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The Influence of Social Networks on Prepositions of Source Variation in the West Yorkshire Dialect.

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ABSTRACT

This research describes the synchronic use of prepositions of source during dialectal speech in the adjoining northern towns of Halifax and Huddersfield. It compares two linguistic variables: the standard preposition of source *from* and the nonstandard variant *off*, to determine the patterns and origins of their use. A social approach to language analysis has been assumed to demonstrate how social factors can influence linguistic behaviour.

Two speech modes were observed during informal, sociolinguistic interviews. Initially, spontaneous speech was targeted during discussions around individual leisure activities, in the first Covid-19 lockdown. Following this, a reading task was provided to the respondents. This comprised ten basic sentences, each without a preposition. The participants were asked to read out each sentence and include a preposition of their choice.

On completion of the data collection, a quantitative analysis of the preposition categories was undertaken. The inter-speaker variation was examined in relation to the variables of age, gender, social network structure, occupation and location. Also, intra-speaker data was examined to identify regular style changes and to interpret the reasons behind them.

The results revealed that fourteen participants from the north of Halifax, used the non-standard preposition *off* to indicate source 'he doesn't get that *off* me, 'whereas speakers from other parts of Halifax and the town of Huddersfield used the standard variant *from*.

Introduction

This research is concerned with the synchronic use of prepositions of source in regional speech. The subject matter was initiated through the recognition of considerable variation in localised, indigenous speech and was directed by the researcher's knowledge of the local dialect. This paper describes the lexical variations observed in dialectal speech, in the adjoining towns of Halifax and Huddersfield. The research aim is to demonstrate that the concept of social networks is a significant factor in the production of homogenous speech, and in the maintenance of nonstandard localised forms. The view of the author is that all interactional elements of language are primary 'contributing factors in sociolinguistic variation' (Eckert and Labov, 2017, p. 467), and more so than any other social variable.

The English Preposition

There are 'over 90 different prepositions in current use throughout the English-speaking world' (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 2). A simple preposition is a single, high frequency item such *as*, *in*, *on*, *at*, *by*, *from*, *over* and *off*, mostly used to describe a relationship between a preposition's subject and landmark 'in terms of their temporal, directional, or spatial specifics' (Eppler and Ozon, 2013, p. 36). The subject (or trajector) generally 'moves towards or in relation to its landmark, which is usually static and larger than its subject' (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 6). In the following example 'the boy is *in* the sea,' the preposition *in* is functioning as a preposition of place which locates its subject (the boy) in relation to its landmark (the sea). Moreover, it can be assumed from the preposition *in* that the boy is immersed in full or in part by the sea, as there is no reference to a secondary or inferred landmark i.e., a boat. If an alternative preposition had been used such as *near*, 'the scene would be less depictable since the subject could be on any side of the landmark, including above or below it' (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 17). A preposition's landmark can be inanimate as in the above example (the sea), or it can be animate i.e., 'she needed some advice *from* him'. In addition, both subjects and landmarks can be 'abstractions rather than physical objects or places and singular or plural' (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 10). These terms, originating from Cognitive Linguistics, are useful in describing spatial scenes for the purpose of language analysis and because 'they make no specific reference to motion, they are applicable to any relational expression' (Langacker, 1986, p. 10).
Prepositions are often overlooked in terms of their dialectal usage, despite their functional and semantic flexibility (Lindstromberg, 2010). On account of this and their high frequency in English, the potential for data was assumed significant. However, a common perception is that prepositions are confusing, in that their 'meanings are difficult to demonstrate or visualize' (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 2), and they can be misunderstood for 'other word categories' (Aarts, 2014, p. 61). Consequently, prepositions have being described as 'polysemous' (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 2) and 'semantically vacuous' (Baldwin, Kordoni and Villavicencio, 2009, p. 119). Nevertheless, most problems ten to arise in the phrasal-verb construct. These idiomatic phrases are used extensively by indigenous English speakers to express colloquial phrases which indicate action. They typically contain a verb and one or more prepositions or adverbs, which are reduced to particles once they become attached to the phrasal verb unit. However, when the phrasal verb is compared to each word's standalone meaning they are completely unrelated, and this can confuse, particularly, non-native speakers of English. Some examples include:

- look up (find information)
- step down (resign)
- give over (a request to stop).

Despite these issues, there are limited sources which describe their employment in dialectal exchanges. And given that 'meaning is constructed in the interaction between speaker and hearer, dictionaries are not equipped to explain language in the context of social interaction' (Eckert and Labov, 2017, pp. 467, 470). In view of this, a social approach to language study has been adopted herein. This method 'looks beyond simple correlations between a linguistic variant and a social variable by contemplating the social dynamics, the culture, and the beliefs of individual communities and how these factors can influence linguistic behaviour and translate social meanings' (Schilling, 2013, p. 24). Typically, dialect studies do not consider closeknit social structures, as being 'central to how people speak' (Sharma, 2017, p. 393). This is perplexing considering that the closer 'an individual's relational ties are within any given territory, the closer their language approximates to the group's vernacular norms' (Milroy, 1987, p. 179). The shared language patterns act to strengthen the established social connections, while simultaneously validating an individual's membership in the group. The application of social networks analysis can assist in understanding communal language use and the underlying social meanings.

Previous Research

There are just a small number of studies on the dialectal use of prepositions in the United Kingdom. This review begins with the furthest away from the current research locations of Halifax and Huddersfield. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the geographical extent of preposition variation, within the United Kingdom.

In South Zeal, Devon, Harris (1967) provided a descriptive account of the phonology, morphology, and syntax of two male speakers and compared it to standard English. He reported the widespread use of the preposition *off* to indicate a source 'where *from* is found elsewhere' (Harris, 1967, p. 110). Harris also remarked that 'the range of some prepositions was much greater in regional dialect than in standard English' (Harris, 1967, p. 130). His data was characteristic of localised, archaic varieties, which reflected the rural location of the small village and the advanced age of his respondents. Two instances of the nonstandard use he observed during conversational speech are below in examples 1-2.

1. They get the wool *off* the sheep.
2. I bought it *off* a farmer.

Cheshire et al., (1993) observed the dialects of children throughout the UK. In Scotland, they observed the preposition *off* being used to indicate a source, 'I got the book *off* Alec' (Cheshire et al., 1993, p.132). In standard English, the preposition *off* typically functions as a preposition of place to locate an object in relation to a surface 'he rolled *off* the bed'. However, in the example *off* is being used as a preposition of source to identify the donor of the book. In Tyneside, they reported that the preposition *off* was used to indicate a source of action 'he is forever getting hit *off* my parents' and 'ah'd rather have no job than bein beat *aff* that man' (Cheshire et al., 1993, pp. 131, 212). In these examples the subjects (parents, man) are being perceived by the speakers as sources of action, which in essence they are. Nevertheless, the official semantic role of the prepositions in these contexts, are deemed 'agentive as sources of the immediate action described by the verbs' (Anderson, 1998, p. 3) Consequently, in standard English the preposition of agency *by* would typically be used i.e. '….*by* my parents' and '….*by* that man.'

