

Th'interpretation of t'definite article in th'North of England.

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This paper considers the nature and development of the form of the definite article in parts of the North of England.

SOME QUESTIONS:

- (i) What are the phonetic forms?
- (ii) What is the phonological distribution of the forms?
- (iii) What is the social distribution of the forms? (Not considered here.)
- (iv) What is the historical development? Will this help with a synchronic analysis?
- (v) How many lexical storage forms are there? Should it be identified with the lexical item normally written *the*?
- (vi) Are they all related historically?

1. The forms

In relatively broad transcriptions the definite article is usually represented as [t], [ʔ] or [θ]. Possible examples would be as in (1) – (3).

- (1) [ɪn t mɔːnɪn] *in the morning*
- (2) [ʊndə ʔ mɑːʔ] *under the mat*
- (3) [pʊt ʊp θ eɪəʔ] *put up the aerial*

However, since these are relatively broad transcriptions, a number of issues are ignored. For example, is the [t] in (1) released or unreleased? If the latter, it could also exhibit assimilation of place: [ɪm pʰ mɔːnɪn]. Also, what is the nature of the glottal constriction: is it a complete closure or a close approximation? Is there associated creaky voice in the articulation, as indicated in some of the transcriptions for Lodge (1978) and discussed by Jones (2007)? And is there an accompanying oral closure?

•Whatever other kinds of phonetic realizations occur, at the very least we are dealing with glottal activity and voiceless dental friction.

• [θ] + vowel and [ʔ] + consonant, as in

- (4) [θɛ:ɹɪəl] the aerial
- (5) [θɔspɪtəl] the hospital
- (6) [ɪŋˈgɑ:dən] in the garden
- (7) [gɪvəsˈbɹʊm] Give us the broom.
- (8) [avjəgətʔtaɪm] Have you got the time?

Note that (8) is different from (9) in that the glottal closure is longer in the former.

- (9) [avjəgətʔtaɪm] Have you got time?

It also occurs utterance-initially as a closed glottis onset to even a voiced stop, as in (10).

- (10) [ʔbʊsɪzkʊmɪn] The bus is coming.

And there may even be both realizations together in some contexts:

- (11) [wɪʔθɛ:ɹɪəl] with the aerial
- (12) [ɪnʔθɔspɪtəl] in the hospital

• **For some older speakers the distribution is [ʔ] + consonant, [t] + vowel with no fricative realizations. There are yet other speakers who use some kind of glottal constriction in all cases, irrespective of the following context.**

• **In addition the dialectal form many speakers use standard English [ðɹ]/[ðə].** For example, in Lodge (1984: 36) speaker N makes the following utterances in close succession:

- (13) [dæʊnˈsɛllə] down the cellar
- [te:ksθɛ:ɹɪəl] takes the aerial
- [wɛ:jəgətʔðɛ:ɹɪəl] where you get the aerial

2. Historical development

This has been fairly fully discussed by Jones (2002) and refs., but there are a number of extra points to make. **The main question is whether the forms come from the ME definite article [θe] or the demonstrative [θat]. It is, of course, possible that it is a mixture of the two forms.**

- **Is the [t/?] form an assimilated form in the context of a preceding [t] or [d] extended to other contexts, or is it from the final consonant of [θat], with subsequent glottal reinforcement and dearticulation?**

- **There is evidence that the ME t-form appeared after [s] as well as [t] and [d]. This can hardly be assimilation.**

- **There is a long-standing dissimilation process whereby the sequence fricative + [θ] became fricative + [t]; hence *width, length*, but *height, thought*, which in OE and ME had a velar fricative, of course. (There are also dialect forms with a ‘double suffix’: [(h)artθ].)**

- **This dissimilation also affects other [θ]-initial words, e.g. *thou*, especially when it follows the verb ending [s], as in modern dialect forms such as [dʊstə], *does thou*. (Note that the [t]-ending of archaic standard *comest, doest, livest*, etc. comes from an epenthetic form where the verb occurs before *thou* with accompanying reanalysis of the word-boundary; cf. Hogg, 1992. The normal northern dialect ending for the second person singular is, however, *s*.)**

