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On the origins of urban dialects: economic change and demography in nineteenth- century Britain

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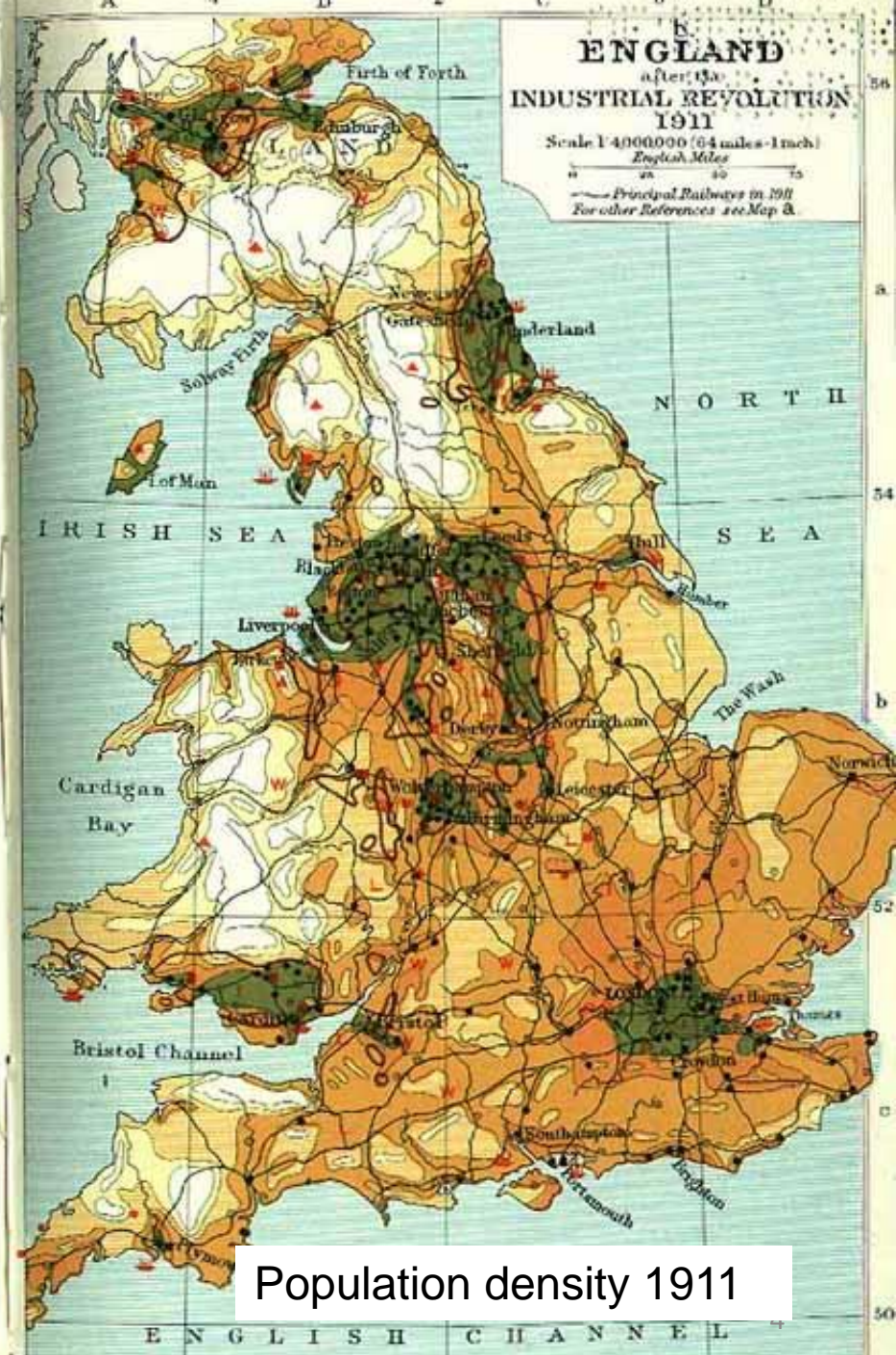
Growth of cities in the nineteenth century

