

## ***To*-drop in the English Dialect of Oldham**

### **1 INTRODUCTION AND AIMS**

The linguistic phenomenon of *to*-drop, also referred to as silent *to* in the literature (Myler, 2011, 2013) or null/deleted *to* (Haddican, 2010), has informally been observed in the dialect of Oldham, Greater Manchester (historically part of Lancashire). It is a non-standard feature of English and is illustrated in examples (1)-(3):

- (1) Let's go Asda.
- (2) Have you been gym today?
- (3) Are you coming library?

This dialectal variable exhibits a number of linguistic variants, and in this paper, I investigate a range of these. A detailed overview of these variants is provided in Section 2. Additionally, I explore whether there exist any generational differences in usage of this variable, as well as the extent to which this variable is found outside of the target area.

### **2 THE STRUCTURE OF *TO*-DROPPING**

I should first make clear that the *to* referred to in this construction is the preposition, as in (4), rather than the infinitive marker as in (5):

- (4) I am going **to** the shop.
- (5) I want **to** eat.

*To*-drop is the phenomenon whereby the preposition *to* is omitted (or perhaps is silent) when following verbs of motion such as *go* and *come*, and it manifests itself through a number of linguistic variants. In this study, I explore four of these:

- i. *to*-drop combined with an unpronounced definite article;
- ii. *to*-drop with the vocalised definite article in its full form;
- iii. *to*-drop with the vocalised definite article in its reduced (glottalised) form; and
- iv. non-*to*-drop, i.e., the complete absence of *to*-drop.

I illustrate each of these variants below.

### **2.1 *to*-drop combined with unpronounced definite article (Variant 1)**

In this variant, both the preposition *to* and the definite article are unpronounced.  $\emptyset$  marks where the missing elements would be in Standard English.

(6) Have you been  $\emptyset \emptyset$  shop yet?

### **2.2 *to*-drop with the vocalised definite article in its full form (Variant 2)**

This variant involves a silent preposition *to* but with full vocalisation of the definite article. Again,  $\emptyset$  marks where the missing elements would be in Standard English:

(7) Did you go  $\emptyset$  the gym today?

### **2.3 *to*-drop with vocalised definite article in its reduced/glottalised form (Variant 3)**

This is similar to Variant 2 except for the fact the definite article is reduced to a glottal stop:

(8) Will you come  $\emptyset$  [ʔ] library?

The reduced/glottalised definite article tends to be represented as *t'* in informal orthography as illustrated in (7):

(9) Let's go to t'shop.

I follow this approach for the sentences with this feature that I use as part of my study with one slight alteration: instead, I attach it to the end of the preceding word as I feel this better represents the way it sounds when spoken:

(10) Let's go to't shop.

### **2.4 non-*to*-drop (Variants 4a and 4b)**

These variants involve the complete absence of *to*-drop. Within this variant, there are two sub-variants: fully vocalised definite article or definite article reduction (glottalisation):

- (11) a. Have you been to the gym?  
b. Have you been to [?] gym.

Example (11a) reflects Standard English, and although example (11b) is a non-standard feature of English, it is nevertheless ubiquitously observed throughout the north of England (Rácz, 2012).

One important observation concerning Variants 1-3 is that preposition dropping is optional and whether the preposition is present or not renders no difference in meaning. In fact, Biggs (2015: 15) argues that speakers are “unconscious of the use or non-use of the overt form in discourse”, and often do not even recognise it as a particular feature of their dialect.

### 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The first real attempt at documenting the Oldham dialect was Schilling (1906), but this study focused almost exclusively on phonology rather than providing any insight into dialect grammar. More recently, as part of large-scale dialectology project, Manchester Voices, Drummond (2022) provides some contemporary insights into the Oldham vernacular, but again, the principal focus is pronunciation.

In terms of dialect grammar, the number of studies on prepositional *to*-drop is rather thin. In fact, this phenomenon is predominantly just briefly addressed as part of larger studies focusing on alternations of theme-goal ditransitives (Haddican, 2010; Biggs, 2015). Prepositional *to*-drop has been reported in a number of dialects of Northwest England such as Manchester (Haddican, 2010; Haddican and Holmberg, 2012), South-West Lancashire (Myler, 2011, 2013) and Liverpool (Biggs, 2015).

