

Variation in clitic negation patterns in Yorkshire English: evidence for supra-localism and diffusion

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This paper considers variation within clitic negative constructions as in (1) and (2), examining data from Leeds (West Yorkshire) and York (North Yorkshire). There are two patterns which occur, as described by Petyt (1985:180). The first is exemplified in (1), where the nasal consonant is immediately preceded by a vowel. Here, variation occurs between the standard productions, as in (1a) and a realisation with the nasal consonant deleted (1b). The second pattern occurs in negated verbs whereby the nasal is preceded by a consonant (2a). Again, a reduced form can occur, but this time instead of the nasal consonant being removed, the preceding consonant is the site of secondary contraction (2b). (This latter alternation is not dissimilar to [z]→[d] rule observed in some US varieties of English (Schilling-Estes 1995, Sledd 1997) although there are sufficient distinctions to promote cautious comparison.) We henceforth refer to the two patterns as DO-type constructions and DID-type constructions respectively, although the variable context is any verb with a cliticized negative particle.

- (1) a. I mean, young people **don't** want to know
b. They sell electrical goods but they **doØ't** repair them
- (2) a. But we **didn't** really realise the impact of it all
b. We **diØn't** have any accidents with the big buses

The data for this project come from two corpora: the first was collected in York in the mid-1990s by Tagliamonte (1998); the second was collected in Leeds in 2005 by Steele (2007). We compare speakers aged 20-30 and 68+ in the York corpus with speakers aged 37-48 and 63+ in the Leeds corpus.

According to Petyt (1978, 1985) secondary contraction amongst DID-type constructions is found across a wider geographic area than it is for DO-type constructions, which he considers to be restricted to “a much smaller region, including West Yorkshire” (1985:180). On this basis, our research hypothesis was that DID-type secondary contraction would be observed in both Leeds and York, but that, due to the situation of Leeds in the West of the county and York being to the North, DO-type contractions would be found to a much greater degree in Leeds than in York.

However, our findings suggest that the DO-type construction may be more widespread. Results show similar patterns of variation in the two cities, however Leeds speakers use both DID-type and DO-type secondary contractions to a greater degree than York speakers, suggesting a diffusion of the feature from West Yorkshire to other areas of the wider Yorkshire region. Our findings lead us to believe there is scope for an analysis of secondary contraction across the North of England, contributing towards our understanding of the process of supra-localisation in British dialects.

References

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