

Mr Tickle in a Newcastle accent

Rosy Hall is an ESRC-funded PhD student from Oxford University working with the BL's Spoken English collections. She writes:

At the *Evolving English* exhibition at the British Library (2010-11), we asked visitors to submit recordings of their voices in specially designed telephone booths. Around 15,000 speakers took part, and the outcome is the [Evolving English VoiceBank](#) and [WordBank](#) – a collection of accents and dialect words from over the UK, and all around the world.

One of the things we asked participants to do was to read us a story, so that we could compare different voices saying the same thing. We went for Roger Hargreaves' *Mr Tickle*; it's a useful text because it includes plenty of words that give us clues as to where people are from, like *fast* and *laugh*, for instance (do you say yours with a short or a long 'a'?). We also hoped its light-hearted tone would put the readers at ease so that they wouldn't change their 'normal' voice too much, since sometimes reading out loud can cause people to switch into a more formal register.

In [this recording](#), however, the speaker was so at ease that he put on a performance, exaggerating features of his Newcastle accent to give us the full Geordie experience. He even 'translates' some of the words into dialect terms, such as 'starving' for 'hungry,' 'pack it in' for 'stop it,' and 'arms as long as you'd like' to refer to Mr Tickle's 'extraordinarily long arms.' Then there's 'out for the count' instead of 'fast asleep,' and 'upset' for 'terrible pandemonium.' And of course the speaker adds 'man' at the end of a few sentences for good measure.

Our Newcastle speaker also beautifully demonstrates some Geordie vowel sounds for us. Notice the way he pronounces words like 'house,' 'out,' and 'down' – this 'oo' sound is where the Toon gets its nickname from! There's the 'oo' in 'book,' too, and the characteristically Newcastle vowel sound in 'long' ('lang'). You can find out more about Newcastle English on the [Sounds Familiar](#) website.

Perhaps the theatricality of this reading task makes it inauthentic in some way – it's hard to say whether the participant really speaks like this in everyday life. But, we have more 'natural' recordings elsewhere of these features (check out this other Geordie example in the [VoiceBank](#)), so we know they can be 'real Newcastle' too. What's more, recordings like this can be incredibly useful to us as sociolinguists, because they tell us something about the dialect words and features that are most salient to speakers as markers of their local identity. And, of course, they are evidence of the delight and pride speakers take in their linguistic heritage.

Continue the conversation with us [@Voicesof English](#).