

A Certain Romance: Style shifting in the language of Alex Turner in Arctic Monkeys songs 2006-2018

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Abstract

This paper reports on a diachronic study of the language employed by Arctic Monkeys frontman Alex Turner in his songs over a thirteen-year period. The analysis adapts Simpson's (1999) USA-5 model for studying accent in vocal performance, and focuses upon the realisation of three phonological variables and two dialect variables in a 16,000-word corpus of 69 songs across all six albums released by the band. Hailing from High Green, Sheffield, Turner speaks with a vernacular Yorkshire accent, and the band's early appeal (particularly in northern England) is often accredited partially to their authentic down-to-earth image, content and performance. Throughout their career, the band have evolved in terms of their musical genre and style, and, having recorded their first two albums in England, subsequent albums were recorded and produced mostly in Los Angeles. Simpson's model is modified in order to analyse trends in usage of five linguistic variables with non-standard variants iconic of northern British identity, with a view to analysing how Turner's changing linguistic practice relates to his affiliation with vernacular and institutional norms, and thus his performance of different identities within songs.

Keywords

Accent, Arctic Monkeys, dialect, identity, northern English, non-standard, vernacular

I. Introduction

In the song ‘This House is a Circus’ (2007), Arctic Monkeys frontman Alex Turner delivers the line ‘the more you open your mouth, the more you’re forcing performance, and all the attention is leading me to feel important’. Language and identity are two concepts that are inextricably interwoven, with Bucholz and Hall (2010: 18) suggesting that identity is ‘a relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction’, rather than being ‘a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories’. This suggests that people’s understanding of their identity is engendered by and communicated through their use of language and the language of those around them. This analysis focuses on one particularly salient discourse context of interaction: that of popular music.

Pennycook (2007: 3) explains the relative dearth of academic (and particularly linguistic) research in the area of popular music and popular culture more broadly as being one of an ideological origin. He notes that, ‘[f]rom a conservative perspective, popular music and entertainment are the shallow interests of a populace devoid of an interest in higher culture’; nonetheless, there are for Pennycook ‘social, cultural, political, aesthetic, philosophical and educational grounds for seeing popular culture in more complex terms’. Hesmondhalgh (2001: 274) also argues for the need to study and understand popular music texts more comprehensively, and claims that ‘[p]opular music is more than mere entertainment. It is a means by which people affirm, create and nurture their individual identities’. In this project, a quantitative language ideological approach is adopted to study the changing language of Alex Turner across the Arctic Monkeys’ six albums to date.

Beach (2002: 2) notes that artists can ‘convey social distinctions through such linguistic signs as accent, diction, vocabulary, grammar and verbal proficiency, as well as the sound of the voice itself’. Turner and his bandmates grew up in High Green, a suburb of Sheffield in South Yorkshire, England. His local Yorkshire accent was one of the most noticeable features of their early career as they were one of the last guitar bands to enjoy a high level of success in the British singles chart. Robinson (2016: 1) notes that ‘what’s perhaps more remarkable than Turner’s use of dialect words and grammar here is that he also sings in a Sheffield accent’, something that he reflects on as being ‘curiously absent from mainstream popular music (though often central to traditional and/or folk music)’. Over time, however, it has been noted that Turner’s vocal stylings have changed considerably. Petridis (2018: 1), for example, notes that ‘[t]he Yorkshire dialect that was once his USP is now

deployed sparingly, as a jolting effect’, and that ‘he regularly shifts into a mid-Atlantic easy-listening croon [...] that seems deliberately mannered’. The perceived desertion of his local vernacular in favour of American-stylised delivery and perhaps a more measured appropriation of overtly prestigious forms have drawn criticism from fans and journalists, although Turner told popular music magazine *NME* in 2013 that this shift was ‘not intentional’ (Stevens, 2013: 1).

This project conducts a quantitative study of five linguistic variables to evaluate the extent to which Turner’s language choices have changed during the course of his 13-year career to date. The work of Trudgill (1983), Simpson (1999) and Beal (2009) is particularly instructive in the methodology, which adapts Simpson’s USA-5 model and combines this method with Beal’s language ideological approach to studying Alex Turner’s performance.

In section 2, some background is provided on the linguistic study of popular music texts and popular culture more broadly, with special attention being paid to the work of the three aforementioned authors. In section 3, context and justification are provided for the selection of the texts focused upon, and the model and variables investigated, as well as some discussion of the changing nature of the band’s sound and genre and its significance in interpreting the data. A detailed analysis of the data is provided in section 4 before this data is then evaluated in section 5 in terms of proposing explanations for the changing linguistic identity of the Arctic Monkeys frontman. Finally, in section 6, some summary remarks are offered in terms of the overall outcomes of the study.

