Cultural prominence

“Cultural prominence”, or the salience of certain population centers in the national consciousness, appeared to play a major role in perception in Montgomery’s (2006) study. Support for the phenomenon of cultural prominence can be found in the data for the “Manc” (Manchester) dialect area, which displayed a relatively high level of recognition, in contrast with a lack of recognition of a Manchester area in the only other perceptual study in the United Kingdom (Inoue 1999: 167), the data for which was gathered around 1990.

In order to measure cultural prominence, exposure in *The Times* and *Sunday Times* has been investigated using LexisNexis academic (2010) by searching for place-name mentions. The number of mentions each year was divided by the population of each of the cities as recorded for that year, giving a “words per head of population” figure. This figure can then be used as a measure to investigate the relative cultural prominence of each of the cities on which hand-drawn dialect areas were based. Figure 1 shows the change in “words per head of population” from 1990 (when Inoue’s data were collected) to 2004 (when Montgomery’s data were collected) for each of the 10 most frequently drawn dialect areas.

![Percentage change in words per head of population 1990-2004 (The Times & Sunday Times)](image)

Figure 1. Percentage change in “words per head of population” 1990–2004

Figure 1 demonstrates that the number of mentions for Manchester rises by 108% between
1990 and 2004. This increase is only exceeded by Newcastle upon Tyne (134%), although the Geordie dialect area (based around Newcastle upon Tyne) is well established in Inoue’s (1999: 168) data and is therefore less noteworthy. Tentative conclusions can be drawn from these data which suggest that the high recognition level for the “Manc” dialect area could be due to an increase in Manchester’s popular cultural prominence since Inoue’s study took place. This appears to be a persuasive explanation for an increase in recognition from a very low level.

References