CITY	18 th Cent.	1801	1831	1851	1901
Glasgow	12K (1725)	77,000	200,000	320,000	762,000
Newcastle	20K (c1750)	33,322	48,950	80,184	246,905
Leeds	16K (1771)	94,421	183,015	249,992	552,479
Hull	7.5K (1700)	21,280	40,902	57,484	236,772
Manchester	43K (1774)	88,577	205,561	339,483	642,027
Liverpool	30K (1766)	82,430	180,222	320,513	711,030
Sheffield	7K (1736)	60,095	112,408	161,475	451,195

Sources: <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>, Wikipedia, local councils

Using the past to inform the present

- The British Industrial Revolution (c. 1760–1860) saw large-scale socioeconomic and demographic change in northern England, southern Scotland and South Wales
 - New, or massively expanded, industries
 - Textiles
 - Iron
 - Transport infrastructure
 - Mass production
 - Water power, then coal-powered steam
 - Export (trade)
 - Wealth generated in the 18th cent. by Atlantic slave trade



Late Modern English (1700–1900)



- This is said to have been a particularly stable time for the language, belying the social upheavals of the age (Romaine)
- Yet we know from studies in Historical Sociolinguistics that there were changes on all linguistic levels
- For the variationist sociolinguist, there are some frustrations ...

Historical Sociolinguistics



- Corpus based, corpus driven
 - Begins with a corpus of texts, not with the speech community
- Isolates linguistic features (usually morphosyntactic)
- Investigates change over great time depths and geographical distances

Problems for the variationist sociolinguist:

- Can't investigate many features at once
- Data occurs sporadically ('bad data problem')
- Microvariation in phonetics/phonology inaccessible
- Broad synchronic sociolinguistic variation inaccessible
 - Lack of social, demographic and linguistic information

Studying communities in the past



- (Speech) communities are built on face-to-face communication over time
 - between each person and family members, neighbours, co-workers, visiting relatives, migrants (short distance, long distance)
- The dialect landscape is a continuum of varieties
 - horizontal and vertical variation
- Communities are in flux (constant change)
 - individuals with overlapping and changing social networks
 - A speech community reflects concentrations of people who are potentially in contact with each other
- An essentially Gumperzian view of ‘speech community’

How can this model be fitted into the Historical Sociolinguistics paradigm?



- Investigating the validity of such a model *in the present* is challenging in itself
- For the past, we can only have fleeting glimpses of it:
 - Network studies
 - Metalinguistic comments
 - Social comment in, e.g., correspondence
 - Observing geographical and social distributions of particular features
- We need a model of social structure that does not rely on scarce linguistic, social and metalinguistic data

Demography and dialect (and language) change

Focus on the formation of dialects at times and places where particular **socioeconomic** and **demographic** changes are taking place.

- Socioeconomic factors:
 - In Britain, the rise of a capitalist economy, replacing an agrarian economy characterised by feudalism (big landowners) and farmers who either owned land or rented it
- Demography:
 - Increase/decrease in population size
 - Driven by natural change (births and deaths) and by migration (in-migration and out-migration)

Demography and dialect (and language) change

Framework:

- The social forces driving language change derive in large measure from face-to-face contacts between people using different linguistic features
- The nature and frequency of those contacts are determinants of the direction and speed of change. **Questions to answer:**
 - *How many people* belong to the different dialect groups that are in contact?
 - *How frequent* are the dialect features which are in contact?
 - *How much face-to-face communication* takes place between the different dialect groups? Are there social restrictions – especially due to position in a class system characterised by economic and cultural differences?

What can we find out about the dialects in Late Modern English?



How much can we find out about changes in vernacular speech during the 100 years of the Industrial Revolution?

- Small-scale descriptions of dialects of northern cities – Sheffield, Leeds. English Dialect Society 1873-1896
- Rapid expansion of towns and cities
- Was there **koineisation (new dialect formation)**?
 - Can we infer this from dialect descriptions?
 - Do we have enough demographic information about communities?
- Can we construct a picture of social and demographic change that we can compare with what we know about contact-driven dialect change in the present?