2. Background

Popular music is an extremely interesting genre of discourse for linguistic study as not only does it represent a multi-billion-dollar global enterprise based on mass communication, but it is also an industry in which language use is central to its purpose. While pop music is often considered ‘a kind of modern poetry’ (Werner, 2012: 24), it is notable that the mode of discourse of texts in this genre is primarily an oral one. Although songs are usually written before they are sung, their written elements are arguably secondary to the vocal performance. Laing (2003) discusses the complex nature of vocal style in popular music, noting that this is a genre of spoken language in which speakers often effect accents and modes of delivery that are not necessarily reflective of their usual spoken voice. Laing (2003: 207) notes how British pop singers have ‘[a] complex relation to American vocal styles [...] including both imitation and resistance’. This adoption of varieties unfamiliar to the speaker or singer is labelled by

Rampton (1995) as ‘language crossing’ and has been found to be emblematic of many artists creating texts in the pop music genre.

One of the first linguists to conduct a systematic study of this process was Trudgill (1983). Trudgill studied British pop and rock songs quantitatively from the 1950s through to the late 1970s, and found that they had a number of phonetic features typical of American English. Reflecting on the nature of pop music as a discourse genre, he notes that ‘[p]op music is a field where language is especially socially symbolic’ (1983: 159), and that in contexts in which language is central to the communication of their identity to their audiences, ‘there can be no doubt that singers are modifying their linguistic behaviour’ (1983: 143). Trudgill links this language crossing to Le Page’s work on imitation (1975, and others), in which speakers attempt to mimic the speech forms of a model group with which they wish to identify; this is similar to accommodation theory, except that it is not the addressee’s variety which is adopted, but one which is considered to be respected by the audience as a prestige form. As such, it is recognised that American English is the institutional norm for the genre of popular music.

Trudgill’s (1983) project involves a real-time trend study of albums from 1963-65 (two each by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones) and 1978-79 (by four different bands). Trudgill found that the American-influenced use of rhotic /r/ in these songs fell from 36% to 4% of tokens, which he takes as evidence of a change during this period. While he notes that his data do not really provide evidence for this change beyond his focus sample, he suggests that this is in fact the case (1983: 150). His case study on the Beatles between 1963 and 1970 supports this theory more strongly, and a comparison of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in the 1960s shows a reduction in American-stylised flapped realisations of intervocalic /t/. Trudgill attributes this shift away from American styles to a change in genre and outlook:

[The Beatles’] change in pronunciation reflects a change in genre. Their early songs are often clearly in the rock-and-roll mould, while later songs tend to be more complex, contemplative, poetic, and so on. The subject matter of the songs changes too, and the later songs, now written entirely by themselves, show an increase in more obviously British themes and locales. (Trudgill, 1983: 153)

Trudgill concludes that the choice of linguistic features is influenced by the projected image desired by an artist, and that, by the 1970s, British accents had become more commonplace in

the delivery of pop music acts, a trend which was influenced both by the development of the British music scene as an enterprise, and the rise of punk. The author notes ‘an intention to aid identification with and/or by British working class youth, and to appeal to others who wish to identify with them, their situation and their values’ (1983: 155). This change in prestige forms brings about what Trudgill refers to as ‘a conflict between “how to behave like a genuine pop singer” and “how to behave like a British urban working-class youth”’ (1983: 159).

Simpson’s work on popular music is inspired by Trudgill’s findings that British acts may be switching towards a more authentic delivery style indicative of British identities rather than institutionalised global prestige forms. Simpson (1999: 344) describes popular music as ‘a longitudinal cultural form that is as fickle as it is pervasive’, suggesting a dynamic and mutable genre of discourse which merits attention. Simpson’s USA-5 model for studying American-influenced features in British pop music is based on Trudgill’s work, but offers a more systematic framework for this kind of study. This model features five of the most iconic features of American English: intervocalic /t/ flapped and realised as [ɾ] or hyperdialectal [d]; fronted, long [a:] for the BATH vowel; the same realisation for the PRICE vowel; rhotic post-vocalic /r/; and an unrounded LOT vowel. Simpson promotes this model as effective, although does note some limitations in that certain British accents also contain these variants. Many English speakers from the southwest counties and South Wales have rhotic accents and the fronted BATH form, for example, while unrounded LOT is found in Irish varieties of English and monophthongal PRICE is found in many northern varieties, including that of Sheffield, the home of Alex Turner, the focus of this study.

