Variety and heritage: An investigation into the relationship between perceptions of Basingstoke English and the London heritage narrative

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Abstract
The link between language and identity has been extensively studied, whether it is the link between language and nationalism, or the relationship between an individual and their languages. One aspect understudied, however, is the relationship between perceptions of language varieties and local identity narratives. This study examines the relationship between the perception of a Basingstoke variety of English and local narratives of London heritage. An online questionnaire completed by 90 participants was used to collect relevant data. The findings indicate that the relationship is a lot more complex than expected. First, London heritage narratives seem to play a less central role than other factors, such as age, in the perception of Basingstoke English. Further, the local variety of English is viewed as a source of pride. Local language attitudes were also linked with broader social prejudices in the 'correct' use of language.

Keywords: Basingstoke, folk linguistics, language attitudes, identity, London, construction, emotion

1. Introduction

Basingstoke is a town in the south of England. It is commonly called a 'commuter town' due to the large number of people who live in Basingstoke and work in London. In the period following the Second World War, Basingstoke's population grew dramatically, going from 13,000 people at the start of the war to 185,000 in 2021 (ONS 2022). Basingstoke is home to people from all over the world but one common narrative that binds the community together is the 'London heritage' story. The town, by design, was rapidly changed by planners in the postwar period to accommodate people leaving London, which naturally affected Basingstoke's demographics. Many families (including the author's) can trace their heritage back to the London boroughs. This narrative is often a source of pride and, like all heritage identities, an extremely personal and powerful force. One way in which this identity has materialised is in what many describe as the 'Basingstoke twang.' This expression describes the local variety of English that carries with it an echo of the London varieties, especially those of East End London. An investigation into attitudes surrounding this perceived variety and its connection to the London heritage identity will shed light on the power of linguistic construction of identity and how it can shape people's worldview.

It seems necessary at this point to briefly unpack what I mean by 'London heritage narrative.' As I have mentioned, many residents in Basingstoke can trace their family roots to London, with many being first, second or third-generation internal migrants from London. The London heritage narrative refers to a discourse that roots a resident's self-identity construction as being, or having family from, London.

The study found that participants with London heritage did not overwhelmingly identify with a Basingstoke variety of English, as was initially assumed. It also found that residents viewed the local variety of English with pride while simultaneously showing some negative attitudes

consistent with wider social prejudices, such as that of class or age. It also showed that the age of participants had a strong impact on their attitudes. The results of this study serve as a reminder of the complex interwoven factors that shape people's perceptions and attitudes towards language varieties.

2. Language and identity
2.1 Conceptualising language and identity
The main focus of this study is to examine the relationship between language attitudes and identity. Identity has been conceptualised as a social construction; that is, from the point of view of a story we tell ourselves and others tell us. These narratives can be split into individual and group/social identities. While they are both linked, this study will focus on the latter, social identity. Scholars such as Evans (2018) have argued that identity is socially constructed, active and ever-changing. Evans also makes the interesting point that identity construction should be understood as the process underlying discourse and power relations. Another important aspect of identity construction is that "we have multiple identities, so our language can be expected to be variable to allow us to construct these different aspects of our identities as we speak" (Cheshire 2002: 19). This is a postmodern social constructivist approach which has been contested by essentialists.

There is debate in the linguistic academic community between the postmodern and essentialist approaches as to how identity is formed and conceived. The postmodern approach is concerned with social construction. Postmodernists argue that identity is fluid, shaped by our interpretation, and engagement with social reality (Collin 1997). On the other hand, essentialists believe that there are innate and unchanging aspects of a person's identity that come from the individual themselves (Oyama 2000, quoted in Sverker and Kurlberg 2020). This study attempts to reconcile this dichotomy by accepting the validity of emotion in the essentialist approach from the postmodern position.

2.2 A theory of identity: Between two traditions
There is a tendency by postmodernists to treat humans as blank slates, androgynous beings absolutely at the mercy of the forces of socialisation around them. While they do place emotions in a social context, discourses of identity (especially those relating to people's uniqueness) are downplayed in pursuit of more universalist applications. On the other hand, essentialists tend to believe, as mentioned earlier, that identity comes from within an individual and is unchanging. They believe that a language is the idealised representation of this unchanging identity (Tupas 2016). In the essentialist tradition, emotions are often treated as a source of empowerment, and this has been especially true in post-colonial struggles which can also be seen in language policy and planning (Tupas 2016). This study will take a compromising stand between these two positions which are too often framed as absolutely irreconcilable.