Interestingly, Biggs’ (2015) study on Liverpool English is quite revealing in that she provides evidence for a wider class of verbs that permit *to*-drop. These include both manner-of-motion verbs (12a) and allative verbs (12b):

- (12) a. Joe plodded the pub.  
b. Swim the end and back

(Biggs, 2015: 16)

Despite this, no comprehensive grammaticality judgement study has been carried out to investigate the exact nature of prepositional *to*-drop in terms of the structural variants it can surface as, and which particular verbs of motion it more commonly co-occurs with. Even this would only constitute a study of linguistic variables. Beyond this, there are a number of sociolinguistic questions that warrant further study such as generational differences in usage of *to*-drop, which could then be used as evidence for language change in either direction. As a result, I hope this study goes some way in addressing this lack of research on this phenomenon and provides a much-needed insight into this interesting aspect of dialect grammar.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research design

Participants were invited to take part in a grammaticality judgement questionnaire comprising a list of target sentences each containing a variant of the feature. Three variables were tested in this study: one concerned linguistic variation, another pertained to generational variation, and the final examined geographic variation.

#### 4.1.1 Linguistic variable

I explored whether the choice of verb determines the degree to which *to*-drop occurs. To do this, I chose a range of verbs of motion that occur with the preposition *to* in Standard English: *go*, *come*, *been*, *nip*, *pop*, *be off*. It should be noted that *been* is the participle form of *be* and occurs in the present perfect structure *have been to* + place. Within this variable, I also tested the degree of acceptability of the four variants outlined above.

There was an additional factor for the verbs *go* and *come*. With *go*, I included test sentences with both common and proper nouns to test whether there was any difference, e.g., *go shop* vs *go Asda* and with *come*, I included test sentences with a possessive pronoun to establish whether *to*-drop is acceptable before possessives, e.g., *come to mine* vs *come mine*.

#### **4.1.2 Generational variable**

This variable tested the degree of acceptability of *to*-dropping across generations within Oldham. I grouped respondents into three age brackets: 18-44, 45-69, and 70+ to reflect three generational groupings: younger, middle-aged and elderly. The data was used to establish whether there was diachronic shift either towards or away from acceptability of *to*-dropping within the Oldham locality.

#### **4.1.3 Geographic variable**

This variable explored the question of whether *to*-dropping is unique to Oldham, whether it is also found within the areas surrounding Oldham, or whether it is more ubiquitous throughout England.

### **4.2 Sampling and participants**

#### **4.2.1 Population and sample size**

Participants were targeted from both within the dialect area of Oldham and from outside. This allowed for all of the variables outlined above to be tested. There was a total of 72 respondents: 22 who identified as being from Oldham and 50 from elsewhere.

The following table summarises participant numbers by age for Oldham. Since generation was not a factor in analysing data from respondents from outside Oldham, this information is excluded:

<b>Generational Groups</b>	<b>N</b>
18-44	15
45-69	6
70+	1
TOTAL	22

*Table 1: Number of respondents (N) for each generational group within Oldham*

#### **4.2.2 Sampling methods**

A range of sampling methods were used to collect data, which are based on McCombes (2022). Participants who had grown up or spent a considerable part of their life living in Oldham were actively encouraged to participate as well as participants across the three age groups. As such, sampling was both geographically and generationally stratified.

Furthermore, snowball sampling was employed since I initially asked personal contacts and contacts of contacts to participate. Beyond this, participants were recruited voluntarily through the advertising of the study online and on social media platforms, therefore employing voluntary response sampling.

### **4.3 Data collection**

#### ***4.3.1 Data collection methods***

Data was collected using a dialect questionnaire produced on Google Forms. Participants were invited to anonymously complete the questionnaire and it was made available for a period of three weeks. Written dialect surveys afford many advantages over other data collection methods, some of which include wider access to a population for sampling, time efficiency and elimination of the observer's paradox (Chambers, 2018).

#### ***4.3.2 Questionnaire format***

After initially collecting participant information relevant to the study, i.e., age bracket and geographical data, participants were invited to rate sentences based on their perceived acceptability of each sentence. They were asked to consider to what extent they would ever use a sentence like this and/or how commonly they would hear such a sentence in their speech community. Sentences were judged on the Likert Scale from 1 to 5 where 1 was 'never' and 5 was 'very frequently'.