What are the conditions for koineisation (new dialect formation)?



- Trudgill (2004) on the formation of New Zealand English in the 19th century

Deterministic model

- Depends on the dialect features that arrived (from Britain and Ireland), and
- The proportions of the population who used these features
- The outcome can be predicted (or explained post hoc)
- The model does not take account of social dynamics
 - Social relations between groups (social status, rivalry)
 - Differences in how children acquire language
- The model works well only in *tabula rasa* cases (where there were no prior speakers of the language)

Tabula rasa in 19th century Britain?



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- With one exception, no new towns were established during the Industrial Revolution
 - The exception is Middlesbrough (more later!) and possibly Liverpool
- Is there evidence that Middlesbrough has a ‘new’ dialect?
- What evidence is there for dialect change in other towns?

Mufwene's Founder Effect (1996)



- *Founder Effect*
 - Idea that the initial population disproportionately influences the outcomes for later generations, even with large-scale migration

Testing (or at least exploring) the Founder Effect



Hypothesis:

- Let us assume that, for a dialect to be changed, there needs to be, *at a given point in time*, a minimum proportion of in-migrant people who have not acquired the local dialect. In the absence of detailed information, we can set this number at 50%.
- This means that the population must increase by 100% for a certain length of time. We can set this at 10-12 years. This is the time taken for children and teenagers to acquire their local dialect from aged 4 or so.

- Are the population changes in the Industrial Revolution enough to lead to new dialect formation (koinés)?
 - In the absence of contemporary quantitative linguistic data, can we use demographics to find out?
- Let's take a broad look at the state of Britain in the nineteenth century

Demographic change

- Natural change
- Migration

Britain: the world's first urbanised and industrialised country



- Britain at the peak of the Industrial Revolution, and the most urbanised country in Europe:
 - 1831 34% lived in cities
 - 1851 50% “
 - 1931 80% “
 - 1991 90% “

The demographic framework: From rural to industrial 1801–1911



- Langton, J. & Morris, R. J. (eds.) (1986). *Atlas of Industrializing Britain 1780–1914*. London: Methuen.



