1. **Introduction**

‘Variation ideology’ (Cameron, 1995: 27-28), whereby non-standard language varieties are positively valued, emerged in the past forty years as a challenge to the ideology of linguistic homogeneity that previously normalised the prominence of standard language (see among others Cooke and Simpson, 2012). In the British context, non-standard varieties are used in several institutional domains, such as media and education (see among others Coupland, 2007). However, despite the acknowledgement of the value of language variation and the covert prestige attached to several non-standard varieties of English, a hierarchical relationship between standard English and other varieties of English still persists in the British school context (Cheshire, 2005). This established hierarchy is responsible for perpetuating the ‘dialect bias’ in education that strongly links non-standard language to working class speech.

We focus here on Scouse, sometimes equated with Liverpool English. Scouse is a highly recognisable variety (see Montgomery 2007, 2010) that includes many distinct language features, which are “regionally restricted and socially marked” (Clark and Watson, 2016: 32). Some of its socially marked features relate to the variety being enregistered as, among others, working class (Juskan, 2018). We explore the use of Scouse in two all-girls grammar schools located in middle class neighbourhoods of the Wirral, Merseyside. Drawing upon classroom talk and interview data from students and teachers, we examine the extent to which participants engage with Scouse in classroom interactions, the social values and social meanings Scouse indexes for them in metapragmatic talk and how this indexing shapes specific stances and, in turn, the wider positioning of our informants. Our participants consistently distance themselves from Scouse by illustrating that it indexes (Silverstein 2003, Johnstone et al. 2006) social values such as non-posh, annoying, and disrespectful, which places the variety in lower scale levels of indexicality (Blommaert, 2010). We argue that this positioning reflects and sustains a local grammar school ideology which interacts with a ‘middle-class bias’ (Grainger, 2013) pairing standard English with ‘good schools’ and educational attainment. This strict pairing appears as naturalised in the schools under scrutiny and leaves no room for Scouse to be used flexibly, as a resource in the school setting. We discuss the educational implications of our findings on learning and student regional language awareness.

Within this context, this article aims to address the following research questions: a) to what extent do our participants engage with Scouse in the classroom context?, b) What are the social values and social meanings Scouse indexes for our participants in metapragmatic talk, and c) How does this indexing shape specific stances and the wider positioning of participants? We will address the first research question in section 6 where we present quantitative results of the use of a salient Scouse feature in classroom-fronted talk. The second and third questions are addressed in section 7, where we provide a qualitative analysis of interview stances and social values indexed by Scouse. We conclude by discussing the educational implications our findings have regarding social class, regional identity and educational (dis)advantage.

1. **Standard language, regional speech and dialect bias in education**

Snell and Andrews (2017: 299) discuss the notion of standard English according to the National Curriculum in England. They explain that the definition of standard English is a highly codified and uniform variety that is used in writing, and this variety should be taught in schools and included in curricula. However, they go on to explain that defining a spoken standard English is problematic, illustrating that some scholars have argued that such a variety would be characterised by the lack of regional dialect features. Yet, because variation in speech is context dependent, this definition is further complicated since “what counts as ‘standard’ or ‘acceptable’ speech will therefore change from one situation to the next” (ibid). They ultimately conclude that ideas surrounding a spoken ‘standard English’ are strongly tied to the uniformity demonstrated in the written variety, and we see ideologies in educational contexts that centre on notions of ‘correctness’. Such notions can be upheld and maintained in schools via the proscription against regional dialect forms based on social judgments and evaluations of linguistic forms. Snell and Andrews (2017) go on to note that some linguists acknowledge the idealised status of standard languages and argue that many non-specialists subscribe to an ideology that standard languages are equated with notions of ‘correct’ usage. These notions are maintained via engagement with standard writing systems in schools. Moreover, as Tegegne (2015) explains, ideological links between standard English and correctness can lead to teachers correcting students’ use of spoken language in relation to their accent and dialect. For this reason, we use the term “standard English” to mean an ideological opposite to students’ spoken language and which is heavily influenced by written standard English and used by teachers to correct students when they produce nonstandard regional forms in speech.

The importance of standard language is historically tied to the formation of Western nations-states where the need for one common language as a “unifying ‘glue’ for a nation” (Cooke & Simpson, 2012: 121) is closely connected with the rise of the ideology of language homogeneity that often coexists with monolingualism (ibid). Within the fields of critical sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, ideologies of homogenism and monolingualism are enforced by powerful institutions such as the media, the government and the academy and, thus, become dominant and naturalised to the extent that they cannot be straightforwadly questioned (Blommaert, 2008; Cooke and Simpson, 2012). The dominance of such discourses results in the promotion, validation and, in turn, prominence of standard language often at the expense of non-standard varieties (see among others Coupland 2007; Blommaert, 2010; Archakis et al*.* 2014).

The past forty years or so saw a turn towards regionalism as opposed to language homogeneity (Coupland, 2007; Mugglestone, 2003). In the British context, this phenomenon saw powerful media institutions such as the BBC incorporating an ample variety of accents and dialects as opposed to Received Pronunciation corresponding to a ‘neutral’ variety that was dictated until approximately the 1960s (Mugglestone, 2003). More recently, globalisation has given rise to increased social mobility, thus compromising the social and linguistic categories imposed by the ideologies of monolingualism and homogenism. This process, described as superdiversity, (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2007) denaturalises established national, social and linguistic demarcations and challenges the discourse of “one nation one language” (Cooke and Simpson, 2012: 120). As a result, it sheds new light on longstanding phenomena, such as heteroglossia, linguistic diversity, style shifting, mixing and language crossing. Hence, not only is it difficult but also less necessary to draw boundaries between language varieties and distinguish between ‘standard’ and ‘non-standard’ (see Snell, 2013). The result, at least in the British context is, “a new and ever evolving language ideological climate in which it is less necessary and less feasible to respect a British standard variety of English” (Coupland, 2007: 97). Similarly, Cameron refers to a “variation ideology” where language variation is positively valued and co-exists with already established ideologies of homogeneity (Cameron, 1995: 27-28).

Variation ideology also circulates in institutional domains such as primary and secondary school education where typically there is a need of adhering to normative standards such as formality (see among others Donnelly et al. 2019). The *National Curriculum for England and Wales* (2014) in its *Programme of Study for English* states that children should “start to learn about some of the differences between Standard English and non-Standard English” already in years 3 and 4 (English Programmes of Study – key stages 1 and 2: 30). Further awareness and control of local vernaculars is promoted in secondary education (KS3, Grammar and Vocabulary). In Key Stage 3, it is mentioned that pupils should be taught to become confident and effective speakers which includes “using Standard English confidently in a range of formal and informal contexts, including classroom discussion” (Key Stage 3, Spoken English). This expectation raises several issues. First, standard English appears as the means to confident and effective speaking and is marked as the preferred variety in the school setting, even in spoken contexts (i.e., classroom discussion). Thus, speakers of non-standard English may be excluded or marginalised. Second, confident and effective speaking is, according to the National Curriculum, one of the vehicles to educational attainment, which, in turn, pairs standard English with educational success. Therefore, despite the presumed inclusion of varieties of English into pedagogy, the hierarchical value of standard English remains unquestioned from a national curriculum standpoint. Even the most updated version of the National Curriculum demonstrates that, unlike the wider ideological climate that promotes and acknowledges language variation, some domains or settings are still less prone to flexible language use even in spoken contexts, which are, by default, subject to less strict norms and conventions.