Further south, Ojanen (1985) studied the rural Cambridgeshire dialects of eleven working-class men, aged between 72 and 91 years. She claimed that 'the speech of her male informants contained a greater use of non-standard prepositions' (Ojanen, 1985. p. 179), including the preposition *off* which was frequently used to reference a source. Ojanen explained that 'the use of *off* would usually denote informal speech whereas *from* would be the custom variety in more formal situations' (Ojanen, 1985, p. 193). She surmised that her data was representative of a continuation of older forms, which had been passed down by older generations. Examples of the preposition *off* usage, that she observed, are below in examples 1-3:

1. 'he couldn't get enough pigs *off* the local people'
2. 'sometimes we used to have it [bread] *off* Whites'
3. 'that little colt that I bought *off* ye'

(Ojanen, 1985, pp. 192-193).

Note that regarding (2) above, it is unclear whether the speaker uses *off* to refer to the name of a physical landmark, or to the family who owned the village store (the Whites).

In the northwest, Shorrocks (1980) investigated the dialect of thirty-eight native speakers of Farnworth. His focus was on syntax and morphology, however linguistic style was also of interest. Shorrocks recognised that speech would become more formal with strangers whereas, 'more traditional regional vernacular was used with family and friends' (Shorrocks, 1980, p.82). He noted that the use of the preposition *off* to signify a source was used habitually in more casual surroundings, 'the first pint used to come *off* the winning landlord of the pub' (Shorrocks, 1980, p. 563), whereas in standard English *from* would be used ordinarily.

A Theoretical Insight

The field of sociolinguistics broadly explores social communication, and language users are fundamental to this. The concept of social networks 'relates to the informal social relationships contracted by individuals' (Milroy, 1987, p. 178). The shared conventions, beliefs and attitudes of social groups, can unfold in the language choices of their members who typically 'oppose dominant institutional values and standardised linguistic norms' (Milroy and Milroy, 1992, p. 6). The analysis of these social constructs can provide 'insight into how social ties and structures are enacted, shaped, and changed during linguistic interaction' (Schilling, 2013, p. 24). Therefore, by examining 'speakers positions and social identities relative to the communities in which they reside' (Monka, Quist, and Skovse, 2020, p. 175), a better understanding of the social mechanics which drive the homogeneous social behaviours of these groups, can be realised. Accordingly, a social approach to language study has been adopted herein, which enables investigators 'to interpret variation between speakers at the level of the individual rather that the group' (Milroy, 1987, p. 172).

Within the current sample existed a multiplex, social network in which the researcher was the anchor (Milroy, 1987), due to her existing connections with each participant. The majority of the sample, who were from the north of Halifax, were linked to other participants through various social channels i.e., friendship, kinship or employment. In contrast, the remaining participants, from other areas of Halifax and Huddersfield, were considerably, less integrated. These opposing relational factors warranted a social network approach to better understand 'the relationship between the social dynamics of the group and their use of shared linguistic variables' (Eckert, 2012, p. 91), while simultaneously comparing the language patterns of the less familiar speaker groups.

Social networks are described as 'informal social mechanisms that support language varieties specific to particular social groups' (Milroy, 2004, p. 549). Typically, members of these groups use low-status or vernacular language 'as they view the communal speech as more prestigious than standard variants' (Milroy, 1992, p. 21). As a rule, the denser a network is the more homogeneous the language becomes, and the 'strong social ties within them enable non-standard forms to be maintained over generations as flourishing vernaculars' (Milroy and Milroy, 1993, p. 60). The network analysis concept 'provides a good basis for understanding the mechanisms that underlie the process of language maintenance' (Milroy and Milroy, 1993, p. 66). The preservation of older language varieties has been credited to the solidarity of close-network members who choose their heritage above social advancement. Much like a child who chooses to attend a local comprehensive instead of a grammar school, so that they can maintain regular, social connections within their local area (Milroy, 1987). The result of which would reduce the child's exposure to standard linguistic norms, and reinforce the existence of deeply embedded, localised forms (Milroy, 1987; Labov, 2006).

In the north Halifax network, there were several 'social clusters of first and second order social network zones' (Milroy, 1987, p.46). A social cluster is a group of individuals who are socially connected via a 'content link' (Milroy, 1987). A content link is something that connects the members of a social cluster through either, employment, kinship, location or friendship (others do exist). A first order zone relates to an individual's direct contacts, whereas a second order zone denotes a friend of a friend (Milroy, 1987). Some individuals were linked to several social clusters which is known as having 'multiplex network ties' (Milroy, 1987, p. 51). The significance of this is that 'these types of dense and multi-layered networks have the capacity to impose linguistic norms upon their members' (Milroy, 1987, p. 136). In fact, it is the social clusters within these social structures that are more significant in their ability to influence social and linguistic behaviour (Milroy, 1987). Such multidimensional

structures are regarded as having a strong network strength scale, through which pressures on members are made to embrace the values, beliefs and language of the group (Milroy, 1987). Moreover, so powerful is their influence, that these structures are known to have 'a greater explanatory value for language choice than social variables such as age, gender and social class' (Lindberg and Trofimovich, 2020, p. 276). To test this theory, Milroy (1987) devised a network strength scale of 0 to 5 (see below) of which each network member in the Belfast study was assigned a score. This enabled the calculation of individual scores that were compared against other group affiliates. The higher the individual's score, it was assumed the deeper their level of integration was in the network, and thus, 'the more social control they have of language' (Labov 1973, p. 283). In turn, owing to the favoured dialectal forms used by these key members, they are 'spread rapidly throughout the wider network' (Bergs, 2005, p. 41). Moreover, through 'sharing these community language norms, it indicates the importance of the social connections within them' (Mitchell, 1974, p. 288).

Milroy's Network Strength Scale

(1) Membership of a high-density, territorially based cluster.
(2) Having substantial ties of kinship in the local area.
(3) Working at the same place as at least two others from the same area.
(4) The same place of work as at least two others of the same sex from the area.
(5) Voluntary association with work mates in leisure hours.

(Milroy, 1987, p.141).

By measuring an individual's integration level within an informal social structure, Milroy found that 'the closer an individual's network ties were within the local community, the closer their language resembled the localised vernacular norms' (Milroy, 1987, p. 179). Milroy's conclusion echoes the hypothesis in the current study, which was based on the researcher's knowledge of the local dialects and through her membership in the north Halifax speech community. To measure the integration level of the current respondents, a scale similar to Milroy's was developed. The conditions attached to the scale are described below (1 to 5) to establish how many individual speakers within the network were connected to one another, to what degree and in what capacity.

(1) Have been raised in the north of Halifax, preferably since birth.
(2) Have family members in the local area.
(3) Have regular contact with long-term friends in the local area.
(4) Hold current or previous employment with at least three other people from the area.
(5) Have social contact outside of mutual employment, with at least three people who are connected to this area.