As researchers, when our participants share their inner or emotional positions in their identity construction, it is crucial we respect these emotional positions as valid. None of us are robots and it is important to remember how powerful emotions are to an individual's identity. It is for this reason that this paper attempts to find a common ground between these two positions. It recognises identity as a social construction while taking into account the importance of emotion in the construction of an essentialist identity. In relation to language and variety, this emotional factor is important in understanding the experience of a community of language speakers using a language variety.

The postmodern and essentialist positions can be reconciled when we consider the role of language varieties. Edwards (2009: 54) uses the analogy of language being used to "protect an important vehicle of culture and tradition." He explains that language can be understood beyond its systematic and communicative features to include the identity or symbolic function of language (Edwards 2009). This essentialist argument can be reconciled here with the postmodern belief pointed out by Onuf (2012) who emphasises that it must be recognised that humans are fundamentally social beings. The diversity of identities between communities does not undermine their socially constructed nature. Another interesting point Edwards makes is that there is a strong emotional or what he calls a 'symbolic' relationship between people and language (2009). This can be understood if we take the perspective that every particular language and variety encodes a unique human experience which includes cultural knowledge and a social/cultural legacy. This ties in with Anderson's 'imagined community' (1983), which is discussed in the following section.

2.3 Imagined communities

Anderson's idea of the 'imagined community' is central to the arguments of this study. Benedict Anderson argued that the nation should be understood as an 'imagined community,' one in which, although it would be impossible for all members to personally know one another, they are sure of each other's existence through social, cultural, and linguistic identities (Anderson 1983). In framing the nation as a shared project of the imagination, Anderson tapped into the extremely personal and emotive side of nationalism. It is also worth noting the emphasis Anderson placed on the role of language in the shaping of national imaginations. He places particular emphasis on the role of vernacular language combined with access to print media as awakening the national consciousnesses of Europe (Anderson 1983). Others, such as Song (2012), have applied Anderson's ideas to the even smaller scale of the familial. Anderson's postulation forms the basis of this study as the central focus is on language users' perceived or 'imagined' English variety and its relationship to the narrative of London heritage. I believe that Anderson's framework is especially helpful in shedding light on an imagined community in Basingstoke that does not have obvious objects of common imagination, such as a national flag.

3. Studies in folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology

The fields of folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology have been interested in the relationship between language attitudes and social phenomena but the connection between perceptions of dialect and self-identity construction has not been extensively addressed. Some scholars such as Büdenbender (2013), Winke and Ballard (2017), Gold (2015), Alford and Strother (1990) and Lai (2005) have used perceptual dialectology and folk linguistics to investigate the role of language variation in different kinds of discrimination. However, these studies are all centred around the participants' perceptions of the 'other' and not of how they view language variation in their own identity construction. Peters (2016) investigated the role of language attitudes and emotion words on identity construction in multilingual environments. The study found that the self-constructed identities of individuals are constantly in flux, reflecting an increasingly globalised and multilingual world (Peters 2016). The present study builds upon Peter's work and methods while applying them to a more conventionally monolingual (if multidialectal) setting.

Basingstoke[1] does, of course, have other languages than English being used (such as Shona and Polish, among others mentioned later in the paper); however, for the purposes of this paper, the Basingstoke English variety is the object of interest and the main variety of English used in the area. A future study of the other languages of Basingstoke would be interesting and would surely help challenge the widely held belief that Basingstoke is a monolingual community.

Another related study by Lonergran (2016, cited in Cramer and Montgomery 2016) investigated real and perceived variation in Dublin English. Using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to test if the participant's perceptions of the Dublin variety matched the 'real' or measurable varieties in the city, the study found that the perceptions did not match the measured varieties. Lonergran concluded this was due to a range of sociolinguistic factors, such as social class and the common use of inaccurate and complex identity labels, such as 'northside' and 'southside' (Lonergran 2016, cited in Cramer and Montgomery 2016).

Lonergran's study has been extremely informative to the present study. Its scale on the city level is the same as mine and the complex social factors behind perceptions in the study are similar to mine. However, both studies are dissimilar in some respects. For instance, my study is not interested in measuring a *real* Basingstoke English variety as Lonergran measured the different Dublin English varieties. This is because my study is concerned with the factors that trigger variety perception. It would be interesting, however, for future research to test Lonergran's methods in Basingstoke but this is not the primary focus of my study.