ATLAS

OF

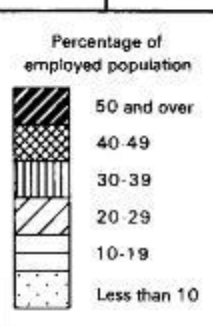
INDUSTRIALIZING BRITAIN

1780-1914

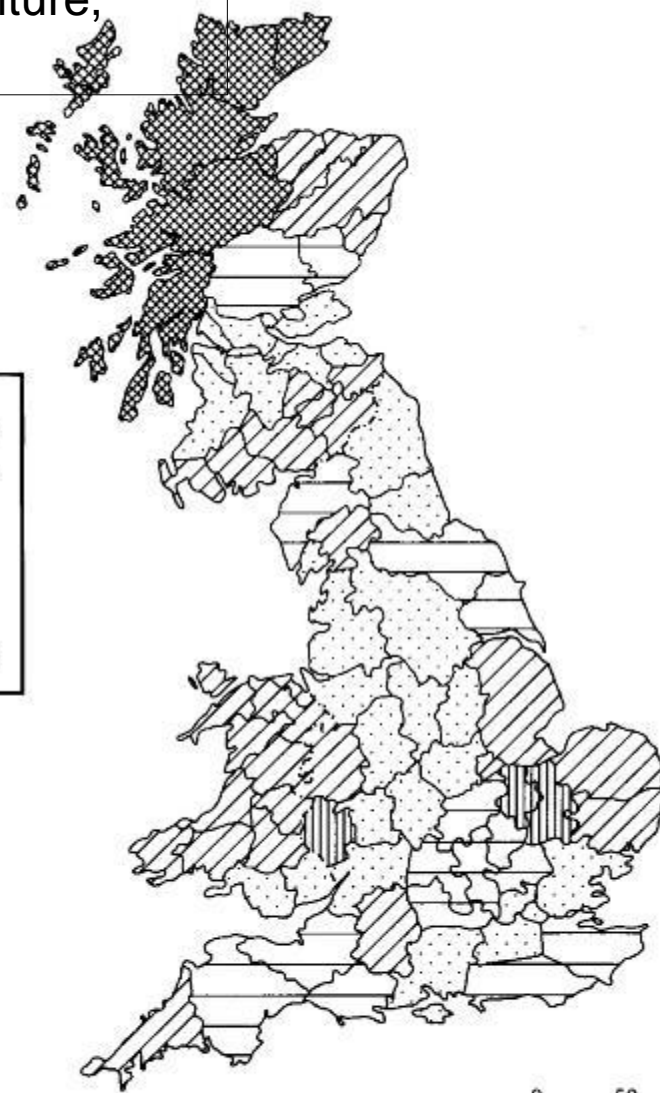
EDITED BY JOHN LANGTON & R. J. MORRIS



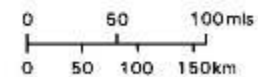
Employment in agriculture, 1851 and 1911



1851