There were 34 target sentences in total that covered all of the linguistic variants outlined above. The full list of these sentences can be found in the appendices. The sentences were presented in random order.

In addition to reading each target sentence, a recording of each sentence was provided, produced by a native Oldham speaker. The justification for this was that I considered it essential that the sentences be heard in order to avoid the issue of the orthography of non-standard features. For example, some of the sentences contrasted the reduced definite article with the full form. Although this is sometimes transcribed as *t'* as in *t'shop* (see comment above regarding orthographical decision), I felt that this would not be completely clear to everyone and could lead to misunderstandings and, as a result, less accurate data. Since this is a spoken dialect feature of English, having the sentences read out went some way in compensating for this.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

Following collection, the data were organised into various categories ready for analysis according to the variables. Note that for the generational and linguistic variables only responses from Oldham participants were considered.

For each category and sub-category, averages of each grammaticality judgement were taken from the total number of participants in that category.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

The amount of personal information that was collected was limited to just that necessary for the study, i.e., where the participant was born and their age bracket. No information that can be used to identify any particular participant was collected. Upon partaking in the questionnaire, participants were presented with information about how their data would be used and stored, and then they had the option to refuse to participate and exit the questionnaire. Additionally, ethical clearance was obtained in relation to the use of spoken recordings.

#### **4.6 Limitations**

It proved particularly challenging recruiting participants from the older age bracket (70+). Only one from Oldham and one from outside Oldham were found, which unfortunately, severely limited the analysis of the generational variable. The most likely reason for this lack of participants is limited access to the internet and social media use preventing such potential participants from engaging in the study.

#### **4.7 Reliability and validity**

The questionnaire was designed to avoid incidences which may impact the reliability or validity of the data. For example, in cases where question responses are made mandatory by the project designer, participants may be inclined to elicit a response which they believe is the most positive or most likely to be accepted by the study designer, described as a ‘social desirability bias’ (Sheth & Malhotra, 2010). By ensuring participants have the right to decline to answer questions, this potential issue is ameliorated.

There was also the potential issue of standard language ideology bias whereby people in general, or respondents in the case of this study, prioritise a perceived dialect, i.e., the

standard language, that carries prestige over other dialects. This resultantly leads to negative attitudes towards non-standard forms (Walsh, 2021; Lippi-Green 1994, 2012). In order to mitigate against participants devaluing the non-standard sentences, I ensured the directions provided to respondents were sufficiently clear as well as attempting to actively recruit respondents from a wide range of sociolinguistic backgrounds.

## **4.8 Hypotheses**

Based on personal exposure to *to*-dropping, I formulated a number of hypotheses outlined below.

### **4.8.1 Verb choice**

From informal observation, the more frequent a verb, the more likely it is that *to*-dropping is permissible. Therefore, I predicted that verbs such as *go to* and *come to* (which according to the BNC Spoken Corpus have a frequency of 545.059 and 76.165 instances per million words respectively) would more likely undergo *to*-drop than verbs like *pop to* or *nip to* (with a frequency of 2.364 and 1.051 instances per million words). Note that the frequencies stated only serve as a rough guide, as the results were not filtered to exclude irrelevant results, such as *go to* being used as a noun. Nevertheless, the huge difference in frequencies is rather striking.

### **4.8.2 Type of *to*-drop**

Again, guided by informal observation, *to*-drop appears to co-occur more frequently with either a fully elided definite article or with a reduced definite article rather than a fully vocalised definite article. I therefore hypothesised V+N and V+D<sub>red</sub>+ N to be more acceptable than V+D+N, where V=Verb, D=Determiner, D<sub>red</sub>= reduced Determiner, i.e., glottalised *the*, and N=Noun.

### **4.8.3 Generational differences**

When engaging with locals, I have generally noticed *to*-drop to be much more common among younger speakers. This suggests diachronic change towards *to*-drop and so I hypothesised this as such. From this, it can be predicted that the younger generations will judge *to*-drop much more acceptable than the older generations.

#### **4.8.4 Geographic differences**

Although *to*-drop is a feature commonly observed among speakers from Oldham, it can be found in other locations. For example, several there are several BNC Spoken Corpus hits of N+V in places such as Warrington and even as far as Norwich. Some of these are easily explainable due to their close proximity to Oldham, but other cases are more challenging to explain. Therefore, I hypothesise that *to*-dropping is not a linguistic feature unique to Oldham, but a feature found in other dialects. This predicts that some participants from other parts of Britain will judge sentences with *to*-drop as acceptable.