3.1 Relevance of the study, and research gap

Prior research has investigated how communities and individuals imagine themselves as relating to each other, exploring the relationship between language attitudes and discrimination on the basis of race and nationality, among others. The literature has also looked at the role language attitudes and emotions play in identity construction in multilingual environments. Finally, existing literature has looked at language attitudes and the perception of language varieties in a city-level context. My research builds on the existing literature by applying certain methods of previous research to a different under-researched language community. The present study also focuses on language attitudes and self-identity construction as opposed to attitudes of the perceived 'other', although these two are often closely linked. Based on this gap, the following research questions are formulated for this study:

1. Does the perception of the Basingstoke variety of English have a relationship to the narrative of London heritage in the identity construction of Basingstoke residents?
    a) Is the variety a source of local pride?

    b) Does the bonds/emotional power of the narrative affect the perceived strength of the variety?
2. Do people perceive the variety as being distinct from Standard British English?

3. Is there a generational effect on the perception of the variety?

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[1] I have used the term 'multidialectal' here to recognise and validate the fact that even in communities where one language is primarily spoken, there are always multiple dialects or 'varieties' which reflect the different individual's experiences and usage of the language. To paint a community as just 'monolingual' is problematic as it presents a false reality of linguistic homogeneity which in the real world does not exist.

4. Methodology

4.1 Questionnaire

This study is a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis of a questionnaire, containing both closed and open-ended questions, completed by 90 Basingstoke residents. The questionnaire consists of fourteen questions, in addition to an additional section for information on the participant's age and gender identity. The first section asked for informed consent, while the second part obtained information on the participant's relationship with Basingstoke. Section three asked the participants to indicate how and if they use English, and what variety they identify with etc. The next section covered issues relating to participants' London heritage. The final section covers the participant's attitudes towards the Basingstoke variety of English. For the design of the questionnaire, the terms 'dialect' and 'accent' were used instead of 'variety,' so as to accommodate views from participants who might not consider Basingstoke English as a separate variety of English. Open-ended items were included in the study because they provided more subjective and qualitative data for analysis, which is an important aspect of folk linguistics. This choice helped the study give the participant as much active role as possible within the research framework. This was then complemented with basic statistical analysis of the quantitative data generated through the closed items.

The questionnaire was selected as a research method because of its ability to collect relevant linguistic data. While some prior studies (e.g., Preston, 1989; Inoue, 1996) in folk linguistics or perceptual dialectology have used dialect perceptual map, this approach is considered insufficient alone in gathering more substantial perceptions of the Basingstoke variety and identity. Since this study is concerned with very personal subjective experiences of identity and language perception, it is important to use an approach that is comprehensive but also crucially open to collect a wide range of participant's answers. The research design draws on the foundation of prior research on dialectology. For example, Chambers and Trudgill (1998) focused on the collection and documentation of linguistic dialect data through direct and indirect questionnaires. The present study builds on the questionnaire used in Chambers and Trudgill (1998), adapting it to include the socially constructed world of identity and language perception unique to my study population.

4.2 Design rationale

One challenge with the research design is eliciting true and honest self-reporting from participants. One way that others have avoided this problem has been through targeting participants based on certain criteria. Stoeckle (2011), when sampling younger participants, specifically targeted those with "communication-orientated professions" with the aim of getting more accurate or linguistically interesting dialect mapping data. While it would be very interesting to break down the 'folk' in folk linguistics into a constructed hierarchy of what could be called 'linguistic awareness' (where presumably linguists would sit at the top and those with absolutely no or very little interest in linguistics would be at the bottom), we would run into two main problems. First, through an increasingly hyper-specific sample targeting certain groups in our new social hierarchy, we would be diluting the central idea of folk linguistics of laypersons. While I do not believe there is anything necessarily wrong with studying groups who are more linguistically aware than others, we must not then make generalisations that these targeted groups represent the broader population. The second problem comes from an ethical position. As researchers in sociolinguistics, it is important to remember that our data is very human. Constructing a linguistic hierarchy in our methodology opens the potential for further disempowerment of our participants through the very labelling of them as linguistically unaware.