1911



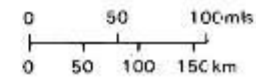
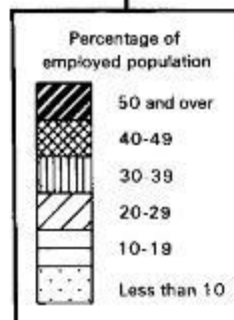
Employment in manufacturing, 1851 and 1911

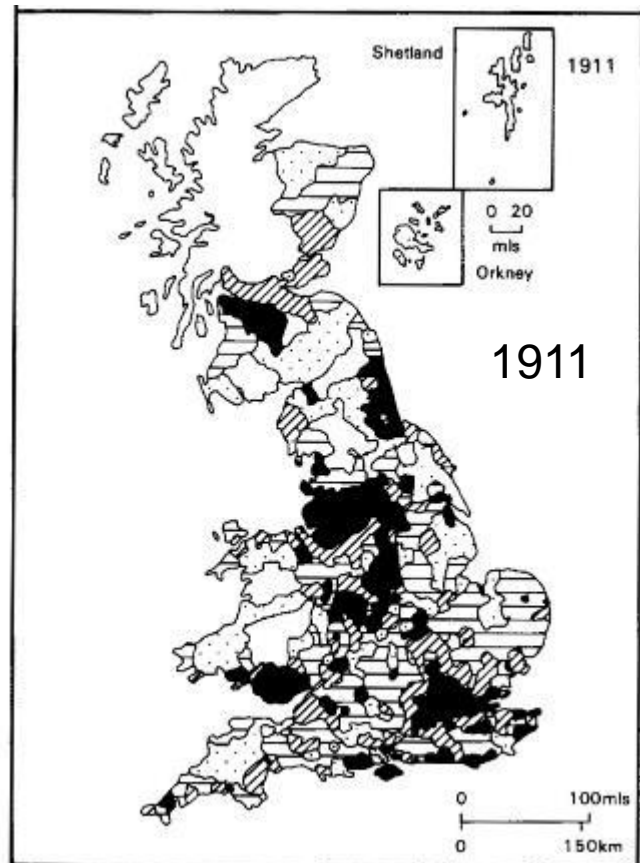
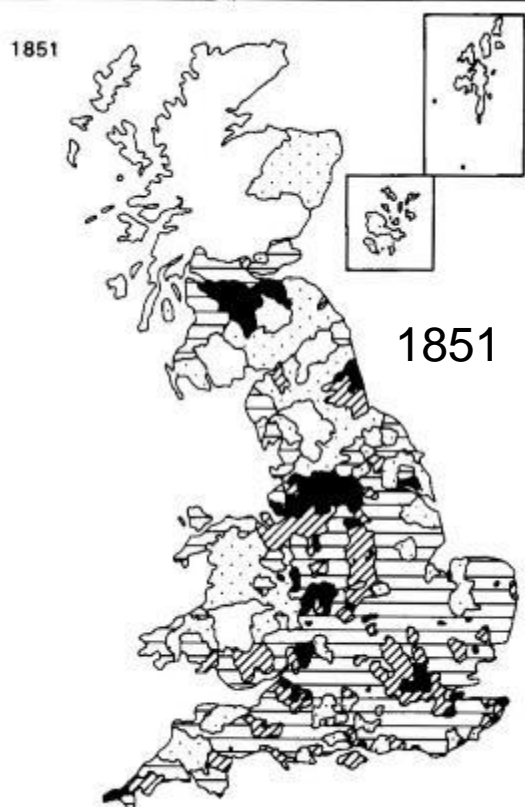
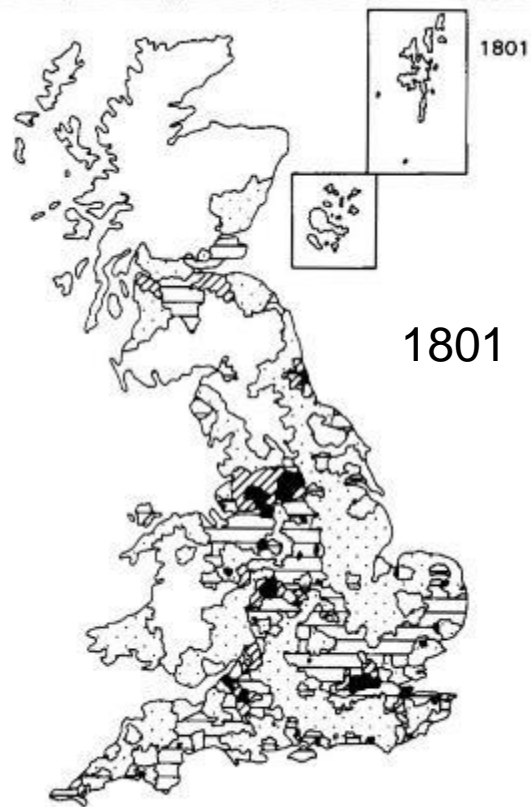


