seems to be the preferred way for Portadown speakers to refer to this feature; “Portadown people would say [kʲ]ar”), S.Q.’s response is the reverse of J.L.’s emphatic correction:

S: and the way we would say [k]ar here ... whereas in Belfast it would be very much ... [kʲ]ar. And not [kʲ]ar.

I: Do people say [kʲ]ar around here?

S: They do, yes, [kʲ]ar, I got a new [kʲ]ar theday ...

I: Do you say [kʲ]ar as well?

S: I would say [k]ar, yeah. [kʲ]ar, yeah.

This example is interesting because not only does S.Q. self-report as using palatalisation while not having any other palatalised tokens for the rest of her interview, she also corrects herself upon repeating the word. The first ‘car’ is not palatalised, while the following pronunciation is. While one should take care not to read too much into a lone example, this can be seen as an indication that for S.Q., palatalised variants might still hold some prestige, hence her correcting herself to a palatalised realisation and saying that she palatalises. This is a classic example of covert prestige, where speakers claim to use features that are considered to be of lower status, while actually not using them (Chambers & Trudgill 1980: 99). The interview setting might also have played a part, seeing as I, the fieldworker, do not speak with a local Portadown accent, and some speech accommodation might have taken place. Also, if S.Q. sees palatalisation as a prestigious feature, we would expect her to use it more in the Formal Style, like the Lurgan females (Pitts 1982: 197). However, only 1 of 12 tokens was palatalised in an interview labelled altogether as being representative of the Formal Style. The very old female speaker V.O, on the other hand, has the highest scores of all the informants for palatalisation before /æ/. This is consistent with Pitts’ other observation that older

women show a higher degree of palatalised variants, possibly dating back to a time when these were prestigious due to their frequent use in Belfast (1982: 199).

It is possible that palatalisation is regarded as being too rural, old and ‘culchie’ for the young speakers in this study to use the feature due to covert prestige. The scope of the study is however too small to be able to say anything conclusive about this; there might well be some young Portadown speakers using this feature, but my data would suggest not.

5.3 The centralisation of (ɛr)

This section discusses the centralisation of SQUARE words in Portadown English. Centralisation of (ɛr) can be described as a shift from the standard Northern Irish English pronunciation /ɛr/ to an r-coloured central vowel /ɜ/, or a SQUARE-NURSE merger. This is originally an innovative Belfast merger which seems typical of middle class Protestant speech, and has been spreading westward (Corrigan 2010: 39). As with (ɛ), we would expect this Belfast innovation to also be spreading towards Portadown. As seen in Chapter 4, the analysis of (ɛr) centralisation is broken down into three categories based on following phonetic environment: the monosyllabic and polysyllabic environments, and the word *there*. This discussion will focus mainly on monosyllables and *there*, since most of the speakers have less than 10 tokens for polysyllables, therefore rendering that data statistically unreliable.

As shown in Chapter 4, the frequency of centralised (ɛr) in Portadown varies with respect to both age and sex, but mostly the former, with younger speakers having most centralisation across all environments. Pitts (1982: 204) found that in Lurgan, women (young women in particular) were leading the trend to centralise (ɛr). This is shown in the Lurgan data, where centralisation is mainly differentiated by sex, indicating a relatively new feature being adopted by females. My Portadown data shows the opposite trend, where age seems to be the most important constraint on raising. Younger speakers in Portadown show consistently more centralisation across all environments, as seen in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 (ɛr) centralisation by age and phonetic environment

	Monosyllabic	Polysyllabic	<i>There</i>
Older	67 %	86 %	53 %
Younger	82 %	92 %	76 %