This study will avoid the pitfalls of targeting participants who are perceived as linguistically aware by taking a more conventional stance of attempting to survey participants without any consideration of linguistic awareness. That being said, in order to elicit relevant data from participants, the questionnaire has followed a particular order to get participants thinking about the relationship between the Basingstoke dialect and their identity. It could be criticised as leading. However, I believe that since research designs are a working compromise instead of a perfect art, the benefits of getting more relevant data outweigh the drawbacks of being slightly leading.

4.3 Positionality
It is considered important in research to provide a positionality statement, which allows the researcher to reflect on contextual or personal factors that can potentially bias the findings of the research. I am from Basingstoke and consider it to be my home in every sense of the word. Some of the most important people in my life, including my family and friends, are from Basingstoke. I owe almost all of what I have and have done to the town. It is this connection to the town which has triggered my interest in local language attitudes and the identity narratives of the people of my town. While my closeness to the participants can be seen as a weakness, as there is an inherent interest and an impossibility of a completely detached objective study, I would argue that my insider status comes as a benefit to my work. I have been able to establish the work in the first place based on conversations I have had with people in the town. I believe that my positionality has come as a benefit to the research as it has provided me with insider knowledge of the research context. Nevertheless, I am aware of this relationship, and have taken it into account in the interpretation of my results.

5 Results and discussion
5.1 Quantitative data
The questionnaire was completed virtually by 90 participants. I used Google Forms to prepare the questionnaire which I sent to participants via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. I also posted it on the community page 'Spotted Basingstoke.' Every participant gave their informed consent for their answers to be included in the study.

I will now present an overview of the results of the questionnaire, including general information about the participants. Out of the 90 participants, 84 reported being residents of Basingstoke, while 52 participants reported being born in Basingstoke. Out of the 38 participants who stated they were born elsewhere, 26 of them reported being born in the South of England and London. Other noticeable birthplaces included Wales, the Midlands and Scotland, while 4 participants reported being born abroad, including Poland, Malaysia and Zimbabwe. The survey also demonstrates a healthy distribution of ages of the participants (see Figure 4 further below). The survey provided a fair spread of years of residency in Basingstoke, as seen in Figure 1.

How many years have you been a resident of Basingstoke?
89 responses
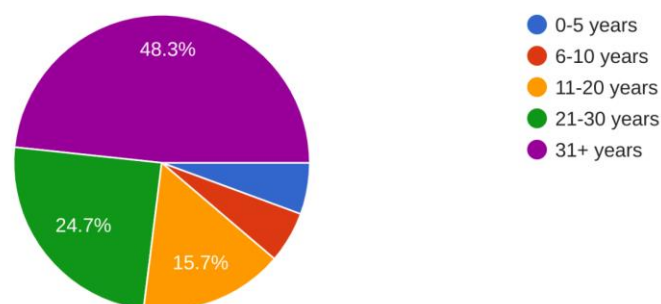
Figure 1. Length of residency in Basingstoke

Of the 90 participants, only 27 self-reported as having London heritage, which was very surprising: as was discussed earlier, Basingstoke is a commuter town which had its population boom in the post-war period when people moved away from London. These 27 reported their family as coming from areas across London, including Fulham, South London, the East End and Teddington, which was not unexpected. Apart from Teddington, these areas were primarily working-class neighbourhoods. The generational breakdown of those with reported London heritage showed that most were second or third-generation (see Figure 2). Again, a healthy spread of generations was expected when researching a migration that happened many decades ago.

If you consider yourself to have London heritage, which category best describes you?
28 responses
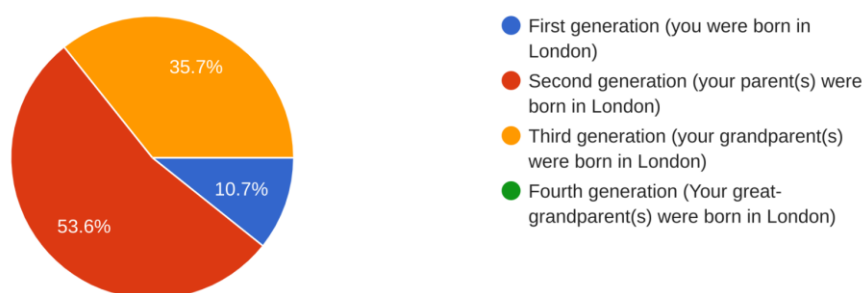
Figure 2. London heritage

With regard to language, 81 of 90 stated that English was their first language. Other reported first languages included Polish, Shona, Bengali, and Welsh. A total of 68 participants reported speaking a Southern British English dialect, while 16 of them mentioned that they speak a London English dialect. The crucial question on Basingstoke variety perception gave a mixed response, as seen in Figure 3.