Individuals scored zero if they failed to meet any of the conditions and five if they fulfilled them all (Milroy, 1987). Respondents with the highest scores were considered 'extremely closely integrated in the social network' (Milroy, 1987, p. 143), meaning that these individuals dictate the linguistic norms and behaviours of the group. The multiplex nature of the network led to the existence of several social clusters which were 'of a higher density than the external ones due to their shared content link' (Milroy, 1987, p. 50). If a key network member has links to several content clusters they have more authority within the group, which can serve to 'increase the effectiveness of the wider network as a norm enforcement mechanism' (Milroy, 1987, p. 52).

The first cluster in the north Halifax group contained four members of the researcher's family, who had lived in this area for a significant period. One of whom, Joyce, was previously married to Keith, the brother of Maria, with whom she shared a son. When the marriage dissolved Joyce and Maria remained socially close and still regard each

other as family. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participant's identities. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the dynamics of the familial cluster.

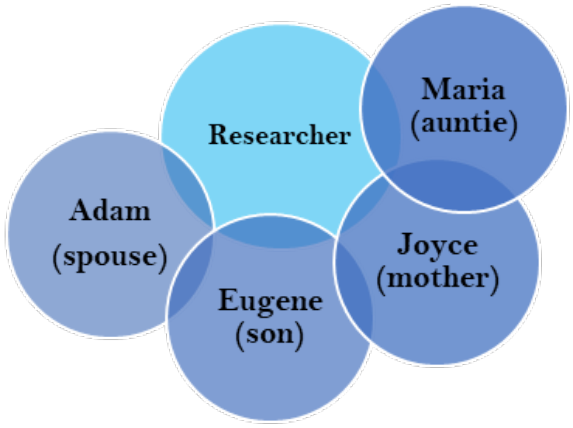

Figure 1.1 The Familial Cluster

Table 1.2 below illustrates the social demographics of the kinship cluster, including their links to the north of Halifax. Individual employment details have been included to demonstrate the wide-ranging occupation types of those who use nonstandard language, which is regarded as the language of the working-classes (Milroy, 1987).

Table 1.2 Familial Cluster: Demographics and Areal Links.

Participant	Age	Gender	Employment Type	North Halifax Links
Adam	50	M	Project Manager	His friends have lived here for 50 years.
Eugene	15	M	FT Student	His family have lived here for 65 years.
Joyce	62	F	Care worker	She lived here for 35 years from birth.
Maria	50	F	Care worker	She has lived here since birth.

The employment cluster contained five individuals who had previously or currently worked together at HBOS, a large financial employer in Halifax. Each member lived in the north of Halifax or socialised with people from this area. In addition, four of these individuals were acquainted personally and belonged to the friendship cluster. The remaining colleague resides in north Halifax and has friends and family (outside of this research) who live in this area. The group were mostly female (4:1). A summary of this data is below in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 HBOS Employment Cluster: Demographics and Areal Links

Participant	Age	Gender	Employment Type	North Halifax Link
Paul	43	M	Operations Manager	His friends have lived here for 46 years.
Rosie	41	F	Customer Service	Her friends have lived here for 45 years.
Diane	48	F	Risk Manager	She has lived here since birth.
Lara	41	F	Beautician	She has lived here since birth.
Evette	45	F	Insurance Manager	She has lived here since birth.

Ten participants from north Halifax were members of the friendship cluster, but not all were mutually acquainted. However, it is possible that these individuals could meet at some point in a neutral, social setting, via the researcher's 'first order network zone' (Milroy, 1987, p. 46) There were six micro-clusters within the friendship cluster. Some of these individuals belonged to other content clusters within the wider network. The demographics of this cluster are below in Table 1.4. A diagrammatic outline has been included in Table 1.5. to demonstrate the multiplex nature of the friendship cluster.

Table 1.4. The Multiplex Friendship Cluster: Demographics and Areal Links.

Participant	Age	Gender	Employment Type	North Halifax Links
Adam	50	M	Project Manager	His friends have lived here for 50.
Eugene	15	M	FT Student	His family have lived here for 65.
Evette	45	F	Insurance Manager	She has lived here since birth.
Michael	53	M	Manufacturer	He has lived here since birth.
Diane	48	F	Risk Manager	She has lived here since birth.
Collette	67	F	Retired Carer	She has lived here for 60 years.
Kira	44	F	Call Centre Manager	She has lived here since birth.
Paul	43	M	Operations Manager	His friends have lived here for 46 years.
Rosie	41	F	Customer Services	Her friends have lived here for 46 years.
Jilly	45	F	Pastoral Manager	She has lived here since birth.

Table 1.5. The Six Micro Clusters within the Friendship Cluster.

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5	Cluster 6
Adam	Adam	Diane	Adam	Adam	Adam
Eugene	Eugene	Evette	Collette	Kira	Jilly
Michael	Michael	Paul			
Collette		Rosie			
Kira					
Jilly					

The final cluster contained one female who lived and worked in Calderdale. She regularly socialises

with friends in the north of Halifax but is not linked to any other clusters. Her demographics and network links are summarised below in Table 1.6.

Table 1.6. Areal Cluster: Demographics and Areal Links.

Participant	Age	Gender	Employment Type	North Halifax Link
Josephine	41	F	Teaching Assistant	Her friends have lived here for 40 years.

The north Halifax social network included fourteen participants: ten females and four males. The age range of the group was 15 to 67 years (mean = 46 years) at the time of recording. There were nine other participants from Halifax who were not mutually connected to the northern network or to any other individuals in the study. This group was predominantly female (8:1). Its members held a broad range of occupations, ranging from unskilled to professional. The age range was 13 to 80 years (mean = 42 years). These specifics are recorded below in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7. The Halifax (other's) Demographics.

Participant	Gender	Origin	Term of Residency	Age	Employment Type
Kirsty	Female	Halifax (other)	80 years	80	Retired Supervisor
Ruth	Female	Halifax (other)	25 years	25	Shop Assistant
Annie	Female	Halifax (other)	44 years	44	Waitress
Finlay	Male	Halifax (other)	13 years	13	Full-time Student
Jenny	Female	Halifax (other)	55 years	55	Senior Project Manager
Katherine	Female	Halifax (other)	43 years	43	Nurse
Lola	Female	Halifax (other)	24 years	24	Full-time Student
Paula	Female	Halifax (other)	59 years	59	Retired Manager
Shirley	Female	Halifax (other)	36 years	36	Copy Editor

The final group included three males and two females from the adjoining town of Huddersfield. The age range was 16 to 49 (mean = 37 years) at the time of recording. Two members of this group were unconnected to any other Huddersfield participants. The remainder were family members: Pamela is Sarah's sister who is the auntie of Jake, Pamela's son. The group's demographics are documented below in Table 1.8.

Table 1.8. The Huddersfield Participant's Demographics.