In his application of the USA-5 model, Simpson also considers the lexicogrammatical choices of artists and how these correspond to the accent features used in the delivery of the lyrics, often finding that American lexis and grammatical structures are more common in songs in which the singer employs an Americanised accent. Simpson (1999: 362) also notes, however, that the trend towards a homogenous stylised rock delivery ‘has forced bands to try to carve out their identity by searching for a generic label which marks them out as different or unique’. While this is linked explicitly to the many labels for sub-genres which developed in the 1990s, this also relates to the concept of authenticity: of being somehow *real*, independent from and outside of the controlling powers of the machine of the music industry.

A decade on, Beal (2009) builds on Simpson's work, but adopts a more qualitative language ideological approach to her study of the language used by Alex Turner, and how features of northern English index qualities of authenticity and independence from the mainstream corporate machine. Her study involves a comparison of accent features in a radio interview given by Turner, with those he uses in the song 'Mardy Bum', to explore how 'authentic' the performance is in terms of how similar it is to his everyday vernacular. Beal (2009: 236) recognises 'similarities between spoken and sung output, at least on a phonological level', and notes that such authenticity is not incidental, but rather the exercise of 'performing their Sheffield identity in a very knowing and sophisticated manner' (2009: 224). Beal notes a target audience of young people from Sheffield in a vibrant local music scene, but also of students from other local northern towns in Yorkshire and further afield in Manchester. She recognises a number of iconic features of Turner's local accent in his delivery, including the word *right* being realised as [rɛɪ?], which is considered to be 'proper Yorkshire' (2009: 231).

Beal's study found that Turner employs more non-standard morpho-syntax in his interview speech than in his songs, suggesting that '[p]erhaps Turner, as a lyricist, avoids using nonstandard morpho-syntactic features in composition because he sees this as inappropriate in what he perceives as a written medium' (2009: 236). Her evaluation of Turner's consistent use of vernacular accent forms is linked to concepts of authenticity, youth and working-class identity. Beal (2009: 230) recognises that 'the North and northerners are stereotypically portrayed as working class, "hard" and down-to-earth [and that] Northern English accents evoke these stereotypes'. It is clear from this study that Beal concurs with Simpson and Trudgill that modern pop artists are aware of the effect of their accent choices, and that an allegiance to a local covert prestige form may be the best strategy for engaging with their target market: converging towards a style which is familiar and valued by their audience.

Coupland (2007: 85) talks about the ideological basis for variation in style, citing the cultural capital involved in using particular varieties to 'cash in' on the prestige attached to them. Coupland (2007: 89) recognises that speakers of English are particularly sensitive to what features they use in their speech and that it can be a 'risky business' when style-shifting to varieties with different levels of prestige (e.g. American English in pop music performed by British acts), which an audience may not appreciate. However, the same author also goes on to note that speakers may often stylise their speech as a form of 'strategic inauthenticity,

with complex implications for personal and cultural authenticity in general' (2007: 154). As such, the approximation by British artists of American-influenced repertoires may be considered as a deliberate and motivated decision in terms of marketing their music to a broad audience.

Thornborrow (2004: 170) suggests that '[s]peakers may wish to be identified with different groups at different times, and their linguistic patterns may produce a shift [...] between different varieties of a language'. Shuker (2012: 23) discusses the concept of authenticity as being central to modern rock music, and notes that 'vernacular community-based styles [...] are frequently perceived as more authentic than their commercialized forms'. He adds that authenticity is central to the ideology communicated and that the use of their own accent helps to provide an element of 'musical cultural capital' (2012: 23). Hesmondhalgh (1999) focuses on the mainstreaming of the indie genre in the 1990s, noting that authenticity was central to the marketing of new bands. He notes the rise in a lyrical style which was considered intelligent and often had 'counter-hegemonic aims' (1999: 38). A reaction against the corporate machine or the control of the powerful classes is seen as central to many bands' identities, and the use of local accents is considered to indicate individuality and 'a contempt for popular culture' (1999: 53).