'People in Basingstoke speak with an accent' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
90 responses
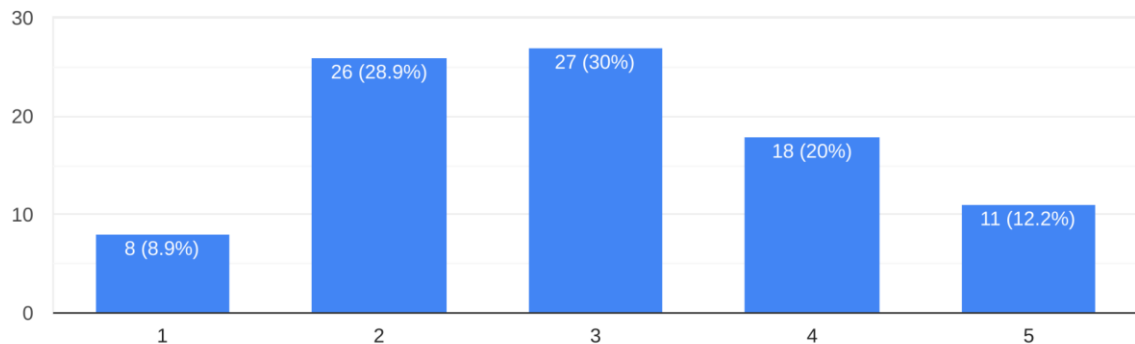
Figure 3. Accent in Basingstoke
Legend: Value 1 = 'Strongly Agree, 3 = No Opinion, 5 = Strongly Disagree)

Finally, I will give an overview of results related to language attitudes. Most participants felt that the Basingstoke variety was similar to the English variety in the surrounding towns. The top three descriptions that participants associated with the Basingstoke variety were friendly (30), uneducated (12), and educated (9). When justifying their choice, participants often tried to explain their judgement of the Basingstoke variety of English. For example, one of the participants remarked that "people from London think I sound like a farmer, but people from the country [i.e. Basingstoke] think I sound like I'm from London." I think this example perfectly represents the perception and hybridity of not only the English variety but also the identity of the town itself. The majority of participants stated that the strongest accents (where the difference is most noticeable from Standard British English) came from the poorest areas which are also commonly perceived as the 'roughest.' For example, "Popley, they talk like chavs." As expected, the opposite is true of areas with the 'weakest accent' where respondents commonly linked this to wealth and age. For example, "Old Basing - sounds more like 'BBC English'." This connection between perceptions of language variety and wider socio-economic associations is found elsewhere in the literature, such as in Lonergran (2016, cited in Cramer and Montgomery 2016), among others.

Interestingly, most participants were female (70%). This can be due to factors concerning how the questionnaire was deployed. Since it was not a completely overwhelming percentage, I do not believe the disproportion negatively impacts the validity of the study. Instead, it helps to amplify the responses of the population which have historically been overlooked. There was also a good mix of age ranges reported by participants, as seen in Figure 4, which strengthens the validity of the study as it makes the questionnaire more representative of the town at large.
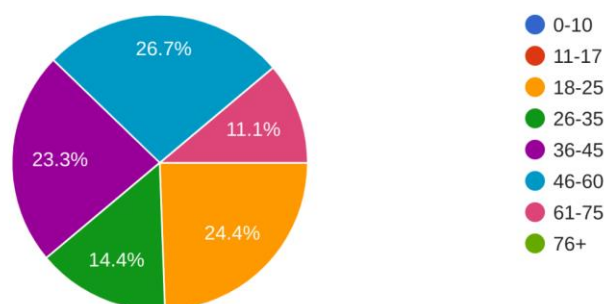
Figure 4. Age

The main aim of this study was to examine the relationship between London heritage and the perception of a Basingstoke variety of English (RQ1). I hypothesised that participants with London heritage would be more likely to believe a Basingstoke variety of English exists. The analysis of the data, however, demonstrated that this link is perhaps more complicated than expected. The survey found that participants who considered themselves to have London heritage were comprised of all ages. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants with London heritage (27) with their answers to the question 'People in Basingstoke speak with an accent.' At first glance, it appears to be proportional to the wider result of that question, disregarding the London heritage factor, as we can see in Figure 3. The result is slightly weighted to the 'agree' side but only by a small margin. The split is 11 for the side of 'agree' and 8 for 'disagree'. However, we can see a more weighted side on 'agree' with a 9/2 split as opposed to the 5/3 split on the 'disagree' side. This indicates a stronger belief in favour of the statement by participants. Ultimately, the data does support my hypothesis but only by the slimmest of margins, so I would argue it would be misleading to generalise the results of 27 people and that more data is needed. It would seem that the London heritage has some effect on folk perceptions of a Basingstoke variety of English.