Participants	Gender	Origin	Term of Residency	Age	Employment Type
Bill	Male	Huddersfield	33 years	33	SEN Teacher

Jake	Male	Huddersfield	16 years	16	FT Student
Shane	Male	Huddersfield	49 years	49	Manufacturer
Pamela	Female	Huddersfield	44 years	44	Senior Clinical Practitioner
Sarah	Female	Huddersfield	45 years	45	Nurse

Methodology

The northern towns of Halifax and Huddersfield are situated respectively in the boroughs of Calderdale (to the West) and Kirklees (to the Southwest).

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Source: Google.

Figure 2.1. A Map of West Yorkshire

Halifax.

The industrial, working-class town of Halifax in West Yorkshire is the largest district within the local authority of Calderdale, with a population of 104,100. According to the 2021 Census survey, 'the populace of Calderdale is 200,631' (Nomis, n.d.) which includes Halifax, Brighouse, Elland, Hebden Bridge, Ripponden, Sowerby Bridge and Todmorden. Halifax borders the town of Huddersfield. The employment figures in 2021 were 88,797, with full-time students at 5934, Nomis, (n.d.). The Standard Occupation Classification (SOC2020) levels, which are used nationally to interpret socioeconomic data, are detailed below in Figure 2.2.

L1, L2 and L3 Higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations
L4, L5 and L6 Lower managerial, administrative, and professional occupations
L7 Intermediate occupations
L8 and L9 Small employers and own account workers
L10 and L11 Lower supervisory and technical occupations
L12 Semi-routine occupations
L13 Routine occupations
L14.1 and L14.2 Never worked and long-term unemployed
L15 Full-time students

Figure 2.2. The Standard Occupational Classification 2020 (SOC 2020).

The employment data for the town of Halifax is detailed below in Figure 2.3. The statistics have been obtained from the Nomis website, which is maintained by Durham University on behalf of The Office of National Statistic (ONS). Occupational data has been included for the purpose of representativeness.

Table 2.3. The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification: Halifax Town

Source: Nomis (n.d.).

The majority of the Halifax (north) group were employed in levels 4 to 6. This is representative of the occupation distribution types in the wider population of Halifax. Table 2.4. below details the north Halifax group's occupation levels.

Table 2.4. Socioeconomic Rating According to Occupation Type: Halifax (north)

Participant	Location	Occupation	O.N.S. Level
Diane	Halifax (north)	Retail Risk Manager	L1
Kira	Halifax (north)	Retail Operations Manager	L1
Paul	Halifax (north)	Retail Operations Manager	L1
Adam	Halifax (north)	Engineering Project Leader	L2
Evette	Halifax (north)	Team Manager	L4
Jilly	Halifax (north)	Pastoral Manager	L4
Michael	Halifax (north)	Manufacturer	L5
Collette	Halifax (north)	Retired Carer	L6
Joyce	Halifax (north)	Carer	L6
Josephine	Halifax (north)	Teaching Assistant	L6
Maria	Halifax (north)	Carer	L6
Lara	Halifax (north)	Beautician	L6
Rosie	Halifax (north)	Customer Services	L7
Eugene	Halifax (north)	FT Student	L15

The majority of participants from other areas of Halifax were employed in levels 4, 6 and 13. This aligns with the employment distribution levels in the wider Halifax population. Table 2.5. below documents the employment types of these participants.

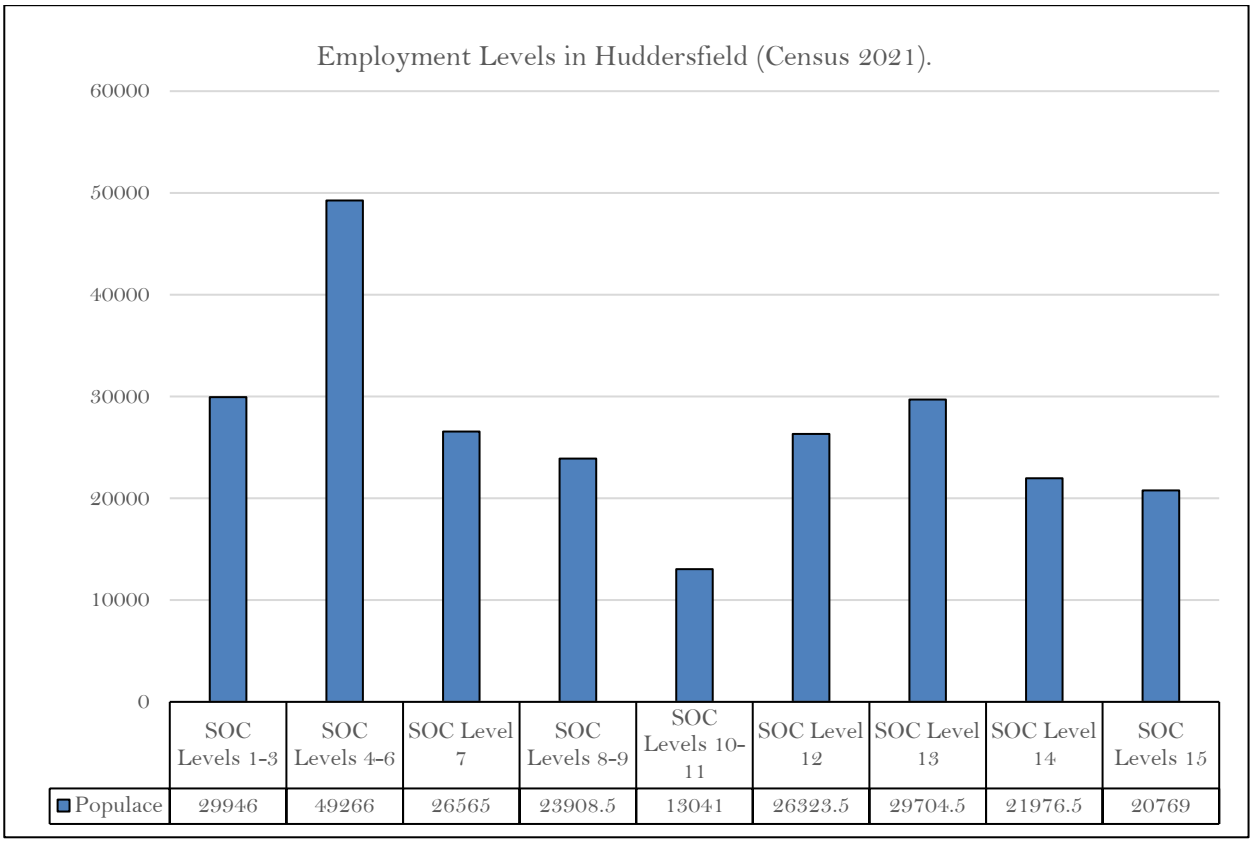
Table 2.5. Socioeconomic Rating According to Occupation Type: Halifax (other).