Cloonan (1997: 54) considers the concept of Englishness in British rock music. He notes that 'England is a country deeply divided by class, race, region and gender. It is multicultural, not monolithic, and the divisions within the English nation can also be seen within pop Englishness'. The selection of accents to foreground particular elements of an artist's identity exploits an audience's awareness of, and sensitivity to, these different kinds of Englishness. Wall's (2013: 209) analysis of the representation of social actors in pop music leads him to note the importance of '[g]etting to grips with how popular music constructs the individual images of pop performers and relates to wider cultural groups'. Bennett (2000: 34) also foregrounds the significance of popular music to local youth culture, while other studies have noted the link between youth, social class and vernacular forms of music more broadly (McWhorter, 2004; Fox, 2004).

Frith (1988: 120) emphasises the importance of recognising the oral mode of a song, and explains that 'a song is always a performance, and song words are always spoken out, heard in someone's accent'. Morrissey (2008: 194) notes that the use of British accents had 'reached a new high' by the turn of the century, with Machin (2010: 137) suggesting that British accents are employed by singers to create an impression of authenticity: '[t]his was

how real people spoke without self-conscious stylisation. [...] It serves to make the vocals – and indirectly the music – less generic, increasing authenticity and a sense of personal identity’. Wiseman-Trowse (2008: 79) also speaks of the ‘perceived authentic qualities’ of local vernacular accents, and links this explicitly to the Arctic Monkeys, who are cited here as an example of ‘the working-class folk voice’ that is said to signal ‘the opposition between the form and the medium, between the music and the music industry’ (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008: 79).

This study assesses the extent to which Turner’s vocal style has changed since Wiseman-Trowse’s comments a decade ago.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

The data analysed comprise the recorded version of every track from each of the Arctic Monkeys’ six albums, from 2006’s *Whatever People Say I Am, That’s What I’m Not* (henceforth *WPS*) through to 2018’s *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* (henceforth *TBHC*). All lyrics from every track are included, with the exception of ‘Brick By Brick’ from 2011’s *Suck It and See*, which was sung by drummer Matt Helders. Similarly, any backing vocals not performed by Alex Turner are not included in the study. The resultant data thus comprise 69 tracks across a 13-year period: a total of roughly 16,000 words. **As shown in Figure 1 below**, albums vary from 10 (*Humbug*) to 13 (*TBHC*) tracks, with the average song length being 235 words. The album with the longest average song length is the debut album *WPS*, while *Suck It and See* has an average song length of just 160 words. By analysing every track from all six albums, a representative view can be taken of how Turner’s language use has changed during his career to date, and there is no question of cherry-picking particular tracks which exemplify more dramatically the general trends exhibited by Turner in his delivery. Where relevant, particular tracks and linguistic examples are noted in the analysis, but the main focus is on the average figures across each album (as justified by Trudgill, 1995).

	Year	Number of tracks	Total number of words	Average number of words per track
Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not	2006	13	3595	277
Favourite Worst Nightmare	2007	12	2841	237
Humbug	2009	10	2487	249
Suck It and See	2011	12	1920	160
AM	2013	12	3124	260
Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino	2018	11	2531	230
Average		11.67	2749.67	235.40

Figure 1. Arctic Monkeys albums and average words per track.

As this study is diachronic in nature, and concerns the extent to which Turner's vocal and narrative style changes across the lifespan of the band to date, it is important to consider the artistic evolution of both Turner as a singer-songwriter, and the band as a whole. To this end, I follow Beal (2009) in considering the reflections of Alexis Petridis, the primary music reviewer for *The Guardian*, whose reviews for each of their six albums chart the band's changing musical, lyrical and broader style choices. Trudgill (1983) attributes the changes in vocal style used by the Beatles to a change in their musical genre, and this is also relevant here to how Turner's use of language varies across his career.

3.2 Albums

Petridis (2006: 1) notes that, on the band's first album, there is an apparent 'refusal to tone down [Turner's] dialect', and the content of the songs is very much rooted in the band's local experiences of growing up in northern Britain, with songs about prostitutes, relationships and getting into fights with club doormen. Petridis notes a sense of authenticity and a lack of apology for not conforming to industry standards, referring to a 'compelling urgency and snotty confidence' in their performance. While the second album moves on to some extent, the content remains broadly similar in tone, and both albums were recorded in the UK, the first in Lincoln, and the second in London. Petridis (2007: 1) highlights a subtle change in sound based on new influences from 'woozy psychedelia' to 'piledriving metal'.