Table 1. Participants with London heritage recognising a Basingstoke variety of English

Age	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Total	2	9	8	5	3
18-25	0	3	1	2	1
26-35	0	0	0	1	2
36-45	0	3	3	0	0
46-75	2	3	4	2	0

For the second part of the first research question (RQ1A), we have a mixed result. Table 2 shows the distribution of language attitudes in general and then by participants with London heritage in particular. For RQ1A, we can see that the local variety does seem to be seen in a good light by participants, while there remain many participants who view the variety negatively, as well as a sizable minority who hold no strong feelings either way. The residents then are broadly proud of their variety. The second part of Table 2 investigates RQ1B. Broadly, it is proportional to the general result in the first column. Table 2 supports part of my first hypothesis: that residents with London heritage would see their variety as a source of pride. This is an interesting finding because it would seem that while residents with London heritage tended to have mixed feelings when identifying whether Basingstoke has a variety of English, they demonstrated a mostly positive feeling towards their variety. Perhaps this is further evidence of a broader phenomenon of speakers not self-identifying as having an accent.

Table 2. Language attitudes of participants

	Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**No variety**
Total Responses (90)	47	23	13	7
Responses to London heritage	15	5	5	2

There was a mixed result for RQ2. It can be seen in Figure 3 that participants had a small bias towards identifying a Basingstoke variety of English by a small margin. The distribution is that 34 think there is a Basingstoke variety of English to varying extents, 27 being neutral and 29 think there is no Basingstoke variety of English, again to varying degrees. Again, it is important to remember that these are self-reported questionnaires and people tend to believe that they do speak with an accent different from Standard British English.

Interestingly, my second hypothesis would seem not to have been supported as participants tended to perceive the greatest linguistic difference occurring inside of town between the people who live in the more commonly imagined poorer neighbourhoods (who were claimed to have the strongest linguistic differences) and more affluent areas (who were claimed to have the weakest differences or used a variety closest to Standard British English). The construction of perceptions around linguistic differences along social and class lines, while not wholly unexpected, was a lot stronger than I had imagined. As discussed earlier, this would support the findings of the wider literature in folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology in particular that language attitudes often correlate with wider social categories and prejudices. Language attitudes seem to reflect or reinforce the other social attitudes individuals hold of their peers.

5.2 Qualitative data

It is also worth breaking down some of the open-question responses related to the perception of the Basingstoke variety. As discussed previously, Table 2 shows the distribution of opinions categorised as being broadly positive, negative, neutral or as not recognising a distinct variety. As mentioned before, there seems to be a strong and established link between language attitudes and other existing prejudices, such as classism or even racism (Giles & Billings 2004).

The data from the open-ended items in the questionnaire support this link. I will now present some of the responses to Question 10, asking participants to pick a word or write in a word that best describes their attitude towards the Basingstoke variety of English. Here are some interesting responses.

"I think we have a broken Hampshire accent."

The concept of a language variety being 'broken' is often found when individuals are discussing languages or varieties that they do not consider to be the true or correct form of a language. This has historically been true of the way some people discuss creoles and pidgins. In this example, it appears the respondent considers the Basingstoke variety of English to be a form of Hampshire (rural) English that has been 'broken' by people moving to the town.

"Most people sound very chavvy in bstoke" (bstoke standing for Basingstoke).

In the above example, we can see another case of language attitudes being connected to wider societal judgments. In this case, we can see that the respondent describes the Basingstoke variety of English as 'chavvy,' a derogatory term for a working-class person.

"The older generation of this town speak as tho they are well educated. Unlike many of the younger ones."

In this statement, we can see that the respondent ties language attitudes to attitudes and assumptions about different generations as well as education. The respondent associates the variety of English of the elderly with education and thus we can assume it is the correct form of English. They hold an opposite view of the language of the youth, who by assumption are perceived as being uneducated and, therefore, the English they use as being incorrect.