As previously shown in Fig. 4.4, the older females, younger males and younger females have similar centralisation scores for the monosyllabic environment, which seems to be an indicator that this is also a feature which reached Portadown some time ago. The older females' higher scores seem consistent with the assumption that the usage of this feature was lead by females, and the high scores for younger speakers seem to indicate that it is now established in Portadown. The comparatively higher scores for the *there* environment among the younger speakers suggests that this is a relatively new trend in centralisation. Contrary to Pitts' findings, which showed most centralisation in monosyllables, followed by *there* (1982: 202), my Portadown data seems to suggest that there is a current trend in which *there* is centralised almost as much as in the monosyllabic environment. Furthermore, my data also shows that the centralisation of *there* is more prominent in the specific lexical item *there* than in the homophones *their* and *they're*, as seen in Figure 4.5. This is not necessarily due to social factors, however. The lexical items *their* and *they're* occur more often sentence-initially, whereas *there* is typically found later in sentences. I found this to be especially the case in Portadown, where *there* is often used for emphasis. In the following examples, *there* is used to emphasise space deixis in [1] and [2], as time deixis in [3], and as either one or both in [4]:

[1] I brought them up food there

[2] She sings the chorus in that there

[3] He had dreadlocks there

[4] I was down in Bangor there a couple of weeks ago

As seen in examples [1]–[4], *there* is often in clause- or sentence-final position, as well as other positions where it is more likely to be emphasised than *their* and *they're*. In

addition, a clause-final *there* might also be more likely to have a slightly longer vowel, possibly influencing centralisation. If a longer and/or more emphasised vowel is more salient, then it could also be a prime target for overt prestige, in which speakers more consciously adopt features that are prestigious to them, possibly to claim a more prestigious regional identity.

The data for the polysyllabic environment is somewhat contrary to the assumptions made prior to the study. Pitts' findings were that this was the environment with the least centralisation (1982: 202), whereas the Portadown speakers centralise most before polysyllables. As previously mentioned, this data is statistically unreliable. For example, the younger males have 100% centralisation in this environment, but the speakers only have one token each, and so there is no real way of knowing how much they really centralise. However, for all the Portadown speakers there are 68 tokens, of which 60 are centralised, and so while we cannot give too much credence to the individual scores of speakers, there does seem to be a trend in which polysyllables are centralised quite often. It is not unthinkable that this is a relatively new trend: the younger speakers in Lurgan were twice as likely to use centralised variants than the older speakers (Pitts 1982: 204). This is indicative of a change in progress. This pattern is not repeated in Portadown, however, but only because a doubling of centralisation scores is mathematically impossible. Here, younger speakers still centralise polysyllables a bit more than older speakers: 92% to 86%. If there were a change towards centralising more often before polysyllables, it has certainly reached Portadown, and might have done so even before Lurgan.

If we were to base our interpretation of these results on the apparent-time hypothesis and assume that the older speakers in Portadown are comparable to the younger speakers in Pitts' Lurgan study, we would observe that Older Females in Portadown centralise polysyllables twice as often as their apparent-age Lurgan peers. It is not unthinkable that the change towards centralisation in monosyllables has begun to affect the polysyllabic environment as well. This notion is backed up by Pitts' observation that in polysyllables "younger speakers are roughly twice as likely to centralise than older speakers of the same sex in the same area" (Pitts 1982: 204). This

is again an indication that a change towards centralisation in polysyllables is not only in progress, but may have also been so for some time. She also notes that Lurgan having a centralisation score of 83% in polysyllables, while probably being a statistical anomaly due to few tokens, “may be worth noting as a possible trend” (Pitts 1982: 204). This trend seems to also occur in Portadown, where young males have 100% centralisation in the polysyllabic environment. While the present study also has rather few tokens for this environment, it does seem to indicate that centralisation is increasing in polysyllables.