Indeed, even in countries with apparently liberal language policies, the school is generally “a straightforward standard language domain” (Cheshire 2005: 2341-2; see also Hagen, 1989: 52). This results in phenomena such as style-shifting, mixing and crossing on the part of students and teachers alike where style-shifting becomes “an instinctive response to the norms of school” (Cheshire, 2005: 2347). To this end, shifts to standard English are associated with appropriateness, formality and authority, whereas the use of vernacular forms serves specific interactional effects (Adger and Wolfram, 2000). There is a consensus among studies addressing language variation in the classroom (see Cheshire, 2005 and references therein; Snell, 2013; Snell and Andrews, 2017) that the blanket use of the standard variety at school and the associated need to adhere to school norms results in educational disadvantage of students whose background lacks exposure to the standard variety prior to them attending school. One of the underlying causes of this is the ‘dialect bias’ that strongly links non-standard dialect to working class speech (see Labov, 1972; Trudgill, 1974; Cheshire, 2005).

Sociolinguists have long attempted to dispute this ‘dialect bias’ (see Labov, 1972 Trudgill, 1974) by attending to dialect systematicity and tolerance to ‘difference’ (Snell, 2013). More recently, studies within the third wave sociolinguistic paradigm view dialect as a social resource that places the speaker and his/her practices at the centre of attention (Creese and Blackledge, 2015: 21). Our article contributes to this line of research as we are concerned with the associations of linguistic forms to social meanings, whereby social meaning “encompasses matters such as register (in the narrower sense of situational appropriateness), stance (certainty, authority, etc.), and social identity (class, ethnicity, interactional role, etc.)” (Johnstone et. al, 2006: 81). Attention to social meaning challenges the view that there exist distinct and different varieties of English (see Rampton, 2006; Snell, 2013). Within this paradigm, Snell (2013) introduces the concept of repertoire. In her Teesside study of working-class schoolchildren, she argues that her informants portray a sense of self by creatively mixing sociolinguistic resources in peer group interactions; they draw upon standard and dialect forms whose social meanings are not pre-determined but framed by the local context and their respective communicative goals. She argues that the repertoire of each individual speaker can give them a ‘voice’ (see also Blommaert, 2005: 4-5; Grainger and Jones, 2013), whereby students have the power to make themselves understood in the classroom. Failure to do so does not imply an ‘inadequate’ repertoire but a wider ideological value system that marginalises working class speech by viewing it as distinctively different and inferior to an expected standard. Snell, therefore, argues that attention to repertoire and voice is a way to dispute the ‘different-but-equal’ approaches to dialect speech, namely the conviction that non-standard dialects of English have “a discrete system of grammar that is isolated from other varieties (such as standard English)” (2013: 111) that were so far used to explain educational failure. The problem with a ‘different-but-equal’ approach is, according to Snell, the static conceptualisation of standard and non-standard speech, which results in the perpetuation of dominant ideologies that associate regional speech with the working class and, subsequently, with educational disadvantage. Educational settings are among the powerful elites that can enforce and sustain such ideologies, which assign ‘symbolic capital’ to standard language (Bourdieu, 1991) thereby creating social inequality.

1. **Sociolinguistic scales, social class and the educational marketplace**

Blommaert (2010) addresses the hierarchical role of (standard) language in his conceptualisation of sociolinguistic scales. Scale is used as a metaphor that denotes movements between hierarchically *ordered* and stratified language and semiotic practices or phenomena. The connection between scales is *indexical* (i.e., pointing towards socially and culturally ordered norms, traditions, expectations and positions, which are phenomena of a higher scale-level). Higher scale levels are described as containing the “translocal” and the “timeless”, namely invoking practices that have “normative validity” (2010: 34-35). Lower scale levels invoke practices that are “momentary” and “local”. These include, among others, personal, contextualised, specific and diverse linguistic and semiotic practices. Scales are, thus, represented on a *vertical* axis and movements between them are “jumps” that not all people or groups are able to perform. To this end, access to scale-levels and, importantly, ability to jump scales are power laden. Scales may interact, collaborate or conflict with one another and the shifts in function and meaning required for the necessary move across scales may not work well in all contexts or not at all in others (Blommaert, 2010: 22). This means that language varieties do not directly ‘belong’ to specific scale levels (low or high) and they may shift scales depending on the local contexts, the social values involved as well as the fact that some resources are subject to the rules of access in wider circulation (Archakis et. al 2018). That said, Blommaert points out that institutional norms and rules often operate at higher scale-levels and prevail over lower scale-levels (2010: 35); the ability to jump scales smoothly that is held by specific (institutional) groups or individuals, such as tutors, results in “outscaling”, a practice which involves power dynamics (2010: 36).

The premise that the language marketplace is a world of power dynamics tied to, not just *difference*, but, importantly, *inequality* originates in Bourdieu (1991). In the linguistic market, not all linguistic resources have the same value. Specifically, standard language or any language variety representing the most prestigious form in society holds symbolic capital and, as such, secures its speakers “a degree of credibility and respect” (Donnelly et al 2019: 500). There are also power related implications to it, as linguistic capital can perform *symbolic violence* against speakers who do have direct access to it (see Cooke & Simpson, 2012: 120). In their study of accent and social mobility in the UK teaching profession, Donelly et al(2019) elaborate on Bourdieu’s ideas to interpret teacher stances on their accents. They observe that despite the formal recognition given to non-language related variation such as ethnic or religious diversity in teaching, varieties of English are far from being embraced in teaching pedagogy. Specifically, Donelly et alargue that “standardised, class-based, and a-spatial, non-localised forms of speech are still the norm for teacher training” (2019: 500). Drawing upon Bourdieu (1991), Donelly et al explicitly link social class with power and prestige in education arguing that prestige forms reflect the language use of those in power, namely traditionally, middle class in Britain and, thus, this variety is socially dominant and is reproduced in schools (ibid; see also Brady, 2015). In a similar vein, Brady argues “[w]hether intentional or not, the pedagogical practices of teachers and the curriculum may serve not only to perpetuate the power of those who guard, sanction and thus legitimise language but also to disempower those who have reduced access to this language” (2015: 149).

Considering education as “just another marketplace” (Grainger, 2013: 99) in present day Britain, it is the continued association between “‘good schools’, accent, and elite employment” that enable standard English to retain its symbolic capital (Donnelly et al. 2019: 500; Clark, 2019: 39). The implication that there exists a causal relationship between elite forms, represented by standard English, linguistic competence and social success reflects another naturalised, dominant ideology circulating in educational discourse (Milroy, 2004). This is often described as ‘middle class bias’ which, according to Grainger is enforced and sustained by policy makers from the middle class, who, due to their role and position, they have the power to shape educational practices (Grainger, 2013: 99). Cushing explains that this bias is reflected in language policing practices that “index language to clusters of other factors, most notably academic achievement, employability, economic success, crime, and space” (2019: 19). Competency in standard English is thus directly linked with attaining high marks in school, which, simultaneously, indexes favourability in terms of employability. Cushing also notes that non-standard language use in the classroom is accompanied by a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach. Such approaches discourage the use of informal and regional language resources in both speech and writing and reiterate the association of standard English with being ‘correct’. We can thus infer that the additional discourses of academic, employment, and financial success indirectly index links to social values commonly associated with the middle class. In addition, zero-tolerance approaches to language policing which target regional speech serve to reinforce the notion that ‘correct’ speech is ‘middle-class’ speech, and this is perceived to be characterised by a lack of local language forms.