For the third album, 2009's *Humbug*, Turner was now living in Brooklyn, and Petridis (2009: 1) asks '[w]hat do you do when you're removed from the environment that inspired you?'. He refers to a 'new, darker sound' which is 'as far from the brittle clang once heard on [2006's] *A Certain Romance* and *Mardy Bum* as producer Josh Homme's Californian desert studio [where the album was recorded] is from Sheffield'. This was the first of the band's albums to be recorded in America, with the more poetic and melodic *Suck It and See* following two years later. Petridis (2011: 1) describes it as their first album 'that tries to ensnare the listener with its tunes rather than guitar riffs or Turner's lyrics'. He refers to the lyrical style as 'dense, Dylan-esque wordplay', and with lyrics such as 'I etched the face of a stopwatch on the back of a raindrop', the content is often more abstract and less rooted in realism than previous offerings. Petridis (2011: 1) accuses the album of 'occasionally sounding ordinary' in comparison to their earlier work, which perhaps suggests a perception of this more poetic form being more generic and less individualistic than the more vernacular style and content of their previous output.

The band's fifth album, *AM* (2013), returns to the more tangible content of the first album, with songs about relationships and nights out becoming the staple subject matter once again. Petridis (2013: 1) notes new musical influences from '90s G-funk', hip-hop, Motown and '70s glam rock', with American genres of music becoming more of a feature in Turner's songwriting. Petridis (2013: 1) sums up this change, noting the tendency of the band to 'swing rather than scuffle'. Their most recent album, 2018's *TBHC*, moves on in content matter to reflect on the music industry and the present socio-political climate. Petridis (2018: 1) comments on Turner's abandonment of 'the Yorkshire dialect that was once his USP', noting that its occasional use has a 'jolting effect'. He again highlights notable influences from American singers, with 'chewy vowels' and a 'mid-Atlantic easy-listening croon'. The transition from young men singing to their friends about shared adolescent experiences in Yorkshire to successful but cynical rock stars living in America is very notable in their changing musical and lyrical style. While Petridis does not mention it, this change is also reflected in the album title, which adopts the American spelling of 'tranquility' rather than the British English variant, 'tranquillity'. Thematically, 2018 sees the band moving on from the everyday subject matter of their earlier work, and from the abstract poetic tendencies of more recent releases. It is also, however, a return to a more palpable kind of social commentary, albeit from a more global perspective than on their first two albums.

3.3 Model

The analysis is based on five variables that are considered significant in evaluating the extent to which Turner adopts competing prestige forms in order to perform (linguistically) particular identities. Each variable allows an assessment of whether Turner elects to use variants typical of his vernacular northern British accent, or whether he exhibits language crossing and adopts forms typical of either Standard British English or Americanised forms. In this sense, it is similar to the USA-5 model developed by Simpson (1999), but with the variables modified in order to fit the task at hand. As Turner is from Sheffield, but is said to have adopted more American forms over time, analysis of such features as long open [a:] for the PRICE vowel are ultimately redundant as this is common both in Turner's vernacular and in American English. The variables selected include three accent variables, and two dialect variables, with the rationale for selection being as follows.

The STRUT vowel is the first variable analysed as, in northern British local accents, this is typically closer than in southern British (and RP) and American accents, with the vernacular northern /ʊ/ contrasting with the overt prestige form /ʌ/ (Trudgill, 1995: 38). As this vowel is particularly iconic in terms of the fact that its close realisation is indexical of vernacular northern identity (Meyerhoff, 2006: 14), this is a particularly relevant variable to investigate in terms of being a linguistic marker of Turner's local and sociocultural background.

The BATH/TRAP vowels are the second variable analysed. In RP, the BATH vowel is typically realised as a long vowel /ɑ:/, while in American English, this is more commonly /a:/. The TRAP vowel in RP is historically /æ/, but more recently found to be realised as /a/ (Wells, 1982: 291-292), while the American form tends to be the same /æ/ as in conservative RP. In northern British English, these vowels tend to be merged as /a/, making a comparison possible between a vernacular realisation (/a/) and a form which crosses into a more overt prestige variant (/æ/, /a:/ or /ɑ:/). Trudgill (1995: 37) notes that vowels are 'often socially more significant than consonants', suggesting that indexing an average usage of socially significant variants such as non-standard forms of the BATH/TRAP vowel is a good way of evaluating how speakers use language to communicate their identity.

Each of the vowels considered in this model is examined in stressed syllables only, so as to avoid neutral, unstressed variants such as the middle syllable in 'metaphor' (from 'Library Pictures'), which typically exhibit /ə/ realisations. In this light, words such as *that*, which can appear in multiple syntactic environments, are included or excluded based on the

function in context: *that* is included when functioning as a demonstrative and thus stressed (as in ‘That’s Where You’re Wrong’); it is excluded from the study when functioning as a relative pronoun and thus likely to be unstressed (as in ‘I imagine that it’s there on a plate’, from ‘Teddy Picker’).