1851

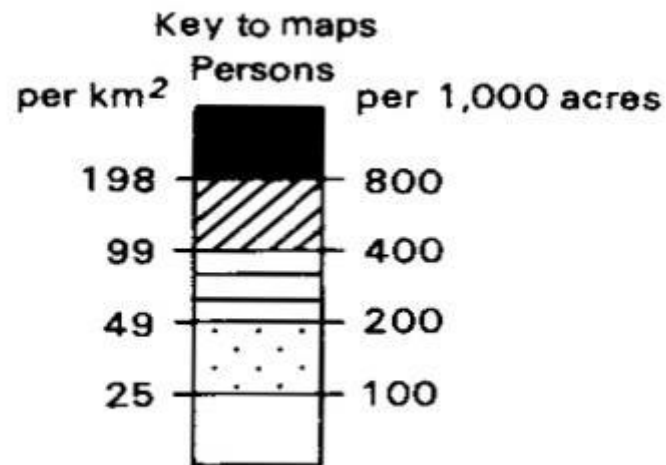


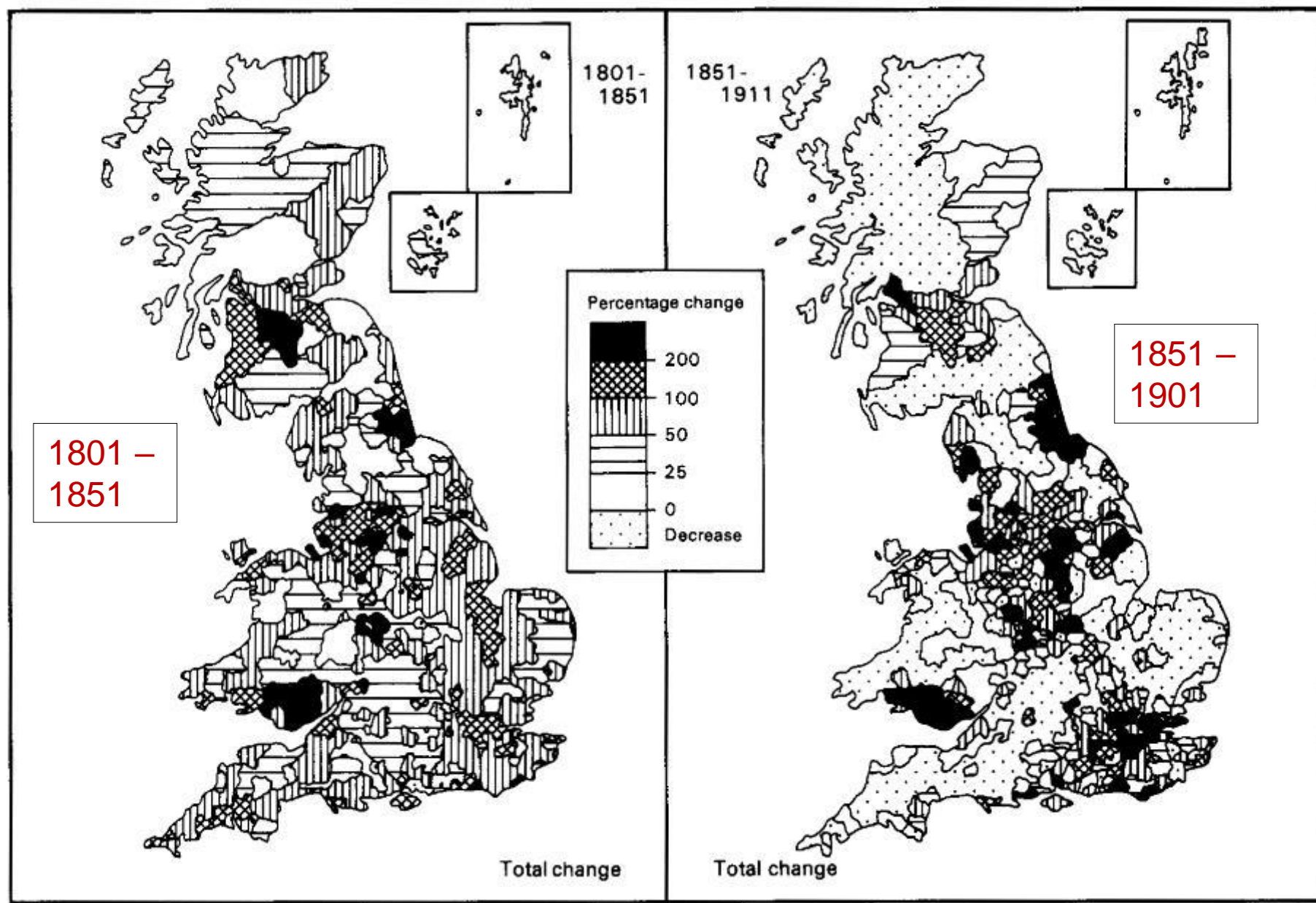
1911



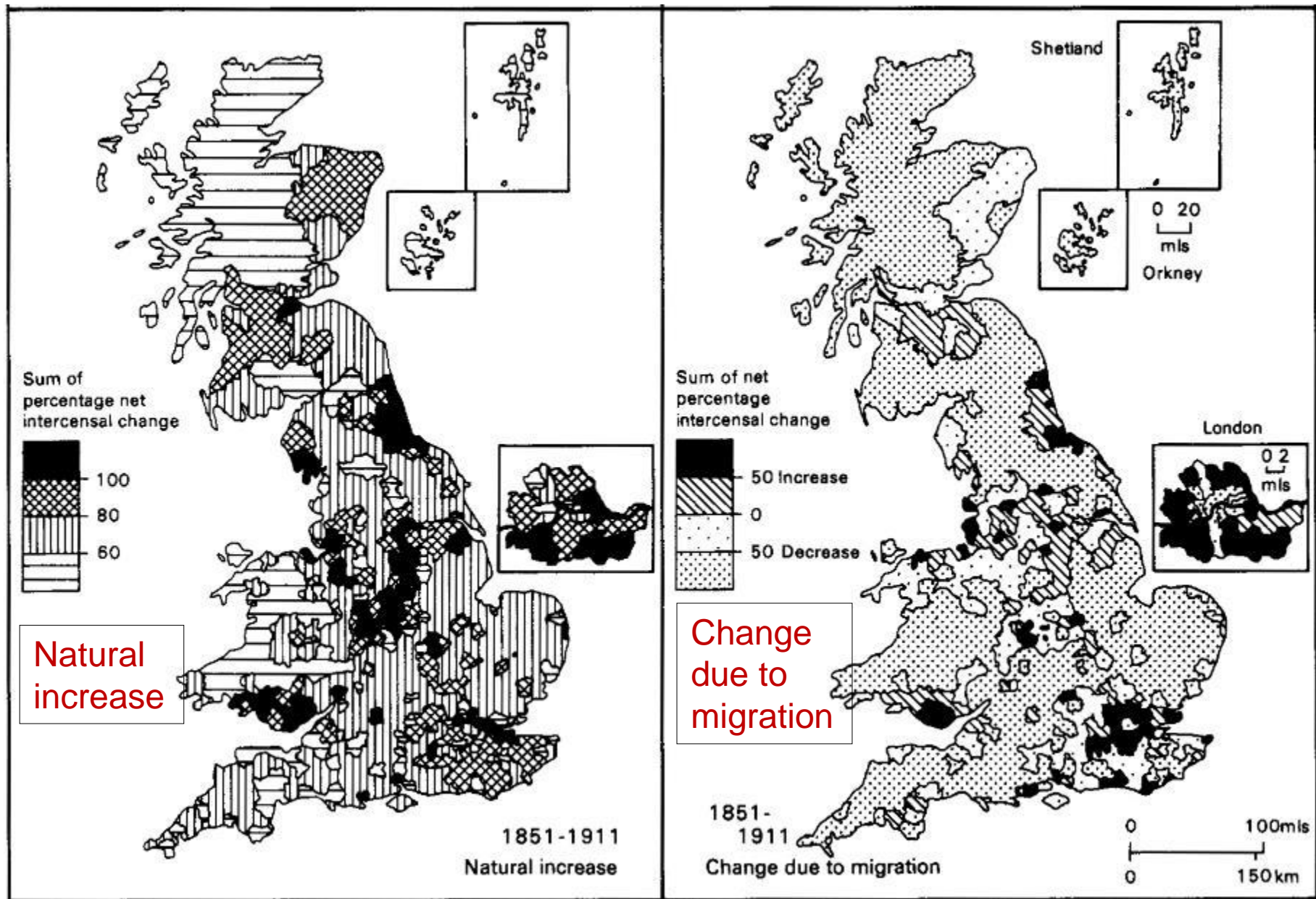


2.1-4 Population density, 1801-1911





2.5–8 Population growth, 1801–1911



components of population growth, 1851-1911

Northern cities in the 19th century



- Is population growth rapid enough to lead to the formation of new dialects?
- Importantly, how much of it is due to migration?

Exploring the founder effect - reminder



- We'll test our hypothesis about dialect change:
- There needs to be, *at a given point in time*, a minimum proportion of in-migrant people. In the absence of detailed information, we can set this number at 50%.
- This means that the population must increase by 100% for a certain length of time. We can set this at 10-12 years.

Blackburn and Middlesbrough: population growth



Popula tion figures	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871
Black- burn	11,980	15,083	21,940	27,091	36,629	46,536	63,126	76,339
Middle s- brough	0	0	40	154	5,463	7,631	18,892	39,284

Blackburn: No 10-year period represents a doubling

Middlesbrough: 1831-41, 1851-61 and 1861-71 represent more than a doubling

What happened in Blackburn and Middlesbrough?