1. **Scouse, social values and enregisterment**

Scouse is a form of speech that is characteristic of Liverpool, Birkenhead and neighbouring areas of urban Merseyside. It counts as one of the most recognisable varieties of the British Isles (Honeybone et al. 2007) and, at the same time, one of the most stigmatised ones (Montgomery, 2010; Coupland and Bishop, 2007). It is this negative stereotyping that mainly results in the consistent and accurate identification of the variety by other speakers. (Honeybone et al. 2007: 254). Research on Scouse has extensively focused on the phonological features which distinguish it from other varieties of English. Honeybone et al. (2007: 107) observe that some have argued that the variety “is ‘only’ an accent and not a ‘dialect’, in part because most of the exceptional characteristics of Liverpool English are aspects of its phonology”, although they contest this view and note that the term ‘dialect’ has a superordinate relationship to ‘accent’ in linguistics. Ultimately, though, Watson points out that the phonological features of Scouse have been the primary focus of linguistic work on the variety dating back to Knowles’ (1973) seminal study, noting that “Knowles points out that it is aspects of phonology, not syntax, which are most region-specific” (Watson, 2007: 57). As a result, this paper will focus on the phonological features associated with Scouse. Moreover, we distinguish ‘Liverpool English’ from ‘Scouse’ in this paper. This is based on the findings of Cooper and Lampropoulou (2021), where students in middle-class areas of wider Merseyside drew an ideological distinction between sounding like they were ‘from Liverpool’, which was positively evaluated and sounding ‘Scouse’, which was negatively evaluated. Consequently, we will not treat ‘Liverpool English’ and ‘Scouse’ as the same ideological construct in this paper and our focus will specifically be on Scouse.

As Honeybone and Watson (2013: 307) point out, despite the stigma associated with Scouse, “we know little about which of its phonological features in particular contribute to that stigma”, and so we seek to understand more about the social meanings of specific, potentially stigmatised, language forms of Scouse in this article. Previous studies concluded that there is assumed covert prestige attached to Scouse, namely a high value among members of a community of non-standard dialect forms (Trudgill, 1972). This is so, because Scouse seems to be resisting supra-localisation which is widely attested in other areas of the UK (Watson, 2006). So, instead of losing its regionality, it is currently spreading towards the Liverpool periphery (Grey and Richardson 2007, West 2015, Clark and Watson 2016). Indeed, Newbrook argues that West Wirral will become virtually indistinguishable from other parts of Merseyside (1999: 105), and argues that West Wirral speakers will demonstrate an uptake of language features common to Scouse. One such feature is the lack of distinction between the vowels in the nurse and square lexical sets (Wells 1982). This means that words such as *fair* and *fir* can rhyme in this variety, as they can include the same vowel, which is usually [ɛː], meaning that both words sound as though they are pronounced like the former rather than the latter (Hughes et al*.* 2012 :113). Juskan (2018: 37) notes that this phenomenon is “generally perceived as one of the most characteristic (or even defining) and most salient features of Scouse”, and cites a catchphrase from Liverpool comedian Kenn Dodd, “whaire’s me shairt?”, as an example. This feature is also presented as salient by Wales (2006: 162) in her discussion of its occurrence in songs performed using Scouse accents by The Beatles, where *her* is pronounced to rhyme with *aware*. As a result, we can describe the vowels in the nurse and square sets as being merged in Scouse, usually in the direction of square. This means that in Scouse, nurse words are likely to be pronounced with a fronted vowel relative to that found in Southern British English nurse. West (2015: 321) labels this Scouse variant “fronted nurse”. Moreover, we can see evidence of speaker awareness of fronted nurse as a Scouse feature, to the extent that it indexes (Silverstein 2003) Scouse as part of an enregistered (Agha 2003) repertoire of features associated with the variety.

Juskan (2018: 14-15) discusses the enregisterment of Scouse, noting that awareness of it became more evident around the 1930s and increased over the course of the twentieth century. Enregisterment is defined as the “processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (Agha 2003: 231) and relates to the ways in which language forms come to be associated with widely recognised social values. Registers are, as Silverstein (2003: 212) points out, “alternate ways of “saying ‘the same’ thing” considered “appropriate to” particular contexts of usage”, and the appropriateness of a register’s forms in context depends on the indexical links activated by the use of those forms. The associations of linguistic forms to social meanings can also be modelled according to their appropriateness in context if we consider them in relation to what Silverstein defines as indexical order. He goes on to explain that a register’s linguistic forms will have “*n-*th-order indexical meaningfulness” that will correlate with nonlinguistic factors such as social class, age, ethnicity, etc. However, these *n-*th order links can become “presupposed” by what he describes as “*n*+1st-order indexicality”, where links between language and social values are drawn according to ideological models, sometimes resulting in stereotypes (ibid., p.220). This concept of indexical order is also employed by Johnstone et al*.* (2006: 82), who define first, second, and third-order indexicality. They state that first-order and second-order indexical links correlate with social factors such as class, correctness, region, etc., but first-order correlations go unnoticed whereas second-order features “become available for social work; speakers start to notice and attribute meaning to regional variants and shift styles in their own speech”. Third-order indexicality involves repertoires of features that are strongly linked to identity and often appear in highly codified lists such as dialect dictionaries. We can also usually see evidence that wide audiences demonstrate awareness of these repertoires as ideas about language, place, and identity are circulated in media, online, and on commodities. As Johnstone et al. (ibid: 84) go on to note, “the meanings of these forms are increasingly linked to place, though they can still be used to evoke class in the context of local identity”. Juskan (2018) illustrates that Scouse was popularised with the publication of “phrasebooks” in the 1960s, such as *Lern Yerself Scouse*, which was aimed at tourists. Combined with additional representation of Scouse on popular television shows as well as in popular music via bands such as The Beatles, we can see that this led to third-order indexical awareness of Scouse by the latter part of the century. Juskan (ibid., p.204) goes on to explain that for some middle-class Liverpool speakers, this increased awareness and stigmatisation of certain Scouse variables, such as a lack of nurse/square contrast, may be subject to hypercorrection evidenced by fronting of nurse. Social values that came to be associated with Scouse included being working-class and urban, as highlighted by Crowley (2012) in his discussion of the role of broadcasting in the enregisterment of Scouse. He explains that TV series like *Z-Cars, The Liver Birds,* and *Brookside* tended to represent working-class people with local accents and focused on issues including “working-class poverty and fierce criticism of the social effects of mass unemployment” (ibid: 110). This had the effect of indexically linking ways of speaking with class, meaning that Scouse was no longer solely associated with a geographical area. Rather, it “became an expansive cultural repository for the generation of images of a specific type of contemporary urban working-class life” (ibid). Cooper and Lampropoulou (2021) similarly illustrate associations between Scouse and being working-class, where female adolescent speakers from middle-class areas of Merseyside described Scouse as not being “posh”, which indirectly indexes associations with low social class. Crowley (2012: 75) also discusses the perception of working-class male speakers in Liverpool as archetypal Scousers, and states that they are often associated with a repertoire of language features, which were used to represent Scouse dialect in a range of contexts. Due to the status of Scouse as an enregistered variety, we would expect Merseyside speakers to be aware of the linguistic repertoire associated with it, as well as the social values that characterise it as among others, urban and working-class.

