Mixing real and apparent time data with population movement: A case study from Somerset

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Apparent-time data has often been considered a surrogate’ and somewhat inferior alternative to real-time data. The logistics of a long-term study to elicit real-time data often prove difficult, either from lack of funding, or indeed time, making apparent-time studies an attractive alternative to those under such constraints. Population movement as an external factor to language change and dialect-levelling has been investigated both from the perspective of change that occurs to the moving individual, and change that occurs to the area a large community might move into, as can be seen in New Zealand (Trudgill et al, 2000), or Milton Keynes (Kerswill and Williams, 2000). One may also consider this from the perspective of a larger community which sees much in-migration, or from which individuals migrate on a periodic basis. This paper will evaluate a mix of real and apparent-time data from Somerset, UK within the context of population movement as a potential external factor in linguistic change. Somerset, the area of study, has had a large influx of economic migrants over the past 60 years. The theories of population movement and accommodation (Trudgill, 1986) would indicate that a change via accommodation and diffusion might be expected in an area that sees a good deal of in-migration and commuting (Omdal, 1994; Britain, 2003; Kerswill, 2001; Kerswill, 2006). Drawing on local data gathered from the Survey of English Dialects during 1957 (Orton et al, 1967), and comparing this to apparent-time data gathered in 2011 from Bridgwater, in Somerset, we can begin to see if this mixed data-set indicates change in the use of allophones of /l/, and what relationship exists between the real and apparent-time data. With increasing mobility among adults for employment or education, are data-sets such as these the way forward for evaluating and perhaps predicting language change and dialect-levelling?