The third variable is the realisation of /h/ in words such as *head* and *heart*. The dropping of word-initial /h/ is a supralocal feature of non-standard English which is present in Turner’s vernacular, as well as in most other non-standard British English accents. It is much less common in US English and RP, so the study of this variable is also indicative of the extent to which Turner either conforms to local vernacular norms or adopts institutional overt prestige forms.

The final two variables complement the examination of phonetic features by considering the presence of non-standard dialectal forms. Variable four is non-standard lexis, while the final variable is non-standard grammar. Non-standard lexis is defined here as any words which are listed by the OED as slang, colloquial or regional/dialect, or any not listed in the OED. Examples include ‘mardy’ (from ‘Mardy Bum’: a northern British term denoting irritability), ‘cos’ (from ‘Perhaps Vampires is a Bit Strong But ...’: a colloquial realisation of *because*), and ‘girls of the night’ (from ‘When the Sun Goes Down’: a slang term for prostitutes), all from their debut album. Non-standard grammatical features are defined here as anything which is not considered British Standard English, and include colloquial clippings such as ‘ain’t’ and ‘int’ (regularly used in place of *isn’t*), non-standard case selection (‘you and me could have been a team’, from ‘Knee Socks’), non-standard concord, and double negation (‘it don’t take no Sherlock Holmes’, from ‘A Certain Romance’: an example which illustrates both features). While non-standard grammar is common in informal speech contexts, it is important to remember that, as each song analysed is a non-spontaneous text, the lexico-grammatical choices are deliberate and motivated, and reflect a particular attitude towards the discourse context, as well as the creation (for Turner) of a particular persona, and a specific relationship with the audience.

The presence of non-standard dialect features may relate to Turner’s desire to identify with a northern British audience, or the extent to which he wishes to perform his own authentic identity. It might similarly be considered that it reflects his attitude to the institutional norms of the genre, and the extent to which he wishes to conform to them. These dialectal variables are features which are carefully composed and decided upon long in advance of the recording of the songs, and are thus less spontaneous than the phonetic

features being studied. As such, they reflect Turner's explicit and deliberate decisions in terms of his use of language, while the phonetic variants might be considered to be more implicit and non-deliberate. The combination of the two kinds of variable thus provides an appropriately varied perspective on Turner's changing use of language across the band's albums.

To evaluate Turner's change in language use over time, the three phonetic variables are collated to provide an overall percentage of non-standard phonetic features for each album, and the lexis and grammar are also combined. Tokens were identified in lyric sheets, and then analysed by ear to determine which variant is present in the performed tracks. This was done on two separate occasions in order to verify the accuracy of the data, and this was further confirmed after being checked by an independent verifier. As the number of words in each album varies between 1920 (*Suck It and See*) and 3595 (*WPS*), the number of non-standard dialect features is normalised by considering how many tokens per thousand words (henceforth, ptw) are present on each album. Normalisation is provided for phonetic features by presenting figures as percentages of all variables which are realised as vernacular non-standard forms. As an example, on their debut album, 95.65% of Turner's STRUT vowels are realised as Northern /ʊ/, and there are 34.21 non-standard dialect features ptw.

This model is selected based on Simpson's (1999) USA-5 model but is adapted to the linguistic features that are considered most significant in the communication of the singer's identity in terms of their regional vernacular and the institutional norms of the genre. As such, I refer to this framework as *the Northern-5 Model*, and will evaluate the extent to which it is productive to adapt Simpson's 5-feature model when used to analyse the changing language of particular singers. This model thus builds on Trudgill's (1983) and Simpson's (1999) work by focusing on one particular artist and developing a model specific to the overt and covert prestige variants sensitive to the singer; it also builds on Beal's (2009) work by providing a quantitative dataset and a diachronic study of Turner's sung style. While Beal compared Turner's use of dialect features in interviews with that in his sung lyrics, this study focuses not so much on a synchronic comparison of his language across styles or mediums, but rather on his shift in style over time, and the competing motivations for this linguistic behaviour.