The apparent-time comparison with Lurgan for (ɛr) centralisation shows a different pattern from the one found for (ɛ) raising and /k, g/ palatalisation, however. While the older speakers in Portadown have comparatively higher centralisation scores for the polysyllabic environment, they seem to be more similar to Lurgan in monosyllables and *there*. Table 5.2 offers a direct comparison between older Portadown speakers and their apparent-age Lurgan peers in the formal style. Some of these scores are remarkably similar, e.g. in the monosyllabic environment, where the Portadown and Lurgan females centralise more or less equally often. The vast difference in polysyllables is also apparent between the two towns, with Portadown leading in centralisation. It should be kept in mind that these scores are not very statistically reliable, however, due to limited tokens from both studies. This comparison indicates that in terms of centralisation at least, Portadown and Lurgan seem to be more similar than for the other variables.

Table 5.2 (ɛr) centralisation in the formal style for Portadown and Lurgan apparent-age peers by phonetic environment

	Lurgan Boys	Portadown OM	Lurgan Girls	Portadown OF
Monosyllables	72 %	60 %	79 %	81 %
Polysyllables	66 % ¹	83 %	46 %	90 %
<i>There</i>	73% ²	58 %	75 %	43 %

¹ Percentage considered unreliable due to only 3 tokens (Pitts 1982: 205)

² Pitts lists the percentage scores for the formal style as 42%, but lists 8/11 tokens as centralised, which gives a percentage score of 73%. The percentage score of 73% is probably the right number, since in another table she lists the overall tokens for centralisation among boys as being 13/23 (Pitts 1982: 201), and the tokens for the casual style are listed as 5/14. While there are still some numbers unaccounted for here, we will work with the assumption that the number of tokens (8/11) is the correct one, and I have therefore listed the percentage as 73%.

The patterns shown in the data for (ɛr) centralisation are a clear indication of a change not only in progress, but almost completed. Young speakers of both sexes show centralisation in over 80% of all tokens in all environments, with the exception of *there* for the younger females at 71%. Unlike (ɛ) raising, which looks like a completed change where the new variant has been reassigned new prestige values by the younger generation, centralised (ɛr) is dominant in younger speech. What is surprising about this change in Portadown is not only how quickly it appears to have spread, especially compared to Lurgan, but also how centralisation has spread to other environments. This is possibly indicative of a change involving overt prestige. The idea that (ɛr) centralisation is affected by overt prestige is backed up by the fact that it increases in formal style, and is “promoted by more socially aware speakers” (Pitts 1982: 206). If a variant has overt prestige, environments in which the feature is more salient are probably likely to see more frequent use of this variant. This can go some way towards explaining the difference in realisation between the homophones *they’re/their* and *there*. Since the latter is more likely to be emphasised and salient in speech, conscious centralisation is more noticeable.

Like (ɛ) raising, the trend towards (ɛr) centralisation also seems to be a case of geographical diffusion from Belfast. In terms of the interpretation of the prestige of the feature, Portadown appears to follow the general trend toward centralisation. This is not surprising, given that centralisation of (ɛr) is considered typical of the Protestant middle class (Hickey 2007: 343–4), to which most or all of the speakers in this study belong. It seems that the changes in the three variables examined in this study all have their roots in Belfast.

5.4 On ethnicity

It seems that among the three variables examined in this study, there are similar motivations enabling the changes that have occurred in all of them. Furthermore, I think it would be difficult to ascribe these changes to any single factor. While Belfast influence is probably the origin of the changes we have seen so far, the facilitation of them can be attributed to certain other factors. While this study did not set out to use

ethnicity as a sociolinguistic variable, I believe it can go some way towards explaining the difference between the speech communities of Lurgan and Portadown. Since Portadown is a town with a Protestant majority, it makes sense that features shown to be preferred by Protestants (McCafferty 1999: 264) would also be preferred in Portadown. It also follows that innovative Belfast features seen more often among Protestants might have been adopted in Portadown before Lurgan, the latter being known as a predominantly Catholic town. This can be seen in the difference in apparent time between the older speakers in present-day Portadown and the younger speakers in early 1980's Lurgan. This could also go some way towards explaining why the difference between the two communities is so much bigger than first anticipated.