#### **4.8.5 To-drop versus non-to-drop**

Since non-*to*-drop is the form found in Standard English, it is predicted that these forms will receive an overall stronger acceptability judgement even in Oldham where *to*-drop is frequent and accepted.

## **5 FINDINGS**

In this section, I first present the findings of the dialect survey in relation to the linguistic variables. Following this, I outline in detail the findings of the non-linguistic variables: generational and geographical.

### **5.1 Linguistic variable**

The data for this variable includes only that provided by participants identifying as being from Oldham as one of the aims of this study is to identify which verbs are judged more grammatical than the others when co-occurring with *to*-drop among Oldham speakers.

Table 2 presents the data for *to*-drop. Judgement scores are provided as averages of all respondents for this category, i.e. Oldham natives from all age brackets. To reiterate, judgements were made on the Likert Scale with 1 meaning this form is never used or heard and 5 meaning it is used or heard very frequently. The cells with no data represent impossible forms (at least in the Oldham dialect and Standard English), e.g., *\*go the Asda*, *\*come the mine*.

Verbal form		Acceptability ratings for <i>to-drop</i>			
		V+ N	V + D + N	V + D <sub>red</sub> + N	Average
<i>go</i>	+ common N	3.55	2.32	3.27	<b>3.05</b>
	+ proper N	3.18			<b>3.18</b>
<i>come</i>	+ common N	3.59	2.27	3.45	<b>3.21</b>
	+ poss. proN	2.55			<b>2.55</b>
<i>been</i>		2.50	2.50	3.45	<b>2.82</b>
<i>pop</i>		2.09	2.00	2.45	<b>2.18</b>
<i>nip</i>		1.82	2.00	2.55	<b>2.13</b>
<i>be off</i>		1.73	1.86	2.23	<b>1.94</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>2.63</b>	<b>2.16</b>	<b>2.90</b>	

Table 2: Acceptability judgement data for *to-drop* in Oldham

It is immediately apparent that *go* and *come* are the verbs from the list that are most accepted with *to-drop*. *To-drop* with *go* plus a common noun is most accepted with zero definite article; otherwise, it is more commonly produced in its reduced form. Additionally, *to-drop* with *go* plus a proper noun demonstrates a relatively strong judgement.

Likewise, for *come*, the strongest judgements are when *to-drop* occurs either without the definite article or in its reduced form. *Come* directly preceding a possessive pronoun shows moderate acceptability.

*Been* is moderately accepted, more so with a reduced definite article present, whereas *pop*, *nip* and *be off* appear to be barely accepted with *to-drop* across the board.

Next, I focus on the three different formulas of V+DP. Looking at the averages in the final row of the table, we see that there is no significant difference between the three. However, we can definitely say that V+D+N is the least acceptable of the three, whereas V+N and V+D<sub>red</sub>+N are roughly equal in terms of acceptability.

Turning now to the acceptability ratings for non-*to-drop* form, we can make a comparison between this and *to-drop*.

Verbal form		Acceptability ratings for non- <i>to</i> -drop			
		V+to+D+N	V + to+ D <sub>red</sub> + N	V+to+N	Average
<i>go</i>	+ common N	3.09	3.64		<b>3.37</b>
	+ proper N			2.73	<b>2.73</b>
<i>come</i>	+ common N	2.91	3.55		<b>3.23</b>
	+ poss. proN			2.50	<b>2.50</b>
<i>been</i>		2.82	3.32		<b>3.07</b>
<i>pop</i>		2.95	4.05		<b>3.50</b>
<i>nip</i>		3.09	3.64		<b>3.37</b>
<i>be off</i>		3.36	3.64		<b>3.50</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>3.04</b>	<b>3.64</b>	<b>2.17</b>	

Table 3: Acceptability judgement data for non-*to*-drop in Oldham

Variation is clear between the acceptability averages of *to*-drop and non-*to*-drop. While *been*, *pop*, *nip*, *be off*, *go*+common noun, and *come*+common noun show overall higher acceptability with non-*to*-drop, *go*+proper noun and *come*+possessive pronoun score higher with *to*-drop.