4. Analysis

4.1 Phonetic features

<i>Album</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>STRUT</i>	<i>/h/</i>	<i>/a/</i>	<i>Total</i>
WPS	2006	95.65	67.95	100.00	89.14
Favourite Worst Nightmare	2007	93.18	66.41	100.00	85.75
Humbug	2009	88.37	44.94	90.71	77.14
Suck It and See	2011	50.75	26.32	58.06	46.86
AM	2013	22.24	15.41	29.51	22.82
TBHC	2018	26.99	23.56	16.64	22.35

Figure 2. Percentage of non-standard phonetic variants chronologically by album.

Figure 2 above displays the percentage of non-standard phonetic variants across Arctic Monkeys albums. The most immediate trend observable is that all three variables are realised with a much lower percentage of non-standard vernacular northern British English variants over time, as demonstrated further by the graph in Figure 3 below. This is a dramatic decline in Turner's local vernacular forms, which are especially prevalent (85-90%) on the first two albums, which are broadly similar in terms of the data. There is then a gradual decline over the next three albums in Turner's use of local forms, until the final two albums level out at just over 20% of variants being realised in his vernacular. The reasons for this rather striking shift are considered in section 5, and the trends for each variable are considered below. What is notable overall is that Turner's language can be divided into three periods: the first (the first two albums) is notably northern, while the third (the last two albums) is much less northern, and the second (their third and fourth albums) is a transition period between the two.

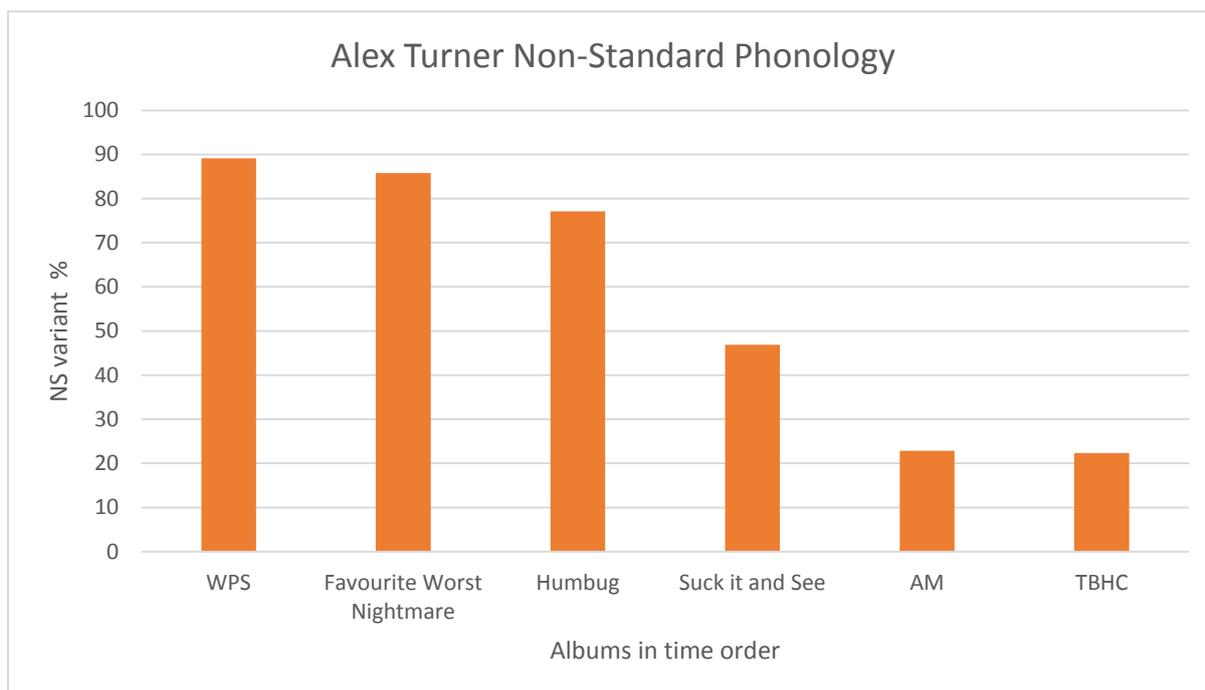


Figure 3. Trend graph for non-standard phonology over time.

For all three variants, non-standard forms are realised in decreasing numbers over time, although the trends for each individual variable are not identical. As shown in Figure 4, the two vowels exhibit fairly similar trajectories, with the band’s first two albums having all tokens of BATH/ TRAP realised as [a], and 94.4% of STRUT realised as non-standard forms. Most of these tokens are the northern [ʊ], although there are also occasional intermediate ‘fudged’ variants which sound closer to [ə], a feature also found by Trudgill (1983) in British singers’ accents. Over time, non-standard forms of BATH/TRAP drop steadily and consistently with each album down to a low of 16.6% on their most recent album. This variable is the most regularly standardised realisation on the new album among the focus features. While non-standard realisations of STRUT drop at a similar rate, there is a slight upturn on the latest album, with 27% of tokens exhibiting non-standard variants. While h-dropping also becomes less common over time, there is a similarly slight upturn demonstrated on the most recent album. The percentage of h-dropping is somewhat lower on the first two albums, with roughly one in three tokens retaining the initial /h/ in accordance with overt prestige forms in British and American English.