It should be noted that this ethnicity-based explanation model is not backed up by any data from Portadown; it is more or less speculation based on previous studies into ethnic differences in Northern Ireland. A larger-scale study would need to be done to confirm this, preferably not only on Portadown, but Lurgan as well. While this observation is not meant as a definite explanation for the results of the study, I believe any quantitative study on variation and change done in Northern Ireland should take ethnicity into account.

5.5 Local attitudes

Another factor that might be influencing the apparent difference between the towns is the attitudes the two towns have towards each other. Two informants from Lurgan mention how Protestants speak “very polite...too polite” (Pitts 1982: 150). Similarly, some of the informants in the present study mention how the Lurgan accent is considered broad:

S: I think they have a slightly broader accent.

I: Yeah?

S: Slightly.

I: How so, more broader, is it farmer-y or country accent, or?

S: No, I would say they're not just as polite as Portadown people, they would be a wee bit rougher.

Another speaker points out that “there’s definitely a difference between Lurgan accent and Portadown accent”, and yet another mentions that when a friend of hers heard I was investigating accents, she said “he should go to Lurgan. For the accent of Lurgan”. While the reports from local speakers do not necessarily mean that the accents are saliently different, they do reveal an underlying attitude towards the neighbouring town. Many speakers also mention a “rivalry” between the two towns, which is especially evident in sporting matters. One could imagine that the attitude towards a neighbouring town might be of importance in the adoption of linguistic features for speakers with a desire to distance themselves from that town.

5.6 Relevance to previous studies

The patterns found in the present study can be explained by phenomena identified in previous studies. Pitts (1982: 230) found that Belfast influence was not a straightforward case of geographical diffusion, where a bigger, influential city spreads its features to smaller towns. Instead, the speakers in Lurgan adopted features from one of two model varieties in Belfast: the vernacular inner city model, and the more prestigious outer city model. This phenomenon can go some way to explain the difference between speakers in the present study. Two of the speakers with least raising, YF D.N. and YM J.J. are both frequently in Belfast, and many of their friends have moved there from Portadown. Additionally, they view Portadown as an inferior place to be compared to Belfast. Therefore, it might be that they are more inclined to adopt features from for example vernacular Belfast speech, which has a strong tendency to maintain low (ϵ) (Pitts 1982: 224). This might explain why they have less raising than their peers, especially so for YF D.N., who is the only female without 100% raising.

Another study that is relevant to the present study is Watt (2002) on levelling in Tyneside. His study of the Tyneside vowel system is similar to this study of Portadown in several respects; not only is the Craigavon area influenced by past migration, but the Tyneside study also paid special attention to stigmatised features. Watt found clear gender-differentiation in the willingness to use traditional local forms: the females oriented themselves towards a supraregional norm, and the males had higher

frequencies of local features. A similar phenomenon is observed in Portadown in both (ɛ) raising and /k, g/ palatalisation. The speakers in Watt's study seem torn between regional pride and local stigma. Watt mentions that features considered old-fashioned and unsophisticated "are liable to be unattractive to the young, educated and mobile, and we predict that features evoking these attributes would rapidly disappear where levelling is underway" (Watt 2002: 55). This is a description which fits the palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ strikingly well, having been described as having a shibboleth status for non-Belfast speakers, and being perceived as typical of 'broad' speech by Lurgan speakers (Pitts 1982: 190).

The notion that Portadown speakers might be aiming to emulate a more general northern accent as opposed to a local accent is backed up by statements made by several of the young speakers in the study, exemplified by 18 year old male speaker J.B.: "But it, Portadown, it's one of those, it's like, in County Armagh, it's like the biggest kind of *culchie* farmer town". *Culchie* is a word with very negative connotations in Ireland, used to refer to (often simple) people from rural areas (The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* 2016, accessed 18 April 2016). In light of this, the reluctance among young speakers in Portadown to use palatalisation can be seen as not merely direct influence from Belfast, but also as a move away from stigmatised local forms in favour of more general northern ones.