- **It also affects other suffixes, such as *-eth* with a loss of the vowel, hence OE *ciest* [tʃiəst] ‘chooseth’.**

- **The changes in the distribution seem to involve a redistribution of ‘allophonic’ variants and lexical reinterpretation.**

- **The evidence from literary texts suggests that an urban dialect had developed by the mid 19th century with levelled out features. Certainly, still in the mid 20th century there were deliberately old-fashioned recitations and poems in broad dialect with [θ] + consonant, as in (14).**

(14) [wɪə ɪɪt dæʊn ɪn θ kɔɪtɔɪt]

We’re right down in the coal-hole

• Literary sources of dialect forms:

2.1 Tim Bobbin, the pseudonym of John Collier (1708-1786), a school teacher from the Rochdale area; *Tummus and Meary* (1746).

- (i) The commonest pattern is *th'* for the definite article. This is most likely to represent the voiceless fricative, given the modern variants.
- (ii) Occasionally *the* occurs, especially in *the dule* (*devil*).
- (iii) *t'* occurs after coronal stops: *sed t'felley* (*fellow*); *whot te plague*.
- (iv) The assimilation after [t/d] and dissimilation after [s] are not lexically restricted but apply to other *th-* words: *mend tat* (*that*), *ot tis seme brig* (*at this same bridge*), *whot tey can*, *howd teh tung* (*hold thy tongue*); *as teaw* (*as thou*), *whoos tat?* (*Who's that?*).
- (v) There is one instance with no indication of the article: *swallut poker* (*swallowed the poker*). This could be a misprint or an indication that the pronunciation was [-tʰp-] with assimilation and no schwa.
- (vi) *T'other* always has *t'* and never *th'*, which may suggest the origin (*tha*)*t other* (cf. Jones, 2002: 326, referring to Barry, 1972).

This looks like the situation of Middle English with regular assimilation and dissimilation.

2.2 Emily Brontë, West Riding of Yorkshire; *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

In most of the novel the pattern is *t'* + consonant, *th'* + vowel and *h*, presumably indicating *h*-drop. Oddly, given the consistency of representation, there are examples of *th'* + consonant from the same character. Whatever the reasons for this, it seems that 100 years later the features of assimilation and dissimilation found in Tim Bobbin have gone, except in the case of the single lexical item *thou*, e.g. *wud tey*.

2.3 Elizabeth Gaskell; *Mary Barton* (1848), *North and South* (1855).

The definite article is invariably written *th'*. *T'* is restricted to forms representing schwaless *to*. This may have become a literary convention for representing 'northern' (or, perhaps, more specifically, Manchester) speech.

2.4 G. Linnaeus Banks; *The Manchester Man* (c.1875).

Th' is used later by Mrs. G. Linnaeus Banks in her representations of Manchester speech of the time of the Peterloo Massacre. This would suggest a dialect with [θ] in all cases and no alternation, again without any assimilation and dissimilation.

2.5 The main changes and an explanation

Between 1750 and 1850 there seems to have been a change in the phonological system of at least some of the dialects of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

(1) 1750: the definite article was in most environments a voiceless dental fricative and was subject to general assimilation to and dissimilation from certain preceding sounds.

(2) 1840: this system was replaced by one or two systems in which there were stop/fricative alternations determined by the following environment, or a fricative-everywhere system.

(3) By the twentieth century there were also stop-only systems.

In all cases there has been a generalization of what were assimilated forms or the lexical form to other and even all environments.

• **How did this restructuring come about?** During the Industrial Revolution, from about 1750 to 1850, population migration from rural to urban locations was continuous. To take a major modern city, Manchester, the increase in population from 1700 onwards was spectacular.

1700 : c.9000; 1800: 89,000; 1820: 180,000; 1851: just under 360,000.