### 5.1.1 A note about acceptable verb forms

Analysing the data for the linguistic variable, it became immediately clear that *to*-drop with the verbs *pop*, *nip*, and *be off* are judged quite low in terms of acceptability. As a result, a methodological decision was made to exclude the data for these verbs in the sociolinguistic and geographical variable in order to avoid skewing the results of the verbs that are commonly used with *to*-drop. Therefore, only data for the verbs *go*, *come* and *been* were used when considering generational and geographical differences in acceptability.

## 5.2 Generational variable

Turning to the sociolinguistic variable, Table 4 presents the data sorted by age bracket. Average acceptability judgements are provided for each of the types of *to*-drop along with an average for all of the *to*-drop forms. The average for all non-*to*-drop is also given for comparison.

Age bracket	Type of <i>to-drop</i>	Average acceptability judgements
18-44	V+N	3.58
	V+D+N	2.40
	V + D <sub>red</sub> + N	3.07
	<b>Average for all <i>to-drop</i></b>	<b>3.02</b>
	Non- <i>to-drop</i>	2.95
45-69	V+N	2.54
	V+D+N	2.39
	V + D <sub>red</sub> + N	3.17
	<b>Average for all <i>to-drop</i></b>	<b>2.70</b>
	Non- <i>to-drop</i>	3.06
70+	V+N	1.50
	V+D+N	1.67
	V + D <sub>red</sub> + N	4.67
	<b>Average for all <i>to-drop</i></b>	<b>2.61</b>
	Non- <i>to-drop</i>	4.86

Table 4: Acceptability judgement data by generation in Oldham

First it is a clear that non-*to-drop* is more accepted than non-*to-drop* across the two older generations. In contrast, the younger generation shows a preference for *to-drop*.

Looking in more detail at the youngest generation, if we discount the V+D+N form of *to-drop* as well as the V + possessive pronoun, both of which lower the overall average, the judgements for *to-drop* are significantly strong.

In terms of the type of *to-drop*, V+N is judged the most acceptable among the younger age bracket, whereas V+D<sub>red</sub>+N demonstrates the highest acceptability for the two older generations. In fact, they score V+N significantly lower than the 18-44 generation.

### 5.3 Geographical variable

The final variable considered geographical differences; specifically, to what extent is *to-drop* judged acceptable outside of the target area of Oldham. Table 5 presents these findings.

Oldham			Non-Oldham		
<i>To-drop</i>		<i>Non-to-drop</i>	<i>To-drop</i>		<i>Non-to-drop</i>
V+N	3.07	3.07	V+N	2.83	3.29
V+D+N	2.36		V+D+N	2.31	
V + D <sub>red</sub> + N	3.39		V + D <sub>red</sub> + N	2.49	
<b>Average</b>	<b>2.94</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>2.54</b>	<b>3.29</b>

Table 5: Geographical acceptability judgement data

At first glance, the acceptability of *to*-drop in Oldham is higher overall than outside of Oldham (2.94 to 2.54 respectively). Equally for each of the three types of *to*-drop, Oldham respondents scored the sentences as more acceptable, with V+D<sub>red</sub>+N being judged significantly higher in Oldham than outside (3.39 and 2.49 respectively).

It is curious, however, that the overall averages for *to*-drop between the two geographical areas are not hugely different. This suggests that, at least some people from outside Oldham are judging certain sentences as quite acceptable and this was indeed what I found. Table 6 shows the number of non-Oldham responses received for the Likert scores 5-3 for a selection of target sentences:

Target sentence	Grammaticality Score		
	5	4	3
Let's go the gym.	N = 3	N = 8	N = 7
Let's go the gym.	N = 13	N = 8	N = 7
Let's go't gym.	N = 5	N = 3	N = 4
Do you want to go Asda?	N = 12	N = 11	N = 5
Are you coming library?	N = 7	N = 12	N = 8
Are you coming the library?	N = 5	N = 5	N = 7
Are you coming't library?	N = 7	N = 5	N = 5
Would you like to come mine?	N = 9	N = 9	N = 11

*Table 6: Raw acceptability data for a number of target sentences as rated by non-Oldham respondents.*

Although many of these non-Oldham respondents indicated on the questionnaire that they came from the Greater Manchester area, there were some respondents from elsewhere in the country who rated many or most of the above sentences with a Likert score of 3 or above. This indicates that for them these sentences are acceptable. Some of these other locations include Essex, West Yorkshire, Oxfordshire, Kent, Berkshire, and London. Interestingly, though, the vast majority of these respondents are from the 18-44 generation.