1. **Methods**
	1. **The project**

The data used in this study are part of a larger project examining the social meanings of Scouse in secondary school classrooms in the wider Merseyside area. Due to the aforementioned status of Scouse as an enregistered variety, the project aimed to explore the ways in which Liverpool and Wirral speakers engage with Scouse in the school context, the social meanings of Scouse in relation to wider social practices (Coupland, 2007: 104) and how student and teacher language choices are shaped by the local educational context. The aim was to record classroom interactions that would provide an overview of speaker engagement with Scouse (i.e., to what extent and how Scouse is used in the classroom). The social meanings were then explored in metapragmatic discourse (i.e., talk about talk; Johnstone et al. 2006) via follow up interviews with students and teachers. These goals were broadly shared with head teachers and heads of subjects (Science, English) in initial meetings with the research team where we also discussed the logistics of accommodating our project in their schools.

* 1. **The setting**

For this paper, we focus on data from two girls’ grammar schools located in neighbouring areas on The Wirral in Merseyside. The schools are located six miles apart and they are both grammar schools in a predominantly middle-class area. Specifically, according to the 2011 Census 59.7% of Wirral residents engage in traditionally middle-class occupations (for further explanations of occupations and social class in the UK see Rose and Pevalin, 2003).

 In terms of educational attainment, both schools are rated as outstanding by Ofsted and are very high achieving in terms of overall performance according to gov.uk. Specifically, both schools are well above average in terms of progress 8 score, namely the measurement of how much progress each student has made from Year 6 to Year 11. Both schools have a 0.78 progress 8 score compared to -0.03 (England average). Upon leaving school, 84-98% students are entering English Baccalaureate, compared to 40% (England average) and 99-100% are staying in education or entering employment in both schools, compared to 94% (England average). 91% (school 1) to 93% (school 2) students achieve grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs where the England average is 43%. Finally, the average A level exam result ranges from B (school 1) to B+ (school 2) compared to a C+ England average. Based on this information, both schools are academically excellent and are comparable in terms of performance ranks. Academic excellence is also mentioned in the welcome message of both schools on their respective websites. The main difference between the two is that School 1 has a religious focus, also reflected in their mission statement and attracts students from a wider radius and broader array of backgrounds as compared to School 2. This is verified by the fact that in our meetings and discussions with headteachers, subject leads and teachers prior to the start of the recordings, in school 1 there was a consensus that students do, occasionally, have a Scouse accent whereas in school 2 there was the conviction that students and teachers ‘are not really Scouse’.

* 1. **The data and the participants**

Our data comprise recordings of twenty-two English lessons, approximately twenty hours of classroom-fronted talk. Of these, eleven lessons each were recorded in school 1 (year 9, age 13-14) and school 2 (year 7, age 11-12) over a period of approximately six weeks. Our choice to focus on the early years of secondary school (years 7 to 9) was informed by literature confirming that speakers of non-standard varieties fully acquire standard written English by the time they proceed to secondary school (Williams, 2007). Additionally, by the age of adolescence the differentiation between standard and non-standard language is conscious to the extent that it enables style shifting and forms clear social and linguistic attitudes (Cheshire, 1982; Tsiplakou et al. 2018). The focus on years 7 and 9 was also led by practical reasons, as students from years 10 onwards are busy preparing for their GCSEs and/ or A levels. The specific choice of years 7 and 9 in the two schools respectively was random, as these were the classes in which the respective teachers chose to accommodate our project.

The recordings were conducted by a research assistant who visited the schools twice a week during the period January-March 2017. The research assistant was a third year English language undergraduate University student and was both born in and currently lived in The Wirral at the time of data collection and broadly identified as Scouse speaker herself. Upon completion of recordings, the research assistant asked to interview the teachers and students on a voluntary basis. Our interview data comprises four semi-structured casual interviews focusing on teacher and student stances on the use of Scouse in the classroom and other contexts. These include one with an English teacher (school 1), one with an English teacher (school 2) and three with different groups of three to four students each in school 2. We do not have available interviews with students from school 1. Nevertheless, we believe that the interview from the teacher from school 1 is illustrative as it includes several metapragmatic comments on the engagement with Scouse in the specific classroom for which we have quantitative data available. The duration of interviews ranges between thirty and forty-five minutes.

The interviews took place after the two-month period during which recording took place, so teachers and students were familiar with the broader scope of the project and with the research assistant herself. The students were interviewed on a voluntary basis in groups and were asked to offer their views on their accent, on Scouse in relation to school expectations and when speaking with peers. Due to the informal and voluntary nature of the interviews, the research assistant’s input was minimal as most students were spontaneously taking up the floor to answer questions and elaborate on theirs or other students’ contributions. Collaborative interruptions and overlaps among the group of interviewees provide evidence of the conversational and casual style of the interview process. English language teachers were also interviewed on a voluntary basis and they were very responsive to the research assistant’s prompts with almost no silences or gaps throughout the interview. The familiarity between researcher and interviewees was mostly achieved due to the researcher’s consistent presence in the classroom throughout the three-month period that enabled informal discussions with teachers and students in between teaching sessions. Additionally, following the principles of advocacy research, namely research not only *on* but also *for* the subjects (Johnstone, 2000) the research assistant gave two talks to the students in both schools on studying English (language) as a subject for a University degree. These talks were initiated by the English teachers and were accommodated within the English language lesson. It follows that the overall positioning of the researcher in the school setting and the relationship she had established with the participants shaped the dynamics of the interview process. Specifically, the researcher’s overall positioning as someone in between students and teachers in terms of age and very close to the students in terms of background, place of residence and use of Scouse projected her as someone who is, broadly speaking, positive about Scouse. Additionally, her academic background as a language student as well as the underpinning objectives of the project that were shared with the teachers in an initial meeting may have contributed, among others, to the goal for being descriptive in talking about language in the teachers’ interview responses. The fact that the interview data obtained are a product of the interactional dynamics between interviewer and interviewees in line with the principles of reflexive research (Bucholtz, 2000) is taken into consideration in our analysis. To this end, we interpret our data qualitatively as part of the local context in which they occurred with a particular focus on the social values indexed by Scouse in said context.

Finally, the students and teachers interviewed all shared a white British ethnic background. Although they were not specifically asked about their personal backgrounds in the interviews, one of the recorded classroom sessions included an activity where students gave a presentation about their childhood from birth to the present day. As a result, we can state that the students who were interviewed were all born on The Wirral, and all but one student grew up in middle-class areas of the region. The one student who was not born in a middle-class part of The Wirral stated that she was born in a more working-class area, but moved into a middle-class area when she was younger (see also Cooper and Lampropoulou 2021).