These short responses help build a more detailed picture of the attitudes Basingstoke residents have toward their variety of English. It also brings to light prejudices some residents seem to hold and associate with the English language use(d) in the town.

The connection between language attitudes or perceptions of the Basingstoke varied and wider social prejudices is a theme which continues when respondents are asked to name areas in the town where the variety is the strongest and the weakest, as can be seen in the excerpts below.

"Popley, Brighton hill, most areas with more crime and wording to match"

"Beggarwood lots of new basingstokers from london"

"Old Basing - more of a posh area and more educated people"

The above responses are similar to ones discussed earlier. They all touch on the connection between the perception of language variety, class, crime, and migration. It is also worth mentioning the association of what respondents consider the 'strongest' or most 'noticeable' Basingstoke variety as being closely linked to London. This helps to support my claim that this variety is perceived as being a combination of London English and the rural Hampshire variety.

Similarly, other respondents stated:

"Old basing - sounds more like 'bbc english'"

"Chineham as it is seen as a friendly place and has no one talking in a different way to come across intimidating."

"Chineham, New Hatch Warren, Kempshot. Because these are not the original estates of the 60's where Londoners were moved out to. The older estates housed London origin families."

The above responses support the ideas previously discussed by confirming their opposite. The assumption that 'broken' English is associated with the working class requires that the upper classes speak the 'correct' way. These responses also touch on some provoking ideas. One response claims that Chineham is friendly because people speak in the same way and do not speak differently, which this respondent claims is done to be intimidating. 'Friendliness' is a tried and tested way of measuring solidarity between speakers and communities. A future study could be interested in unpacking statements like this. Finally, these respondents again link the Basingstoke variety to London. By unpacking these written responses, we are able to better understand respondents' attitudes, and even more telling, emotions towards the Basingstoke variety. They also provide a deeper insight into RQ1B because they provide personal, open responses that can shed light on their attitudes and feelings.

RQ3 was concerned with the generational factor in perceptions of variety. In Table 1, we can see the distribution of Basingstoke variety perception by participants with London heritage subdivided by the age range of the participants. Predictably, we can see an age bias. Generally, those who are younger are less likely to recognise a Basingstoke variety than those who are older. One linguistic theory that can help explain this finding is the idea of language shift, where, over time, an individual's linguistic repertoire changes. We can apply this on a societal scale, so that those who are closer to the original London English variety are more likely to perceive its echo in the Basingstoke variety than those who are removed by time and generation from their London heritage. Even more interesting is the possibility, of course, that the older participants think that they can recognise a Basingstoke variety because they want to. Future research interested in the role of nostalgia and self-identity construction could shed more light as to whether this is the case with these results. Ultimately, however, this age bias was expected and supports my hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study have challenged my understanding of the relationship between identity and dialect perception. It seems that this relationship is far more complex than envisaged, as a myriad of factors are involved in influencing whether an individual recognises a language variety. I had assumed that participants with London heritage would overwhelmingly identify a Basingstoke variety. This is a reminder that the London heritage is the discursive origin narrative of people in Basingstoke who themselves or their family moved to Basingstoke from London. While the results showed a slight bias in this direction, it was only by a slim margin, as discussed earlier. Despite this, residents still strongly claimed that their local variety was a source of pride, identifying it with positive labels. However, there were also negative language attitudes which participants linked to wider social prejudices. Finally, age and generational factors played a role in the respondents' perceptions of their variety of English.

I hope this study has helped highlight the linguistic richness of Basingstoke. It is not just another grey commuter town. Future research could look at the role of other factors, such as gender, in variety perception or perhaps the influence of perceptions of certain estates within the town. It would also be interesting to place the London heritage narrative in Basingstoke with the broader national and international migrations happening at the time, such as the Windrush migration. Future studies could take into account multiple staged migrations and how they might affect perceptions of language varieties.

Every research has some limitations and challenges. The biggest challenge I encountered was respondent attrition. My questionnaire was completed online using Google Forms, which allowed me to track the number of participants who had completed each section. I know, for example, that a total of 90 people took part in the survey but only 66 answered question 12, which invalidated most responses because question 12 was central to the study. On reflection, I strongly suggest any future study makes questions mandatory to ensure that participants answer the most important questions.

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