## 6 DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Interpretation of key findings

The data has shown that, at least for those chosen for this study, certain verbs are judged as more acceptable than others in being permitted to co-occur with *to*-drop. Ratings for *go*, *come* and *been* demonstrated much higher acceptability than verbs such as *pop* and *nip*. This

supports the proposed hypothesis related to verb frequency with *go*, *come* and *been* being clearly more frequent than the other verbs

In terms of the structure of *to*-dropping, we saw that V+N and V+D<sub>red</sub>+N are more frequent than V+D+N for the two youngest of age brackets surveyed. One possible explanation could be that both of these preferred forms reflect reductions, so that if there is a choice of whether to include the article or not, it is more efficient to either omit it or reduce it.

I hypothesised that standard forms would receive higher grammaticality ratings, and the data supported this. This is explainable by the fact that, even if a particular speaker uses non-standard forms frequently, they are aware of the standard forms and so are less likely to rate them with low acceptability.

The analysis of the sociolinguistic variable provided evidence of, and support for the hypothesis that a change is in progress. The data demonstrated a correlation between age and acceptance of *to*-drop: the younger the speakers, the more likely they were to accept it. Of course, as previously mentioned, participants for the two older age brackets were severely limited in number; nevertheless, the correlation still stands with the data I managed to obtain.

The geographical analysis was rather revealing. Although I predicted that *to*-dropping has been observed outside of the target area, the data suggests this is much more widespread than first thought. It was not only areas in the north of England that previous studies provide support for, but also found in places as far away as Kent. I mentioned that most of the non-Oldham speakers who provided strong grammaticality judgements of *to*-dropping were from the younger generation. This is not evidence in itself, as there are many independent factors that could influence this, such as the simple fact more young people participated in the study. Nevertheless, it is suggestive that this feature may be more generational than locally bound.

## **6.2 Comparison with existing literature**

Given the fact no single study has attempted to answer the same questions I have pursued, making any comparisons can only be based on what has already been researched. My data support the findings of Myler (2011, 2013), (Haddican, 2010) and Biggs (2015) in so far as prepositional *to*-dropping is widespread in certain geographical areas, particular Greater

Manchester, but this current data has revealed certain insights into the variants of the grammatical form of prepositional *to*-drop as well as the possible fact that this may be a change in progress.

### 6.3 Theoretical perspectives

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive theoretical analysis of prepositional *to*-dropping, but I would like to provide a very brief overview of possible explanations. Myler (2011) proposes two theoretical explanations. Supported by cross-linguistic data, there is some evidence to suggest the little-*v* head is able to assign accusative case to the DP without the requirement for an accusative case assigning preposition. The problem with this is why it is only restricted to certain prepositions. Biggs (2015) provides data that seems to weaken this theory. As she observes, although *to*-drop is permitted (as well as stative *at*-drop), it is not permitted with other prepositions:

- (13) a. He's heading \*(from) the station now.  
b. He put the beers \*(in) the fridge. (Biggs, 2015: 17)

The theory would have to explain why little-*v* is sufficient to be the case assigner under certain motion and stative cases, but not with others.

Myler also proposes the theory of preposition incorporation but this requires further investigation to uncover more evidence that this is a viable explanation.

One other possibility I would like to put forward centres around the nature of lexical items in the Lexicon. Dialects which licence motion verbs selecting a DP directly rather than a PP could possibly have slightly adapted sub-categorisation frames from those of Standard English, i.e. the verb *go* in one dialect may select for a DP goal rather than a PP goal. For Liverpudlian English, at least, this is not an accurate analysis, since Biggs (2015) points out that sentences with *to*-drop can successfully undergo *straight*-modification, a common test for prepositions. Thus, (14) is acceptable:

- (14) I'm going straight the pub after this. (Biggs, 2015: 18)

If there were no prepositional head, then *straight*-modification would fail, so the head must be at least syntactically active if not phonologically active, i.e., it is a silent or covert head. Further investigation would be required to determine whether this is also the case for Oldham, and indeed other dialects with *to*-drop.