Participant	Location	Occupation	O.N.S. Level
Kirsty	Halifax (other)	Retired Supervisor	L6
Ruth	Halifax (other)	Shop Assistant	L13
Annie	Halifax (other)	Waitress	L13
Finlay	Halifax (other)	FT Student	L15
Jenny	Halifax (other)	Senior Project Manager	L2
Katherine	Halifax (other)	Nurse	L2
Lola	Halifax (other)	FT Student	L15
Paula	Halifax (other)	Retired I.T Manager	L4
Shirley	Halifax (other)	Copy Editor	L5

Huddersfield

The industrial, working-class town of Huddersfield is the administrative centre of the Kirklees local authority, with a population of approximately 241,500. This is 57% more than the population of Halifax and 17% more than the whole of Calderdale. In 2021 'the population of Kirklees was recorded at 433,200, which included Batley, Cleckheaton, Dewsbury and Wakefield. Huddersfield is parallel to Halifax and is situated approximately 14 miles south-west of Leeds, its nearest city. The fulltime employment numbers in 2021 were recorded at 198,756, alongside 20769 fulltime students (Nomis, n.d.). There are more students in Huddersfield owing to the existence of several educational amenities in the town. The socio-economic data (NS-SEC) for Huddersfield is detailed below in Table 2.6. This information has been provided to corroborate the representativeness of the Huddersfield group.

Table 2.6. The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification: Huddersfield.



Nomis (n.d.).

In the Huddersfield sample the majority were employed in professional roles. The youngest member of the group was a full-time student, and the remaining respondent was employed in a level 5 manufacturing role. These particulars are tabulated below in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7. The Socioeconomic Rating of the Huddersfield Participants According to Occupation Type.

Participant	Gender	Origin	Occupation	ONS Level
Bill	Male	Huddersfield	SEN Teacher	L2
Sarah	Female	Huddersfield	Nurse	L2
Pamela	Female	Huddersfield	Advanced Clinical Practitioner	L3
Shane	Male	Huddersfield	Manufacturer	L5
Jake	Male	Huddersfield	FT Student	L15

Table 2.7. indicates that 80% of the Huddersfield participants have higher level occupations (1-6) which echo the distribution of employment types in the wider population of Huddersfield.

This summary intends to demonstrate that although the population of Huddersfield is much greater than that of Halifax, these traditionally, industrial towns are similar. Moreover, the current occupation data is comparable with the distribution of role types held in both towns. The minor variation in student numbers (2.6% more in Huddersfield) is possibly owing to the existence of the university and numerous, further education settings.

Sampling. The 28 participants were recruited via judgment sampling. This was considered more time

effective as it makes use of 'a researcher's extended social networks and their contacts within the community' (Holmes, 2013, p. 31). To be included, respondents were required to be long-standing residents of either town and fluent in the local dialect. For representative purposes, a broad mix of social demographics were targeted, including children, as there is a 'lack of literature on the regional influences in children's dialects' (Jacewicz, Fox and Salmons, 2011, p. 448).

Methods

A quantitative approach was applied through the calculation of data tokens that were elicited during sociolinguistic interviews. This aimed to provide meaningful results in the form of 'hard data that postulates that results are objective, generalizable and replicable' (House, 2018, p. 7). Also employed, were holistic, qualitative research methods that consider 'the multiplicity of other situation-specific factors that can potentially influence the interactional process' (House, 2018, p. 4). For example, social networks, personal identities, and other contextual elements of social interactions. These inductive processes allowed the fieldworker to generate theories through conversations and observations, while 'making decisions about what to do next according to earlier observations and interviews, as it is impossible to know when your observations become analytical insights' (Morgan, 2013, p. 49). The inclusion of descriptive analysis was thought to provide social context and meaningful explanations of linguistic behaviour for the reader.

Interviews

A participant-observation stance was adopted in the informal interviews, since the interviewer 'was part of the vernacular culture and cognisant of its values' (Milroy, 1987, p. 27). This relational element was regarded as a key factor in the research design and was expected to mitigate the speech typically associated with an interview. It was assumed that the existing familiarity between interlocuters would facilitate 'a context that provided something much like every day linguistic interaction' (Cukor-Avila and Bailey, 2001, p 258). This was intentional, as vernacular speech is considered as 'the basis of which all other speech styles are evaluated' (Labov, 1981, p. 29).

Two speech styles were elicited during the interviews: spontaneous and a reading-aloud style. Any consistent style change between the two modes, would help 'to identify linguistic norms for particular variables to understand their social relevance' (Labov, 2006, pp. 58 - 59). Using Labovian techniques, the participants were encouraged to relay anecdotes and shared experiences, since 'an interesting and relatable topic can positively impact speech flow and productivity levels during an interview situation (Siegman and Pope, 1996, p. 243). Similarly, when a speaker initiated a topic, this was maintained by the interviewer so 'it could be used again and again without exhausting interest' (Labov, 1981, p. 13). These methods were thought to facilitate the elicitation of vernacular speech which is known to 'provide the most systematic data for linguistic analysis' (Labov, 1981, p. 29).

Spontaneous speech was targeted initially, to ease the participants into the interview situation. The questions, based on individual recreational activities during the Covid-19 lockdown period, were open-ended to encourage continuous dialogue. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour and were executed 'in the subject's natural environment, (via Zoom), which served to lessen observational effects' (Labov, 1973, p. 86).

Prepositions of source were targeted through enquiring about sources of exercise, takeaway food, entertainment, and arbitrary online purchases during the lockdown period. To encourage honest conversing 'the researcher was emersed in the discussions unequivocally and shared personal experiences' (Tagliamonte, 2006, p. 37), for the purpose of receiving the same. The researcher used vernacular speech, complete with profanities while deliberately excluding linguistic jargon. This was thought to promote 'linguistic alignment'

(Weatherholtz, Campbell-Kibler and Jaeger, 2014, p. 388) and demonstrate to the sample that they could speak to the researcher as they would do ordinarily. The intention was to 'remove the authority of the interviewer' (Labov, 1981, p. 40), so that speakers would feel comfortable and speak naturally.

To avoid influencing preposition choices, the researcher was mindful of how questions were framed during the interviews. Instead of asking 'where did you get that *from*?' an alternative was posed instead 'where would you buy something like that?' A selection of the interview questions are below:

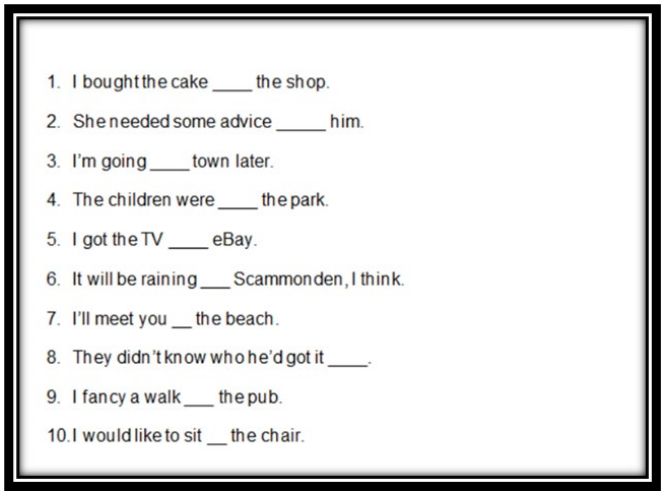
- What type of takeaways do you usually get? Italian, Chinese, Indian? Where do you go?
- What is the last thing you bought? Where did you get it? (Hot tubs and garden rooms were popular purchases at the time).
- What day trips or events have you got planned? Where did you book it?