1. **Scouse and fronted nurse**

As outlined in section 3, we focus on the vowels in the nurse and square lexical sets due to their salience as Scouse features. We collected tokens of these vowels from the classroom recordings only, which yielded 143 nurse words (36 in School 1, 107 in School 2) and 70 square words (26 in School 1, 44 in School 2) in the speech of the students across all classroom recordings. As lessons were neither conducted on the same topics nor following the same format, there was some disparity in the number of tokens of each vowel collected in each school. Tokens were extracted and measurements for F1 and F2 were taken manually using Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2017), where F1 and F2 refer to bands of energy that appear on spectrograms known as formants. As Ball and Rahilly (2004: 166) note, it is “usually possible to differentiate formant patterns in terms of tongue height, tongue advancement, and lip rounding, i.e. the three main features which are used to classify vowels”. By considering the measurement of the second formant, F2, we can determine how far forward in the mouth these vowels are being pronounced, since “front vowels have higher F2s than back vowels” (ibid. p.166). These data were normalised according to the method described in Labov et al. (2006: 39-40) via the NORM Vowel Normalization and Plotting Suite (Thomas and Kendall 2007). This method was chosen because of its speaker-extrinsic nature and would account for the fact that speakers were not individually recorded. Tokens occurred across four different speech styles which emerged in the data. These include: (i) reading before the class, where students would either read aloud extracts from a text, or written work they had produced themselves [henceforth “reading”]; (ii) speaking before the class, where students were most often asking or answering questions of and from the teacher [henceforth “speaking”]; (iii) speaking to the teacher, where students in the class were working in smaller groups and generally talking amongst themselves, but they would also speak to the teacher directly [henceforth “teacher/small group”]; and (iv) speaking to other students, where students were talking to each other while working in small groups, where tokens for this style only occurred in School 1 but not School 2.

The extent of vowel fronting for both nurse and square differed observably between the schools. Watson (2007: 358) states that square can be fronted to [eː] or even [ɪː] in Scouse, and Watson and Clark (2013: 320-321) conclude that ‘fronted nurse seems to be more salient than central square’. Given the observed spread of Scouse features into the surrounding areas, we can interpret this to mean that F2 fronting in nurse and square contributes to the salience of these variables, meaning that our students are likely to associate fronting these vowels with Scouse. Figure 1 illustrates F2 frequencies for vowels in nurse and square words for students in Schools 1 and 2. The pattern highlighted in Figure 1 indicates that there is a high degree of overlap of F2 in nurse and square in School 1, although square is more fronted overall, and much less overlap between nurse and square in School 2, indicating that these vowels are more distinct for students in School 2 than in School 1.



*Figure 1. Boxplot showing normalised F2 frequencies for vowels in nurse and square words in School 1 and School 2*

F2 measurements were also less fronted overall for both nurse and square in School 2 than in School 1, suggesting that realisations of these vowels are more Scouse-like in School 1 than in School 2. One explanation for this distribution is that, although these schools are both in predominantly middle-class areas, School 1 accepts students from a wider range of backgrounds than School 2. The overall distribution of frequencies in Figure 1 illustrates that F2 for both nurse and square is lower for School 2 when compared to School 1. We therefore suggest that, despite the apparent spread of Scouse into Liverpool’s hinterlands, some of the more salient Scouse features, such as the merger of nurse and square characterised by the fronting of nurse, are not being universally adopted throughout the wider Merseyside area. So, overall, classroom data from School 2 show that students tend to use this salient Scouse feature less compared to School 1. In addition, F2 frequencies for nurse and square tended to overlap in each of the four speech styles in School 1; this means there was no clear pattern to indicate style shifting. However, in School 2 there was considerably less overlap, and the extent to which nurse and square were merged appeared to be influenced by speech style, as illustrated in Figure 2. Because of this, we will focus our analysis only on School 2. This is also because we have follow-up interview data for School 2 students, but we do not have equivalent data for students in School 1, meaning that we can interpret the apparent stylistic differences shown in Figure 2 based on students’ metalinguistic and metapragmatic comments in the interview data. We cannot draw any firm conclusions about School 1 due to our data being limited to only classroom recordings. Thus, we have chosen to focus solely on School 2 going forward.

Figure 2 shows these differences between nurse and square according to the three styles recorded in the School 2 classroom recordings. The distribution of F2 frequencies in Figure 2 highlights more of a distinction between nurse and square across all styles. This is particularly evident in the “reading” and “teacher/small group” styles where we see that nurse and square are essentially distinct, with the latter style displaying the most dramatic distinction and the lowest overall distribution for nurse when compared to the other styles.



*Figure 2. Boxplot showing range of normalised F2 measurements for nurse and square tokens for the "reading”, “speaking” and “teacher/small group” styles in School 2*

This pattern appears to correspond with Juskan (2018: 207), who notes that younger middle-class speakers are subconsciously aware of nurse fronting and its stereotypical association with Scouse, meaning that we can expect middle-class speakers in the wider Merseyside area to be less Scouse in their fronting of nurse. Additionally, as we will discuss in section 7, our interview data with students from School 2 illustrated that students associate stereotypically ‘Scouse’ features with being inappropriate for speaking to teachers and appear to want to avoid Scouse features in that context. Our interview data also included student comments, which illustrated that some teachers in School 2 demonstrated an expectation that students should speak ‘properly’ to teachers, where Scouse features indexed ‘improper’ language. Cooper and Lampropoulou (2021) also discuss students’ indexical associations of Scouse with not speaking ‘properly’, which further highlights that students may have internalised a perception that highly salient Scouse features such as the fronting of nurse should be avoided when talking to teachers, and this is manifested in the reduced fronting demonstrated in this context. This also demonstrates evidence of metalinguistic awareness on the part of the students similar to that observed by Tsiplakou et al. (2018: 69) in their discussion of Cypriot Greek in educational contexts. They note that students were aware of the different social identities indexed by differing contexts in school and were able to vary their use of language accordingly. Specifically, students used the standard variety when participating in the “actual lesson and addressing the teacher” (ibid: 67); whereas they used Scouse when, among others, they were informally conversing with the teacher. It emerges from our data that the Wirral students may have similar levels of metalinguistic awareness relative to Scouse in school.

Overall, the patterns identified in Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicate that students in School 2 use less Scouse when compared to School 1, as far as a salient Scouse feature (i.e., where the nurse~square merger) is concerned. Additionally, students in School 2 use *even less* Scouse when they talk to their teacher directly compared to the rest of their talk in the classroom. Hence, there seems to be a gradual *reduction* of Scouse in the figures above where nurse is more fronted in School 1, less in School 2 overall and even less in School 2 specifically when talking to the teacher. The interconnection between class, prestige and formality seems to be a contributing factor behind these choices as it determines indexical links between Scouse features and social meanings which, in turn, shape ideological work as to what is considered as appropriate in the specific context.

 To illustrate this further we will take a closer, qualitative examination of participants’ indexical associations of linguistic forms to social meanings in order to address the complexity of the position of Scouse in these settings. For example, attention to social values indexed by Scouse will show that even the apparent use of Scouse (i.e., nurse fronting in School 1 compared to School 2) is marked by evaluative distancing stances that confirm the hierarchical position of standard English as naturalised in the current context. We will finally demonstrate that this gradual reduction of Scouse between School 1 and School 2 and within School 2 corresponds to different degrees of *tolerance* of Scouse by its users in these contexts.