- No evidence of a new dialect forming in Blackburn
- Strong circumstantial evidence of early restructuring of dialect in Middlesbrough:
 - Ellis, Alexander. 1889. *The existing phonology of English dialects, compared with that of West Saxon speech*. New York: Greenwood Press.

ON
EARLY ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION,

WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO

SHAKSPERE AND CHAUCER,

CONTAINING AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CORRESPONDENCE OF
WRITING WITH SPEECH IN ENGLAND, FROM THE ANGLOSAXON
PERIOD TO THE EXISTING RECEIVED AND DIALECTAL FORMS,
WITH A SYSTEMATIC NOTATION OF SPOKEN SOUNDS BY
MEANS OF THE ORDINARY PRINTING TYPES.

INCLUDING

A RE-ARRANGEMENT OF PROF. F. J. CHILD'S MEMOIRS ON THE LANGUAGE OF
CHAUCER AND GOWER, REPRINTS OF THE RARE TRACTS BY SALESBURY ON
ENGLISH, 1547, AND WELSH, 1567, AND BY BARCLEY ON FRENCH, 1521,
ABSTRACTS OF SCHMELLER'S TREATISE ON BAVARIAN DIALECTS, AND
WINKLER'S LOW GERMAN AND FRIESIAN DIALECTICON, AND
PRINCE L. L. BONAPARTE'S VOWEL AND CONSONANT LISTS.

BY

ALEXANDER J. ELLIS,

F.R.S., F.S.A., F.C.P.S., F.C.P.,

VICE-PRESIDENT, TWICE PRESIDENT, OF THE PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
MEMBER OF THE MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY, FORMERLY SCHOLAR OF TRINITY COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE, B.A., 1837.

PART V.

[pp. 1*-88*, 1433-2267.]

EXISTING DIALECTAL AS COMPARED WITH WEST SAXON
PRONUNCIATION.

With two Maps of the Dialect Districts.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED FOR THE PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
THE EARLY ENGLISH TEXT SOCIETY, AND THE CHAUCER SOCIETY, BY
TRÜBNER & CO., 57 AND 59, LUDGATE HILL.

1889.

THE
EXISTING PHONOLOGY
OF
ENGLISH DIALECTS
COMPARED WITH THAT OF WEST SAXON SPEECH.

FORMING PART V. OF "EARLY ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION."

Ellis 1889 on Middlesbrough



- Conservative dialect in Cleveland (where Middlesbrough is situated):
 - [ganz] 'goes'
 - [geəd trʊf tʃal θɪŋ] 'went through the whole thing'
- Comments about Middlesbrough dialect:
 - 'South Cleveland, North Cleveland [Middlesbrough] being spoiled for dialect by the iron works'
 - 'North of Stokesley the dialect has been corrupted by the development of the ironworks, of which Middlesborough is the head'
- Middlesbrough speech seems to have moved away from local features, maybe towards Standard English

Demographic evidence for Middlesbrough

- Even though the population increased very rapidly, there is evidence that the proportion of non-locally born people *did not reach 50%*.
 - Llamas (2015) mentions that 20% were Irish born (alongside other in-migrants) in 1871
 - Llamas also argues that there is evidence of Irish influence in the vowel system, even today.

Demographic evidence for Middlesbrough



- What factors could have led to the lack of local features and the presence of Irish features?
- At this point, we need to bring in **social and subjective factors** that accelerate contact-driven change:
 - Attitudes of groups towards each other (e.g. Irish vs. English)
 - Social integration
 - Social differentiation
- These factors are hard to assess from a distance of 150 years

Conclusions

- Tried to apply modern sociolinguistic understandings to a historical situation where there is very little linguistic evidence, but considerable demographic information
 - This is a move away from the corpus-driven historical sociolinguistic method
- The model allows us to penetrate further back than before in understanding sociolinguistic change
- Demography and socioeconomic change are central
 - We need now to look at what influences **language acquisition** and hence introduction of changes
 - Local subjective factors may steer direction of change

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- <https://york.academia.edu/PaulKerswill>

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