The target variable was the preposition *off*, used to indicate source. This was considered an emic category, specific to speakers who had social ties to the north of Halifax. 'Emic categories are typically used in ethnographic fieldwork to identify local groups' (Hoffman, 2013, p. 28). This study was not ethnographic, but it did share similarities in terms of exploring the social factors that can cause variation.

To measure stylistic changes during the interviews, midway through, a reading task was given to the participants, of which prior notice had been given. The reading task, shown in Figure 2.8. below, was created to elicit prepositions of source and other types, relating to a separate project. The introduction of the reading task would enable the identification of stylistic shifts from natural speech to a more formal style.

Figure 2.8. The Reading Task.

The reading task comprised of ten basic sentences,



each without a preposition. The sentences were simplistic so that respondents did not need to regard them excessively and 'the minimum attention was paid to speech' (Labov, 1981, p. 3). The sentence compositions were varied and designed to accept several prepositions to draw several variations from the participants.

Analysis

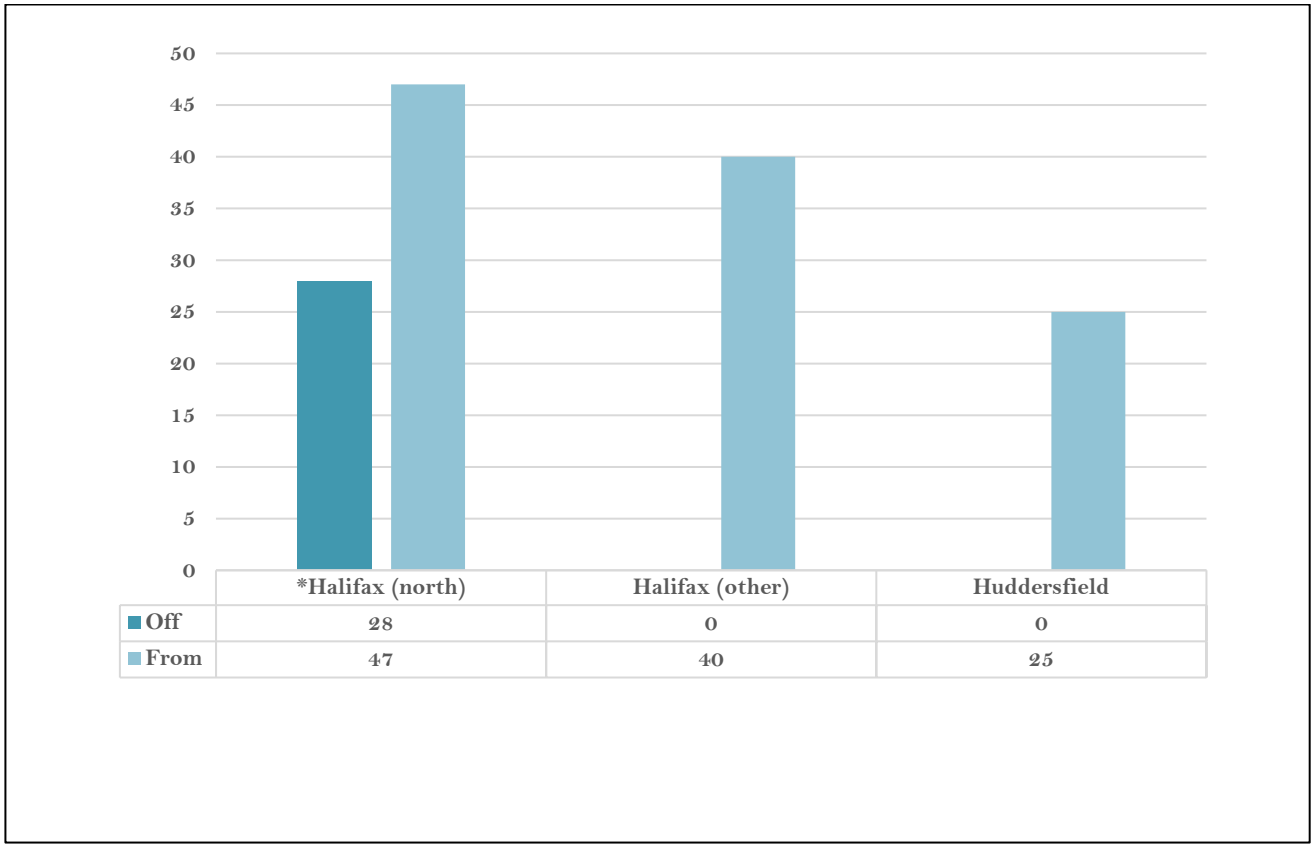
When the data collection process was complete, a quantitative analysis of the 140 elicited tokens was undertaken. Each token was ordered into the lexical categories of *off* and *from*. The process involved calculating the frequency of the categorical variables produced by each participant, as 'individual variation is important because different ways of calculating group averages will give different results' (Holmes, 2014, p. 101). The distribution patterns of the linguistic variants were examined in relation to the sample's social network ties. Also, intra-speaker speech was examined to understand the stylistic behaviours of individual speakers within each speech mode. The purpose of this was to identify any divergence in style resulting in variation, with a view to organising the data and to draw further conclusions. The non-standard variant *off* was expected to be used more during spontaneous speech and was projected to have a significant presence in the Halifax (north) group. Moreover, high levels of reduction, mis-speech, profanities, and taboo language were expected during casual speech, by speakers who were socially

closer to the researcher. In contrast, it was assumed that standard forms would increase during the reading task, and non-standard forms would decline. The pace of speech was expected to reduce significantly, resulting in more defined articulation.

Results

The nonstandard use of the preposition *off* used to indicate source, was used exclusively by the Halifax (north) speakers, whereas the participants from other areas of Halifax and Huddersfield used the standard form *from*. The overall distribution of the 140 tokens revealed that the standard form was used significantly more (79%) than the nonstandard variety (21%). The statistics indicate that the standard lexical item 'for marking source is the locative *from*' (Clark and Carpenter, 1989, p. 3). Table 3.1. below illustrates the overall distribution patterns described.