1. **Stances and social values**

The following four extracts are from the interviews with students and teacher in School 2 and the teacher in School 1. They are organised according to themes highlighting the main social values indexed by Scouse in metapragmatic talk. These social values correspond to difference stances, which, we argue, range between more or less distance from and tolerance of Scouse.

* 1. Scouse as strong and non-posh

Extract 1 is from the interview with the teacher in school 2. The teacher, who is originally from the Wirral, has earlier mentioned that prior to teaching at the specific school she taught in Liverpool city centre. She then went on to discuss differences in teaching practices in relation to the accent. The interviewer follows up and asks if she believes there are differences in the accent between the Liverpool and the Wirral.

Extract 1[[1]](#footnote-1). School 2 Teacher.

1 IR If you particularly noticed a difference from teaching in Liverpool to here do

2 you think there’s a noticeable difference in the accent

3 T I think there is I was in I was in Anfield for four or five years and i do think

4 because the accent is so (.) it's quite strong there and that is quite different to my accent

5 as well I think they all thought I was very very posh to begin with ((laughter)) and i think

6 because of that and because of being a teacher you wanna limit that particularly when

7 you work in in a city centre I think you do te/tend to change cos none of them would

8 believe I was from the Wirral at all they were you you’re clearly not from the Wirral

9 you're not from anywhere near where we live so that was quite that was quite interesting

The teacher responds to the question by offering her view on the differences in accent between Liverpool and the Wirral and goes on to elaborate this by characterising the Liverpool accent and comparing it to hers. She then explains that she had to tone down her accent for two reasons: because the accent in Liverpool is strong and because of her position as a teacher, implying that she aimed to assimilate with the students in order to eventually engage them, a practice discussed throughout the interview in general. Finally, she further justifies her decision to ‘limit’ her posh accent through an instance of direct speech (Lampropoulou, 2013) where she represents the voices of Liverpool locals (lines 8-9), presumably students and/ or teachers portraying her as external to them because of her accent.

 We can observe the social value of ‘posh’ indexed by the teacher’s accent (i.e., the Wirral accent) and the social value of ‘strong’ indexed by the Liverpool accent. A ‘strong’ Liverpool accent has been observed to index additional negative social values. As Juskan (2017: 156), notes, these include associations with youth, social deprivation, unintelligibility, as well as sounding ‘intimidating’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘annoying’. These associations also appear to index its speakers as working-class, which is analogous to Juskan’s finding relating to social deprivation. Finnegan (2015: 244, italics in original) explains that other urban varieties of northern English are similarly evaluated, noting that in Sheffield, working-class speakers are “described as having *stronger*, *rougher*, *more extreme*, *harder* and *broader* accents, while middle-class speakers have *not as* *strong*, *modulated* and *sort of refined* accents, with *less use of dialect words*”*.* The teacher in extract 1 aligns with these findings as she presents Wirral and Liverpool accents as incompatible and contrasting, explaining she was unable to reconcile the strong Liverpool accent and her own posh, Wirral accent. This is evidence of the teacher drawing on second-order indexical links to notions of class, formality, and place, as well as third-order links to regional identity. However, she presents ‘limiting’ or toning down her posh accent as a conscious strategy to engage the students, a comment relating to teaching as performance also made by a teacher from School 1 below. In this way, the teacher is distancing herself from the strong accent of the locals. It should be noted that the locals are not named or referred to specifically but they are abstractly grouped with the pronoun ‘they’. Unlike the teacher from School 1 below who claims to engage with Scouse in her teaching, for the teacher from school 2 in Extract 1, toning down the posh accent is presented as far as she could go to approach her students in the specific teaching context. The teacher, thus, creates a Liverpool versus Wirral divide, creating a spatial boundary between Scouse and non-Scouse. Interestingly, this boundary is later rejected in lines 8-9 where the Liverpool-Wirral relationship is represented from the perspective of Liverpool speakers – presumably students and/ or teachers –in the school she was working. They are represented as exoticising the teacher as external to them but not the Wirral itself as a region. Her conclusive comment ‘that was interesting’ summarises the paradox she has just presented. Although for the teacher, the Liverpool accent is contrastively different to hers, and by implication to the Wirral one, via the emergence of the pair ‘strong versus posh’, for the Liverpool speakers the Wirral is portrayed as geographically close enough and not representative by the teacher’s very posh accent.

However, a ‘self-versus other’ divide is constructed throughout the teacher’s interview which further contributes to her distancing of herself from the Scouse accent and the abstract group of its speakers. Grouping is closely tied to ‘othering’, a strategy which helps depict ‘self’ in a positive light (see also Lampropoulou, 2018). Distancing as a stance and the social values indexed by Scouse in Extract 1 further suggest a hierarchical relationship between a) teacher and students, b) specific teacher and a group of locals, and c) posh and strong accent where the first parts of the pair are presented as the powerful ones. We therefore argue that distancing from Scouse is a stance-taking strategy that contributes to placing Scouse in lower scale levels (Blommaert, 2010). This is further elaborated in the following two extracts which include overtly negative attitudes to Scouse by the students.

* 1. Scouse as annoying and disrespectful

The following extract is from the end of the group interview with three year 7 students from school 2. The students discuss the extent to which they speak differently in peer groups compared to the classroom which brings up the issue of differences between Scouse and their accent. It is worth noting that when students name features of what they consider as ‘their’ accent they refer to youth language features, such as the use of ‘like’.

Extract 2. School 2 students, Group A.

1. S1 when I’m writing ‘she doesn’t do that’[[2]](#footnote-2) then I’m speaking and I go ‘she don’t do that’ so it’s more Scouse and you say ‘*dah* [dah] instead of that’

3 S3 I’ve been in different areas and like different places and like if you hang around

4 people that’s more Scouse then like that accent you’re catching that accent but then as

5 soon as you go somewhere else with a different accent then it’ll cover that sort of accent

6 you know what really annoyed me cos my dad and my nan are from Liverpool and they

7 say cook [kuːk] and book [buːk] and oh it annoys me so much

8 IR yeah

9 S2 its book [bʊk] and cook [kʊk]

10 IR thank you so much girls

In Extract 2, Student 1 mentions using Scouse in spoken contexts and exemplifies this with both TH-stopping and /t/ lenition in *dah* for ‘that’ (line 2). These correspond with salient Scouse features identified by Honeybone and Watson (2013). Then student 3 mentions she style shifts depending on the peer group she finds herself in. Specifically, she mentions that she would use Scouse when she is around ‘people that’s more Scouse’ by using the conventional metaphor ‘catching that accent’ whereby being influenced by something is compared to catching an object or an illness. As with most metaphors, it suggests a point of view and creates a context for dealing with it (Burkholder & Henry, 2009). To this end, it can be seen as a stance-taking device. Here, our perception of Scouse is structured by a metaphor that appeals to negative emotions associated with illness. This is reinforced by the fact that when the student refers to other accents in line 5, she does not use the same metaphor. The student then goes on to say that her father and grandmother who are from Liverpool use features that she finds annoying. Specifically, she refers to the pronunciation of *cook* and *book* as having a long vowel. This pronunciation is attested by Watson (2007: 358), who notes that *book*, *cook*,and *look* “typically have a long vowel in Liverpool”. In doing so, she distances herself from them and constructs a ‘self-versus them’ divide whereby the other is portrayed in negative terms (i.e., annoying). Student 2 prompts to correct the Scouse feature pronouncing the words with [ʊ] as they would be elsewhere in Northern English (ibid.) and endorses, in this way, the previously offered stance suggesting, at the same time, that the current feature deviates from a norm and is thus undesirable. We therefore observe that via the social value indexed by a specific Scouse feature (i.e., annoying), the students maintain a distance from the accent. Even when student 3 says she does occasionally use Scouse she presents it in a negative light. Similar social values are observed in the following extract from the second interview with a group of three students from school 2.