The increased frequency of (ɛr) centralisation and (ɛ) raising might also be linked to a similar phenomenon. McCafferty (1999: 264) notes that "Protestants are apparently more willing to adopt innovations from the rest of the North, especially Belfast (and by definition more typical of Ulster Protestants in general), and are less likely to use localised forms, new or old". Considering that more or less all the speakers in this study can be considered Protestant, it makes a lot of sense that we would therefore see an increase in supraregional forms. Indeed, the tendency towards raised (ɛ) was originally an attempt to avoid the stigmatised, local low variant (Pitts 1982: 231). The question is whether the increase in these forms is due to direct Belfast influence or levelling led by Protestant speakers. As there is at this time no data to support either claim, it seems prudent to assume that both may be at play here.

According to Pitts, the nature of Belfast influence is more complex than a simple case of geographical diffusion from one city, as the two model varieties of Belfast speech were shown to have different values for different Lurgan speakers (Pitts 1982: 232–3). According to her, reaction to the urban vernacular is a more important factor in language change in Northern Ireland than reaction to a prestige model (Pitts 1982: 233). Additionally, she notes that “speakers chose the outer-city model not because of its prestige as such, but because it provides alternatives to the stigmatized vernacular variants which the speakers wish to avoid” (Pitts 1982: 234). These findings are similar to those of Watt in a way, in that the motivation for change seems primarily to be avoidance of stigmatised forms. The results found in the present study can also be explained similarly to the pattern Pitts found. Younger speakers in Portadown do seem to avoid the stigmatised palatalised variants. The general tendency for Portadown speakers to raise (ε) can be seen as them adopting the outer-city Belfast model, while the speakers who seemed to break away from this tendency might be adopting more of an inner-city model, as evident by their attitudes towards Belfast as compared to Portadown. In the case of (εr), the clear age differentiation can be explained by the fact that Pitts found centralisation to be “a purely innovative variable” (Pitts 1982: 231), and not necessarily associated with either of the Belfast models.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises the study as a whole, with special focus on the research questions and hypotheses introduced in Chapter 1. As we have seen in Chapters 4 and 5, the following sociolinguistic variables are currently involved in language change in Portadown: (ɛ) raising, (k, g) palatalisation, and (ɛr) centralisation. The first appears to have gone through a change towards almost categorical raising already, with some speakers opting for occasional use of the lowered variant. Palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ has already been shown by previous studies of other communities to be a declining feature, and the present study shows that this feature seems nowhere to be found among the younger speakers of Portadown. The variable (ɛr) seems to have undergone the most recent change of the three variables examined here. The clear age differentiation indicates a change in progress towards more centralisation, and in more environments. Features that were found by Pitts to be prestigious and to increase in formal styles in Lurgan seem to be used even more frequently in present-day Portadown.

Of course, any study done on a set time scale of two semesters inevitably suffers from some shortcomings in the form of research goals that were not realistic. Obviously I would have liked to have the opportunity to work with more speakers, but time constraints did not permit this. A larger-scale study could have included judgement sampling, and might have had representatives from more social classes and both ethnicities. Given more time, style could also have been used as a category, as Pitts found it to be one of the major constraints on variation in Lurgan. A proper comparison between the two communities should include data from both styles. The decision to label all interviews as being representative of formal style still feels like the right one, as my presence as a fieldworker was duly noticed in all of them, but ideally I would have liked to obtain more casual speech.

The analysis of (ɛ) raising could also have benefited from an acoustic analysis. Many realisations of the vowel were not very discrete, and therefore depended on my own judgement, as well as consulting my supervisor when in doubt. Even though clear categories were determined for the analysis, I feel that the analysis could have been even more accurate with proper audio processing software. However, this could not be done due to time constraints.

In Chapter 1, four research questions and hypotheses were put forth. The answers are summarised below. The first research question was ‘to what degree do the phonological variables investigated in this study vary between speakers?’