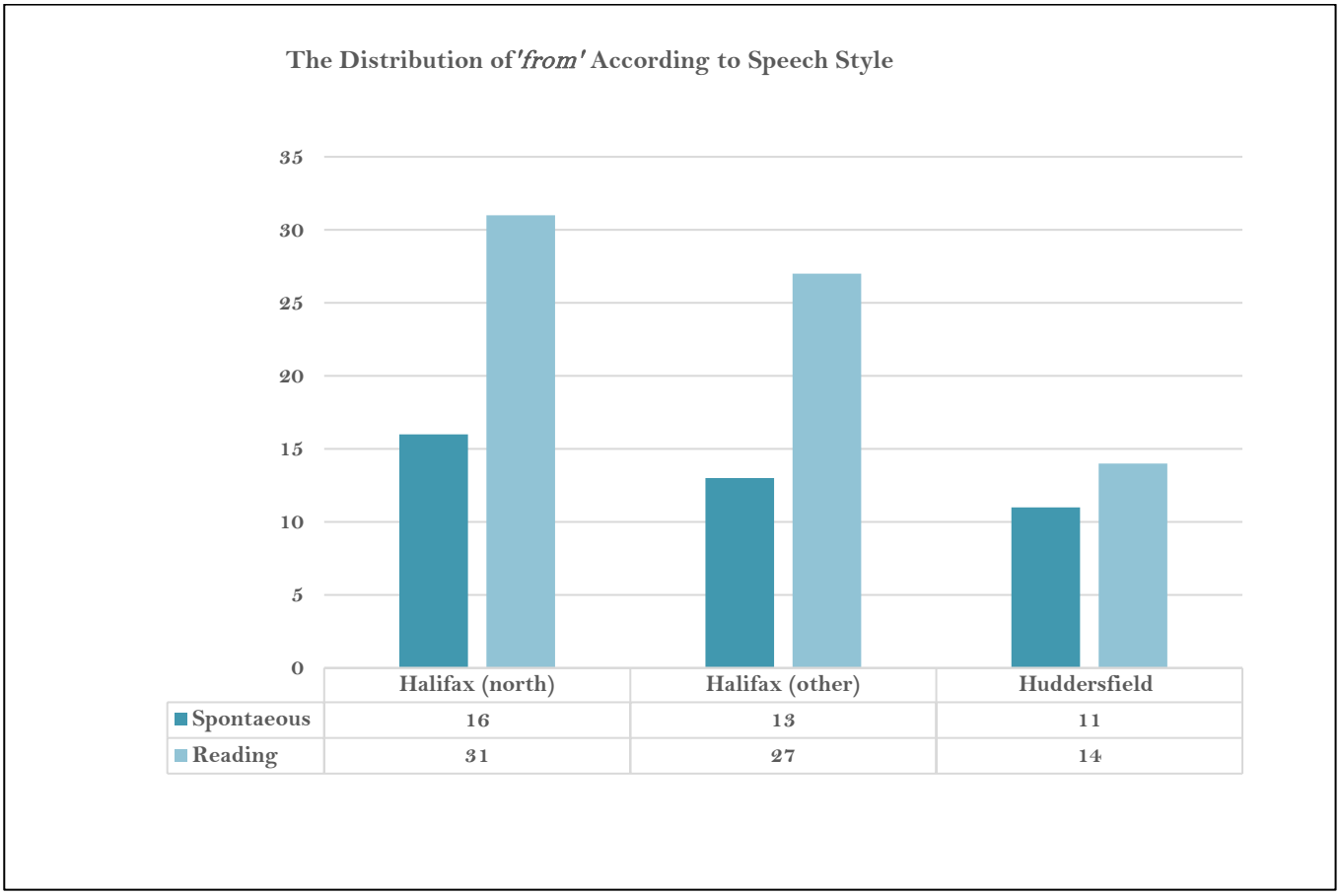
Table 3.1. The Distribution of Overall Tokens of Source.



The nonstandard variable was specific to Halifax (north) speakers. No other groups used this variant to indicate source.

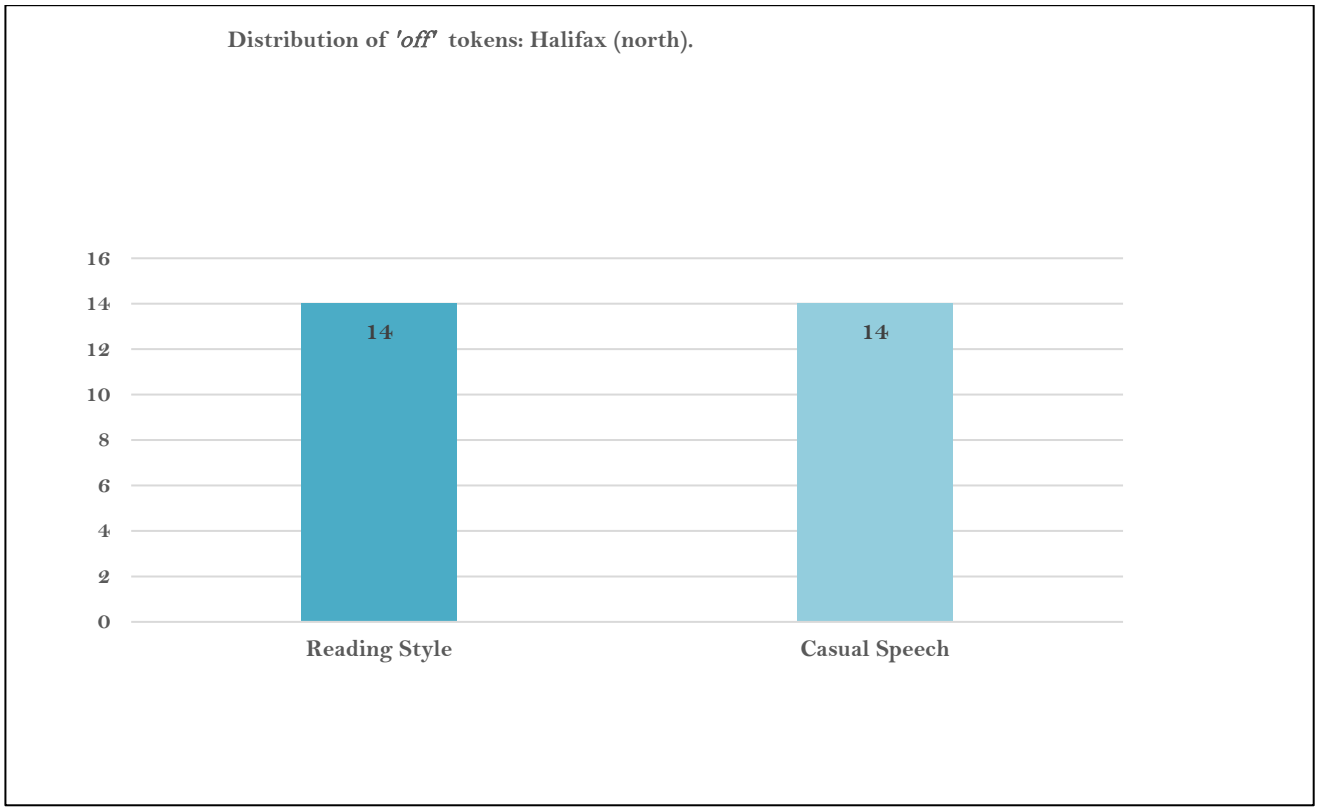
Despite the prevalence of the standard form during the interviews, the majority of these tokens were elicited during the reading task. This pattern of use was anticipated however, since this type of data extraction is regarded as 'formal elicitation' (Labov, 1981, p. 8) and in fact, has been described by some as the 'highest level of formality' (Hernández-Campoy, 2016, p. 78). The Halifax (north) group used *off* 94% more during the reading task, and the Halifax (other) speakers used it 108% more in the same context. The Huddersfield speakers used the standard form 27% more than they did during casual conversations. These figures support the notion that standard forms are characteristically associated with formal language, arising from 'strong institutional pressure' (Milroy and Milroy, 2012, p. 4). Table 3.2 below illustrates the patterns of use described.