Extract 3. School 2 students, Group B.

1 IR would you say that the Wirral accent is different to the Liverpool accent

2 S4 yeah

3 IR yeah

4 S5 yeah Liverpool it’d still be like loudest when they’re generally speaking

5 and like most they won’t have like respect when they’re talking to people

6 IR mmhmm

7 S5 just because like ((inaudible))

8 IR yeah

9 S6 yeah cos when I go to other places like I went to Stoke for like a football

10 thing and they said ‘are you from Liverpool’ so I think to other people from outside

11 Liverpool we sound Scouse but to us it sounds different

In responding to the interviewer’s direct question (line 1) student 5 mentions being loud as a characteristic feature of Liverpool speakers. She immediately justifies this by providing an evaluative comment and assigning the social value ‘disrespectful’. Again, Liverpool speakers are grouped as ‘others’ and are attributed negative traits. The contribution by student 6 (lines 9-11) clarifies that Liverpool speakers are Scouse speakers, which is an underlying premise throughout the interview with the girls from school 2. Student 6 goes on to explain that to people outside Liverpool, the Wirral people, sound Scouse but the specific student denies this identity (see Cooper and Lampropoulou, 2021), distancing herself from Scouse. The Liverpool versus Wirral divide reflects the spatial boundary also presented in Extract 1, positioning the Wirral as ‘I/ we’ and Liverpool/ Scouse as ‘other/they’. Cooke and Simpson argue that users of non-standard varieties of the dominant language are positioned as ‘other’ a practice that reflects a homogenising discourse (2012: 122). “Othering, or the creation in discourse of in-groups and out-groups (‘we’ and ‘they’), is strongly evident in much homogenizing discourse in media and public debate” (ibid) and, as we observe here, in school settings too.

* 1. Scouse for humour and performance

Extract 3 is from the beginning of the interview with the teacher in school 1. It illuminates the Scouse like speaking of students in classroom-fronted talk of School 1 compared to School 2. Throughout the interview, the teacher assumes that Scouse is actually spoken in the classroom by teachers and students alike. Here, the teacher is responding to the researcher’s first prompt and discusses when and in what contexts she would encourage the use of Scouse in the classroom.

Extract 4. School 1 Teacher.

1 IR basically you know the project about like Scouse in the classroom and it's about

2 how the students and the teachers use the accent in like educational contexts basically 3 (…) so basically just asking you what you think about a few of the things really

4 T (…) and I think sometimes, I think, I'm trying to think of quirky ways to

5 remember keywords so you put different stresses on different parts of the word you're

6 trying to

7 IR mmm

8 T get to stick in their minds so I suppose that’s something I think sometimes as

9 well to bring a level of I don’t know to lighten the atmosphere sometimes and add a

10 sense of humour I think you might use it then as well

11 IR yeah

12 T umm I think cos I think that this accent is renowned for humour and people do

13 use it as well

14 IR yeah

15 T umm and I think you can it is an accent where you can really play it

16 IR yeah

17 T: you can really stress it or not so I suppose that that’s another thing as well

18 IR yeah I would agree with that

The teacher is not responding to a specific question but she is interpreting the researcher’s prompt (lines 1-3) by discussing the contexts in which she herself would employ Scouse and/ or generally encourage the use of Scouse in the classroom. The first option she mentions is stressing certain keywords so that students are able to memorise them. This implies that she deliberately distinguishes said keyword from the rest of her speech by pronouncing it in a Scouse accent. Doing so, it is implied that it will stand out from the rest of the instructive content and, as such, it is more likely to attract the attention of the students. The second option is to ‘make humour and lighten’ the atmosphere, shifting between teaching styles with the goal of engaging the students. To justify her statement, the teacher explicitly offers meta-commentary (line 12-13) that links Scouse with humour. Her final comment (line 15) relates to performance as she explains that Scouse is an accent, which ‘you can really play’.

 We can observe several social values indexed by Scouse for the specific teacher in the above extract. First, Scouse indexes humour and informality and, as such, it can be employed as a tool to achieve several pedagogical goals in the classroom context, including student engagement and learning. Additionally, Scouse indexes playful performance and, therefore, lack of authenticity in what is expected to be used in the classroom setting. This is so because the teacher speaks as if using Scouse is a noteworthy strategy, therefore a conscious choice she would not spontaneously make; in fact, the teacher clarifies that the use of Scouse is not only a strategic but also a selective choice that serves specific teaching goals. This implies that *lack of* Scouse is what is naturalised in the specific teaching context without necessarily naming standard English. This observation corresponds to what Tsiplakou et al. found in Cypriot classrooms where the dialect served informal purposes such as joking, commenting and complaining “while the standard was associated with ‘actual teaching’” (2018: 65).

It is worth noting the ways in which the teacher in Extract 3 offers her stance on Scouse. She consistently switches between the personal pronoun and the impersonal you (lines 4-6 and 8-10) shifting between specific and general (Myers and Lampropoulou, 2012). In particular, the teacher consistently states her view in first person (*I think*) and then uses impersonal you to provide evidence that supports this stance. Interestingly, the interviewer’s prompt projects a first person response but the teacher resists to give it; instead she makes assertions and supports them with several instances of impersonal you as well as one instance of the generic noun ‘people’. These function as shared perceptions and arguments which are rhetorically strong for “being distanced from the speaker and being shared” (Myers and Lampropoulou, 2012: 1214). Within this view, although the teacher does acknowledge the use of Scouse in the classroom, she justifies her teaching practice by presenting it as shared. In this way, she maintains a distance from the Scouse accent overall. It follows that distancing is a consistent stance-taking strategy in our interview data as discussed in the previous extracts.

 We observe several antithetic pairs that emerge from the school 1 teacher’s overall stance-taking and specific social values indexed by Scouse. First, we observe the contrasting pair of *Scouse* versus *other* *variety* (albeit not named) that is meant to be used in the classroom. Then, the following pairs of *informality* versus *formality*; *humour* versus *serious tone*; *performance* versus *natural/authentic teaching*. These contrasting pairs create rigid stylistic boundaries between Scouse and non-Scouse which limit Scouse to the first part of the pair. Scouse is thus treated as a distinctively different and marked variety with limiting and very specific uses, echoing a dominant ‘difference’ discourse (Snell, 2013). Within this approach, it becomes clear that although Souse is acknowledged by the teacher as used in the classroom, it is tied to very specific stylistic contexts. We argue that the teacher’s overall stance-taking and social values indexed by Scouse contribute to placing the variety in lower-scale levels of indexicality (Blommaert, 2010).