All three variables are currently involved in variation. All variables seem to vary between age, sex, age and sex groups combined, as well as between individual speakers. This tells us that the selection of variables in this study was good, since we find social variation in the use of these features.

The second research question was: does the difference between age groups indicate language change in any way? Relating to this are the first and second research hypotheses: first, the consonantal feature of /k, g/ palatalisation, which has in previous studies been shown to be a feature in decline, will be primarily used by older speakers, indicating language change, and second, that the innovative vowel features of (ɛ) raising and (ɛr) centralisation will vary according to age and sex, with females and younger speakers leading the change in both features.

The age differentiation for (ɛr) centralisation and /k, g/ palatalisation does indicate language change. The younger speakers in the study centralised (ɛr) more than the older speakers, and no palatalised tokens were found in the younger group. This indicates that the Portadown accent is moving towards: a) more centralisation of (ɛr); and b) no palatalisation of /k/ and /g/. The age difference for (ɛ) raising found in this study is not conclusive as to whether there is a major change currently going on in Portadown. The change from lowered to raised (ɛ) seems to have already taken place, especially when compared to the Lurgan data. If anything, the younger speakers seemed to raise less than the older speakers. This is possibly due to some measure of covert prestige, where young speakers interpret the older variant as carrying some non-

standard prestige, possibly as signalling ‘coolness’ or ‘street credibility’. Also, (ɛ) raising seems to be differentiated more by sex than age in Portadown.

The third research question was ‘If variation and change is found, to what extent is sex a determining factor?’ This question is also related to the first and second hypotheses. The major constraint on (ɛ) raising in Portadown was found to be sex, as all but one female had 100% raised tokens of (ɛ), and only one male had 100% raising. Thus, it can be said that sex is definitely a determining factor in the raising of (ɛ). Palatalisation has previously been established in other studies to be a male-dominated phenomenon that is declining in use. The Portadown data confirms this claim, as only one older female had palatalisation, and only in one token. Meanwhile, two of the three older male speakers in the study did show palatalisation in all environments in a total of 14/30 (46% - J.L.) and 4/23 (17% - G.F.) tokens, respectively. Therefore, palatalisation of /k/ and /g/ can be said to be a clearly sex-differentiated sociolinguistic variable in Portadown. As opposed to (ɛ) raising, (ɛr) centralisation seems to be more influenced by age than sex. There is still some degree of sex variation, however. The female speakers centralised *there* less than males of the same age group.

The fourth and final research question was: does any variation and change indicate influence from Belfast English? This is related to research hypothesis No. 3: “The changes in all the variables are a result of Belfast influence spreading into the Lagan Valley and North Armagh”. However, claiming that the changes found in the Portadown accent in this study are purely attributable to direct Belfast influence might be an exaggeration. I would nonetheless conclude that it is highly probable that the changes in all three variables examined here have their origins in Belfast, and that the changes seen in Portadown are a direct result of Belfast influence. There are two reasons for this, the first being that results from previous studies (Pitts 1982; Milroy 1981: 94) suggest that these changes originated in Belfast, and the second being the geographical and social factors that may facilitate such a change. As well as being the largest city in Northern Ireland, Belfast’s geographical and linguistic proximity to Lurgan (and by association Portadown) leads us to expect Belfast to have considerable linguistic influence on Portadown (Pitts 1982: 20). Portadown is also close enough that

many people commute to Belfast for work. In addition, Belfast is referred to as ‘the place to go’ by the younger speakers I talked to: “It’s really, like, there’s nothing around here, but, if we’re gonna be doing anything we just go to Belfast, but. It’s only forty minutes on the train”. Combined with the apparent disdain for their own town that many of the young speakers interviewed expressed, it is likely that they might view Belfast as a more prestigious model for speech than the more rural speech found in and around Portadown, especially among older speakers.