Although each of these theories has potential, further evidence would be required in order to take any one of them more seriously.

## 7 CONCLUSION

This study has shed some insight into the understudied phenomenon of prepositional *to*-drop. I found evidence in the data collected to support the hypotheses I proposed in section 3. The key findings have shown that there is a change in progress towards *to*-drop, that the feature is more widespread geographically than first assumed, and *to*-drop is accepted more with higher-frequency verbs than with lower-frequency verbs.

Overall, this research has provided a useful contribution to the study of preposition dropping on the one hand, and a new insight to the dialect of Oldham on the other hand.

Further studies could expand the range of verbs that can co-occur with *to*-drop, whether a difference in grammaticality is perceived when a verbal lexeme occurs in a different form, i.e. *go* versus *went*. In order to obtain further support for a diachronic change towards *to*-drop, a more balanced sample should be obtained, particularly with more respondents from the older generation. Finally, much more work is required to definitively conclude whether *to*-dropping is locally bound or a widespread generational phenomenon.

**Word count: 4355**

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## APPENDICES

### 1. List of target sentences used in the dialect questionnaire.

#### **I. GO to + common noun**

1. Let's go gym.
2. Let's go the gym
3. Let's go't gym.
4. Let's go to the gym.
5. Let's go to't gym.

#### **II. GO to + proper noun**

6. Do you want to go Asda?
7. Do you want to go to Asda?

#### **III. COME to+ common noun**

8. Are you coming library?
9. Are you coming the library?
10. Are you coming't library?
11. Are you coming to the library?
12. Are you coming to't library?

#### **IV. COME to + possessive pronoun**

13. Would you like to come to mine?
14. Would you like to come mine?

#### **V. BEEN to**

15. Have you been library today?
16. Have you been the library today?
17. Have you been't library today?
18. Have you been to the library today?
19. Have you been to't library today?

#### **VI. POP to**

20. I'll just pop shop.
21. I'll just pop the shop.
22. I'll just pop't shop.
23. I'll just pop to the shop.
24. I'll just pop to't shop.

#### **VII. NIP to**

25. I need to nip shop.
26. I need to nip the shop.
27. I need to nip't shop.
28. I need to nip to the shop.
29. I need to nip to't shop.

#### **VIII. BE OFF to**

30. Are you off shop?
31. Are you off the shop?

- 32. Are you off't shop?
- 33. Are you off to the shop?
- 34. Are you off to't shop?

2. Extract from dialect survey

- 1. By clicking 'next' below you confirm that you have read and understood the information above, and that you agree to take part in the study. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Agree

Social Background Information

- 2. Did you grow up in Oldham (or very nearby?) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

- 3. If you didn't grow up in Oldham, have you spent a considerable chunk of your life living there?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

- 4. And if you didn't grow up in Oldham, what is the first part of the postcode(s) of the place(s) you have spent most of your life in? (e.g. YO10)

\_\_\_\_\_

- 5. How old are you?

*Mark only one oval.*

18-44

45-69

70+

## Grammaticality judgement survey

This section of the survey asks you to rate sentences on a scale of 1-5 according to how frequently you would use them in your everyday, most relaxed form of speech or whether you would judge them as acceptable if you heard someone use them.

- There are 34 sentences in total.
- You will see each sentence written down and you will be able to listen to the sentence being read aloud.
- It is important to listen to each sentence in addition to reading it, as some dialectal variations are more apparent in spoken form than can be accurately represented in written form.
- Do not let prescriptive "school" grammar rules influence your judgement; instead base your judgement on whether each sentence form you will see and hear is commonly used and/or heard in the area you are from.



[http://youtube.com/watch?](http://youtube.com/watch?v=QZfi2HqupA)

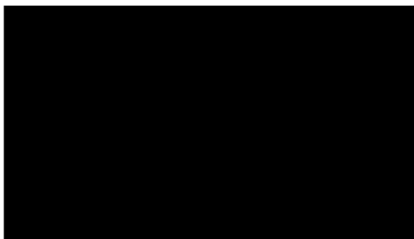
13. I need to nip to't shop. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5

Never      Very frequently

Sentence 9



[http://youtube.com/watch?](http://youtube.com/watch?v=J364Y1jRU2s)

14. Are you coming library? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5

Never      Very frequently

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