1. **Discussion**

We can visualise the student engagement with Scouse (research question a, section 6) and the student and teacher interview stances (research questions b and c, section 7) as a continuum representing different scale levels where Scouse is placed. The lowest scale level is occupied by a complete rejection of Scouse. For example, in Extracts 2 and 3 Scouse is explicitly denied and dismissed in students’ stances or lack of engagement with Scouse as in school 2 where nurse and square are essentially distinct (Figure 1) and NURSE is even less fronted when they are talking to their teacher (Figure 2). The lowest scale level also involves the overtly negative social values, namely Scouse as annoying, disrespectful and contagious. Moving up one scale level includes reducing the posh accent as in Extract 1 (School 2 teacher), but still not making use of Scouse resources. The associated social value is less overtly negative, namely Scouse as strong and non-posh which has additional indexical links to working class and informality. The immediately higher scale level includes engagement with Scouse (Figure 1) but according to the School 1 teacher this is in very selected and specific contexts of use (Extract 4) and more implicitly negative social values (i.e., Scouse as humour and performance; see Archakis et al. 2018 on humour and accent stigmatisation).

We argue that these different scale levels reflect different degrees of distancing from Scouse as well as different degrees of tolerance of Scouse; these form part of a “clear value system” (Tsiplakou et al. 2018: 70) that informs our participants’ practices. It follows that the scale levels are hierarchically positioned and ordered in our dataset, leaving room for standard English to be notionally placed at the very top, retaining, thus, its symbolic value.

|  |
| --- |
| Standard EnglishUsing Scouse is selected and specific contextsLimiting the posh accentRejecting Scouse |

Figure 3: Sociolinguistic scales depicting the position of Scouse and standard English

Our participants present themselves as able to move across scales and do the necessary “scale jumps” (Blommaert, 2010: 35-6) if and when situations demand. These movements are presented as acceptable as long as they do not jeopardise their local and wider social positioning. Holding a place in high performing schools and being interviewed within the school setting, our participants’ project, among others, the identity of ‘good pupil’ or ‘teacher of good pupil’ which “involves a specific configuration of semiotic resources, including displays of competence in standard English” (Snell, 2013: 122). But we argue, it is not just the straightforward access to and competence in standard English but, mainly, the ability to scale jump that secures our participants their strong and powerful positions in the local educational and wider socio-cultural context (i.e., their position as speakers with guaranteed access to the educational marketplace via their social class background and place at the specific school). The contrasting pairs emerging from our participants’ stances and social values indexed by Scouse and, by extension, Scousers, namely posh vs. non-posh, disrespectful and annoying vs. polite and appropriate construct them as powerful enough to afford placing Scouse in the lowest scale levels. To this end, our participants’ positioning is both aligned with standard English and the social values it entails and, at the same time, rejects any covert prestige associated with Scouse (see also Cooper and Lampropoulou, 2021).

Additionally, we do not observe any struggle or conflict between the identity of ‘good student’ and others such as ‘peer-group leader’ or ‘popular girl’ as observed by Snell (2013). We attribute this to the local school ideology, which pairs academic achievement with class, standardness and prestige and, by extension, treats non-standard dialect as a “threat to academic success” (Hadjioannou, 2008: 275). This is highlighted by the interview with the teacher from school 1 who refers to a ‘grammar school pressure’ for competence in standard English, elitism and academic achievement which, she argues, creates peer pressure to behave and speak in a normalised way. This pressure therefore comes from students and teachers alike and is presented as a naturalised discourse; it is nowhere mentioned that there might be students or teachers who struggle to meet these expectations or who are critical of them due to an identity conflict or struggle. We, therefore, argue that the middle-class bias lies at the essence of this naturalised discourse and blurs within a local grammar school ideology that leaves little room for Scouse to be flexibly used as a resource. The result is the promotion of standard English as the only path to academic success (see also Tsiplakou et. al 2018) and a homogenising view of standard English versus Scouse that reinforces a difference discourse (Snell, 2013). This maps onto a distinction between grammar school place holders versus ‘others’ which feeds our participants’ stances and language behaviour at school. It follows that, despite the wide circulation of a variation ideology (Cameron, 1995) and the challenge of social and linguistic demarcations, our data suggest that the specific school settings we analysed are less susceptible to flexible language use, due to among others, the pairing of academic achievement with middle-class and prestige.

The educational implications of our findings add to the body of research that advocates attention to dialect as resource in order to legitimise regional speakers’ linguistic identities (Snell, 2013) that has proven to boost student critical language skills (Tsiplakou et al. 2018). Specifically, “understanding indexicalities and indexical orders is the necessary first step for fostering critical literacy” (Tsiplakou et al. 2018: 70). Additionally, research has shown that lack of acknowledgement of non-standard dialects as powerful linguistic resources may impede language learning (see among others Siegel, 2010) and, thus, result in educational disadvantage. Our study has shown that, despite the secured academic success of our participants, the promotion of language ideologies favouring standard language and presenting it as the only path to academic success results in less positive evaluations of non-standard dialects, as in our case, Scouse by teachers and students alike. This has power implications on dialects enregistered as working-class and their associated users. If flexible language use and, thus, positive evaluations of accent and dialect is not encouraged in middle-class settings where academic achievement is almost secured, then it will prove even more challenging to foster language learning by addressing the indexical hierarchy between standard and non-standard linguistic variation more widely in the classroom setting. As Tsiplakou et al (2018: 54) point out “higher levels of competence in the standard would be achieved not through mere ‘tolerance’ of the dialect, but through systematic contrastive teaching of the two varieties”.

1. **Conclusions**

Studies on dialects that are stereotypically stigmatised have advocated for respect and inclusion of dialect variation in classroom settings in order to address educational failure. Despite ‘the rise of the regional’ and a wider variation ideology (Cameron, 1995) circulating in institutional contexts in the UK, educational contexts are still far from embracing regional speech. Our data from two middle class schools shows that Scouse, despite its attested covert prestige, it is still marginalised in the specific school context. The students and their respective teachers in the grammar schools under scrutiny fully align themselves with standard English and its assigned social values, namely formality, class and social/ educational success. We argue that they are already empowered by their positioning as students/teachers in prestigious grammar schools who not only do they have direct access to standard English but can make their voices heard by smoothly moving across scale-levels or they can dismiss the dialect altogether. We could go as far as arguing that engagement with Scouse in the ways Scouse is enregistered for them could threaten their overall positioning as middle-class speakers who have, in a way, secured their educational attainment and associated social success. Unlike studies that have recently underlined a struggle between non-standard dialect and social class in school settings (Snell, 2018), our data suggest that the combination of class background and institutional context cannot deconstruct the relationship. We believe that our study has implications on language learning and the ways students’ regional and wider identities are shaped. If high performing, powerful, middle-class schools do not encourage flexibility in language use, demonstrated by positive social values assigned to non-standard varieties of English, then alternative discourses will not be able to challenge the naturalised homogenising language ideologies. Therefore, the middle-class bias will persist and, consequently, it will be imposed on student abilities, skills and educational aspirations, which shape their overall positioning and identity construction. Finally, it may undermine any attempt by linguists and language experts to help address educational failure in the UK context.

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1. IR stands for interviewer, T for teacher and S (in extracts 3 and 4) for student. The following transcription conventions are used:

(.) micropause, hearable but too short to measure

((text)) clarification points made by transcriber

/ self-repair

(…) omission of speech [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quotation marks have been added here to indicate reported speech and contextualise the interview extract [↑](#footnote-ref-2)