Migration was mostly from not far away plus a large influx of Irish immigrants in the 1840s. So it is reasonable to assume that Manchester speakers had a Lancashire base with additional elements in varying quantities from further afield. This is, in fact, a **new-dialect situation**.

• **One possible contributory change:**

Irish speakers of English in the nineteenth century would presumably have used [t̪] rather than [θ]. If the definite article in Manchester was [θ] (usually without any schwa), then Irish speakers at least would replace this with [t̪^h]. Over the generations this could have become the target for some speakers, and a shift to alveolar from dental contact would bring it line with current articulations. By the end of the nineteenth century, when **glottal reinforcement** was becoming widespread in various British English accents, the glottal closure would occur in the appropriate environments, especially before consonants. **Dearticulation to [ʔ]** probably began to occur fairly soon thereafter.

3. The grammars of today (Declarative Phonology)

Phonological features are monovalent and relate to particular phonetic parameters such as phonation or place of articulation. They can attach to any level of phonological structure, e.g. foot, syllable, onset, rhyme.

(15) *lips*: {spread, neutral, round}

resonance: {front, retracted, central, advanced, back}

pharynx: {wide, normal, narrow}

velum: {oral, nasal}

phonation: {voiced, voiceless, closed glottis, breathy, creaky}

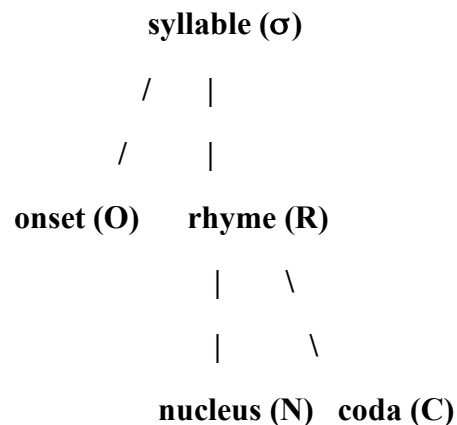
nucleus manner: {high, mid, low}

manner: {stop, fricative, lateral, trill, approximant, high, mid, low}

place: {bilabial, labiodental, alveolar, palato-alveolar, dorsal, uvular}

Although some features under some circumstances may be implicitly interpretable as phonetic features, there has to be a set of specific statements relating phonological structures to utterances, **the phonetic interpretation component**.

(16)



Today there are basically three grammars as regards the definite article (in addition to the possible borrowing of standard forms of *the*). In all three types of grammar the definite article is part of the first onset of the NP, whether the word involved is an intensifier, an adjective or a noun.

3.1 [θ] + vowel, [ʔ] + consonant

The particular alternation under consideration is lexically specific, so we are losing nothing by having an ad hoc phonetic implementation of a single morpheme, namely, definiteness in a NP.

• **Definite attached to a NP will be interpreted as an onset voiceless dental fricative in any case where the first word, irrespective of grammatical category, is vowel-initial. In all other cases it will be interpreted as a glottal closure.** The glottal closure is represented on the phonation layer as [closed glottis]. In the case of the onset feature it will appear with a following oblique to indicate that it shares the onset position with another phonation feature, [voiced] or [voiceless].

(18) [closed glottis/]

(19) /
 /
 O
 [closed glottis/voiceless]
 the pot

(20) /
 /
 O
 [closed glottis/voiced]
 the bus

(The higher node in each case is N.)

The duration of the different phonation features and their synchronization vis-à-vis the other onset features, e.g. the oral closure, will be accounted for in the phonetic interpretation component. Remember, this bit of the phonology is specific to one lexical item only and is not generalizable.

3.2 [θ] only

The [θ]-only dialects may be extinct by today, though they certainly existed a hundred years ago.

• **The lexical entry form is straightforward as / θ /. If place is constant in the realizations, then [dental] is sufficient specification.**

(21) [dental] → [fricative]

Lip position and resonance are determined (and represented) at syllable level. Since dental friction before another consonant can only be voiceless, it is not necessary to specify it in this case. Note that the phonotactics of onsets in these dialects is different from many other dialects.