The fourth research hypothesis was that Lurgan and Portadown would be similar speech communities due to their geographical proximity, but that they would have different interpretations of features connected to social prestige. There do seem to be some differences between the two towns. This is, however, dependent on the apparent-time hypothesis, i.e. that older speakers’ speech is representative of the language they spoke when they were younger. By comparing the data from present-day older speakers in Portadown to younger speakers in Lurgan from 1982, we find speakers that were born around the same time. Comparisons of these groups show that older Portadown speakers more frequently use some features that were found to be prestigious by Pitts.

The issue of comparing present-day Portadown to early 1980’s Lurgan is more complex than first assumed. Even when accounting for the fact that some of the speakers in this study show tendencies toward a more standard accent, and that the religious distribution is skewed compared to Pitts’ informants, there is still a striking difference in both palatalisation and (ɛ) raising. In apparent time, Portadown speakers palatalise much less and raise (ɛ) more often. This indicates that the different towns might have different interpretations of the social prestige of these two features. At the same time, the apparent-time comparison of (ɛr) centralisation indicates that the two towns are also quite close in adopting that feature, as shown in Table 5.2. In some environments, Lurgan speakers even centralised more often than Portadown speakers. With this in mind, there seems to be support for the fourth hypothesis. In the adoption of the new (ɛr) centralisation feature, the two speech communities are quite alike, but the results for /k, g/ palatalisation and (ɛ) raising suggest that these features are treated differently in the two towns.

6.1 Further research

The present study has concerned itself with three features involved in variation and change in MUE, specifically in Portadown. While this study has focused only on three phonological variables, the data collection process hints at a number of other phenomena that could be of interest to further studies. This study can also be used as a pilot study for a larger-scale sociolinguistic study involving these three variables not only in Portadown, but also in Craigavon and MUE in general. The recordings on which this study is based could also have been used to analyse several other variables. Even though the data set is small, it can still give a lot of information on a local variety like that of Portadown.

The study found that (ɛ) was categorically raised by all but one female, and was raised more often by older than younger speakers. Further studies might investigate whether this is actually the case, and to what degree this result is a consequence of the small dataset used in this study. Other studies in Northern Ireland might also examine the degree of (ɛr) centralisation in the polysyllabic environment, and attempt to find out whether the trend to centralise more in polysyllables is limited to Portadown.

A number of other phonological phenomena also bear examining in future studies. The variable backing of (a) was one variable which was originally meant to be examined in this study, but was left out in favour of other variables. While the possibility of a ‘pet-pat-pot’ merger seems far-fetched given the persistence of the prestigious feature (ɛ) raising, it would be interesting to see if (a) backing is also equally different between Portadown and Lurgan. At least one speaker was also found to have TH-deletion, in phrases like “here and there”. This is another phenomenon that could be investigated by another study. A cursory overview of FACE words in the Portadown data indicates that these are usually realised with a monophthong, but as FACE words are known to vary in Northern Ireland, especially in Belfast (Corrigan 2010: 34) and (London)Derry (McCafferty 2001), it would be interesting to see if any variation and/or change could be found in Portadown as well. While Northern Ireland has previously been described as having predominantly clear /l/, dark /ɫ/ has been reported to be

involved in variation in recent years (Corrigan 2010: 44–5). Since the latter has been mostly used by Catholic speakers, it is uncertain whether it would be found in Portadown, but an investigation of the phenomenon would nevertheless be interesting.

A number of morphological features were also noticed not only during the transcription and analysis of the recordings, but also outside them. The example given above of a Portadown speaker's attitude towards Belfast shows a high frequency of clause-final *but*, a traditional Irish English feature. There is also a high frequency of the discourse marker *like*, even among some older speakers. Other morphological features like the use of the second person plural *youse*, and discourse markers like *so it is* were also noticed during the fieldwork. Studies investigating Northern Irish morphology might well include any number of these features that were found in Portadown.

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