Table 3.2. The Distribution of *from* According to Speech Mode.



The preposition *off* was used exclusively by the Halifax (north) group, and to the same degree in both speech modes. This suggests that it is a 'nonlegitimised linguist norm' (Milroy and Milroy, 1992, p. 7) in the north Halifax vernacular. Furthermore, its stable presence in the local dialect 'is related to a shared set of social norms' (Duranti, 2009, p. 67) that exist within dense social structures like these. Customarily, shared social behaviours, including language, are assumed by network members, which act as social identity markers to 'define a particular speech community' (Hockett, 1958, p. 8). The omission of this variant in the speech of the other Halifax and Huddersfield speakers, confirms that the nonstandard item is specific to the north Halifax group. Table 3.3 below shows the equal distribution levels of the nonstandard form in the north Halifax group.

Table 3.3. Distribution of *off* According to Speech Style: Halifax (north).



During the interviews, the subject of online purchases was introduced to prompt prepositions of source. The majority of the Halifax (north) speakers used the preposition *off* to reference these, with eBay being the most cited, 'I got the TV *off* eBay.' Other e-companies were mentioned, but it was the latter which was seemingly recognised as 'the original online shopping system' (Shanthi, and Desti, 2015, p. 14). Interestingly, when an item had been sourced through a traditional company's e-shop, for example 'a football club's shop' who originally had just physical stores, the qualifier 'website' would follow the company name, 'they'd get em [match tickets] *off* the Leeds (L.U.F.C) website.' However, a qualifier was not included when mentioning companies which originally began online i.e., Amazon, and eBay. In addition to this, *off* was not used to reference a physical landmark of source. Instead, the standard variety *from* would be used in this context, 'they'd have got a few cans *from* the offy' (off license).

Despite the systematic regularity of this variant in this group, during the reading task, three of its members used the standard form *from* to reference an online source, 'I got the TV *from* eBay'. This style shift was partially attributed to the formality of the task, since each of these participants had previously used *off* to signal an online source during spontaneous speech. These findings are detailed below in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5. Using *off* to Express an Online Source According to Speech Mode: Halifax (north).

Participant	Gender	Age	*Off* Tokens	Source Type	Context	Speech Style
Adam	M	50	3	Online	Purchase	Both
Eugene	M	15	2	Online	Purchase	Both
Jilly	F	62	2	Online	Purchase	Reading
Martin	M	53	1	Online	Purchase	Reading
Diane	F	48	1	Online	Purchase	Reading

Kira	F	44	1	Online	Purchase	Reading
Maria	F	50	1	Online	Purchase	Reading
Paul	M	43	1	Online	Purchase	Reading
Rose	F	41	1	Online	Purchase	Reading

Conversely, the Halifax (other) and Huddersfield groups used the standard form *from* to reference both physical and online purchase sources. The nonstandard variant was not present in these groups. This suggests that the standard variety is the norm to express source in these speaker groups. This data is illustrated in Tables 3.6 and 3.7 below.

Table 3.6. Halifax (other): Expressing a Purchase Source According to Speech Mode.

Participant	Gender	Age	*From* Tokens	Source Type	Context	Speech Style
Katrina	Female	80	1	Physical	Purchase	Reading
Ruth	Female	25	2	Physical & online	Purchase	Both
Annie	Female	44	2	Physical & online	Purchase	Both
Finlay	Male	13	3	Physical & online	Purchase	Both
Jenny	Female	55	5	Physical & online	Purchase	Both
Katherine	Female	43	4	Physical & online	Purchase	Both
Lola	Female	24	2	Physical	Purchase	Casual
Paula	Female	59	2	Physical	Purchase	Both
Shirley	Female	36	1	Physical	Purchase	Reading

Table 3.7. Huddersfield: Expressing a Purchase Source According to Speech Mode.

Participant	Gender	Age	*From* Tokens	Source Type	Context	Speech Style
Bill	Male	33	3	Physical	Purchase	Both
Sarah	Female	45	1	Physical	Purchase	Reading
Pamela	Female	44	1	Online	Purchase	Reading
Shane	Male	49	3	Physical & online	Purchase	Both
Jake	Male	16	1	Online	Purchase	Reading

Other nonstandard use of the preposition off were apparent when referencing animate landmarks in relation to abstract items of source, for example, 'I'm getting dead eye *off* her' (disapproving looks) and 'she needed some advice *off* him.' Similar usage was captured while discussing a subject's inherent personality traits i.e., 'he doesn't get that *off* me' (his laziness) and 'they get it *off* their parents' (vulgar language use). This usage was systematic and was employed regardless of whether or not the subject was known to the speaker. In contrast, the preposition *from* was a regular feature of the control groups' speech in these contexts.

Conclusions

This research was concerned with the nonstandard use of prepositions of source in regional speech. A social approach to language analysis was undertaken by examining the various social factors which can shape individual linguistic behaviour. The elicitation of vernacular speech in the north Halifax network was a key objective of the study, since this type of language is 'the most systematic data for linguistic analysis' (Labov, 1981, p.29). Also, it provided a basis for comparison in the reading task, which assisted in identifying individual style shifts.

The relational aspects of the study were fundamental in obtaining quality data. The

researcher's insider position, together with her use of vernacular speech and profanities, sought to promote linguistic alignment, so that speakers would speak as they would do ordinarily. This was important, given that contextual factors such as these can give rise to increased standard forms.

The results showed that nonstandard use of the preposition *off* was exclusive to the north Halifax speakers. The homogeneous language employed by these speakers is representative of group solidarity, in which network members 'support localised linguistic norms and resist change originating from outside the network' (Milroy, 2002, p. 562). By contrast, the control groups from Huddersfield and other parts of Halifax, did not use the nonstandard form in this context, instead they used the standard variety *from*.

Despite all attempts to mitigate the effects of the interview situation on speech, speakers who were less acquainted with the interviewer, produced more considered speech, which intensified during the reading task. Conversely, family members and close friends of the interviewer would consistently use vernacular speech, including profanities and vulgarities. The reading task induced a slower pace of speech and more refined articulation by all participants in the study. Similarly, during casual speech all 28 speakers reduced the preposition *from* to *frəm*., including those who spoke nearer to standard English.

Lastly, there was no evidence that age, gender or occupation type could account for the shared language patterns observed. The other interrelating, social aspects considered significant in stylistic variation, included the level of intimacy between speakers, situational factors, and identity.

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