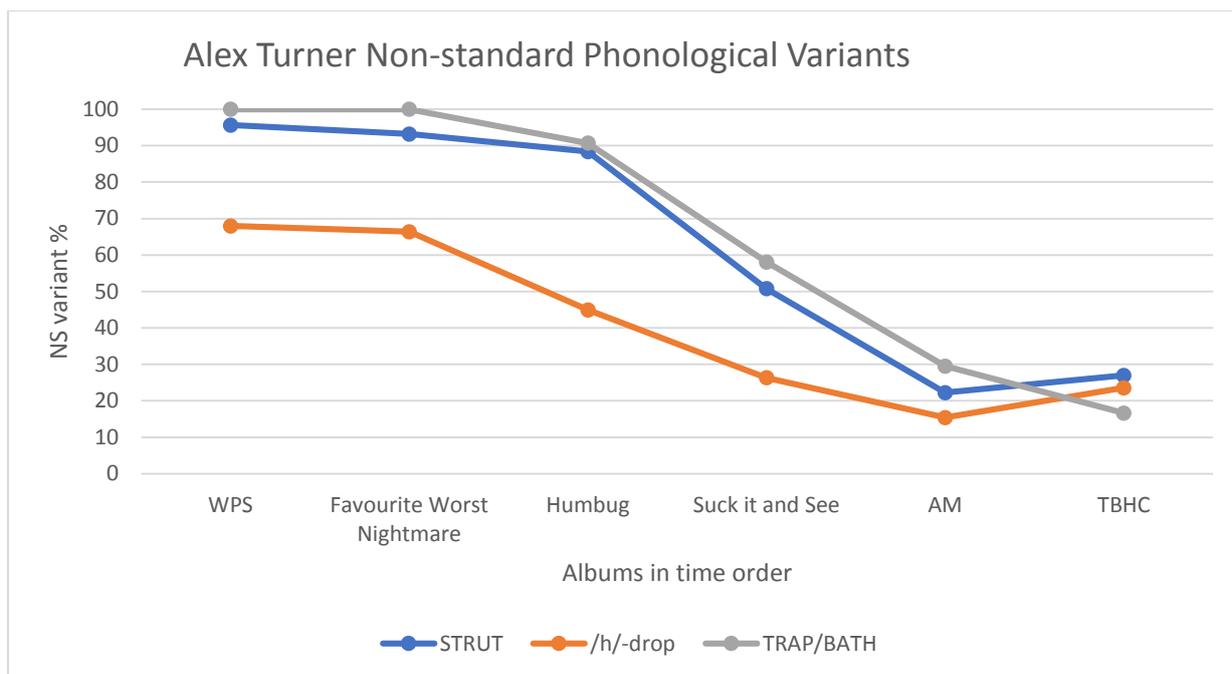


Figure 4. Trend graph of non-standard phonological variants over time.

4.2 Dialect Features

Album	Year	Non-standard features per thousand words (ptw)		
		Grammar	Lexis	Total
WPS	2006	12.80	21.42	34.21
Favourite Worst Nightmare	2007	2.11	9.15	11.26
Humbug	2009	0.80	2.01	2.81
Suck It and See	2011	0.52	4.17	4.69
AM	2013	3.52	2.24	5.76
TBHC	2018	3.16	5.93	9.09

Figure 5. Non-standard grammar and lexis (per thousand words) across albums.

Figure 5 above displays the percentage of non-standard dialect forms across each of the band's albums. While these albums can be divided into three distinct periods according to their increasingly standardised phonetic features, the trends here are more complex, as demonstrated by the graph in Figure 6. The debut album is notably different to the other

albums in that it has more than three times as many non-standard dialectal forms than even their second album, which is the next closest. The general trend over time is that of a U-curve, with non-standard grammar and lexis dropping dramatically across the first three albums, but then ascending at a slower rate across their subsequent albums. Explanations for these trends are discussed in section 5, and more detailed examination of the results for lexis and grammar is supplied below.

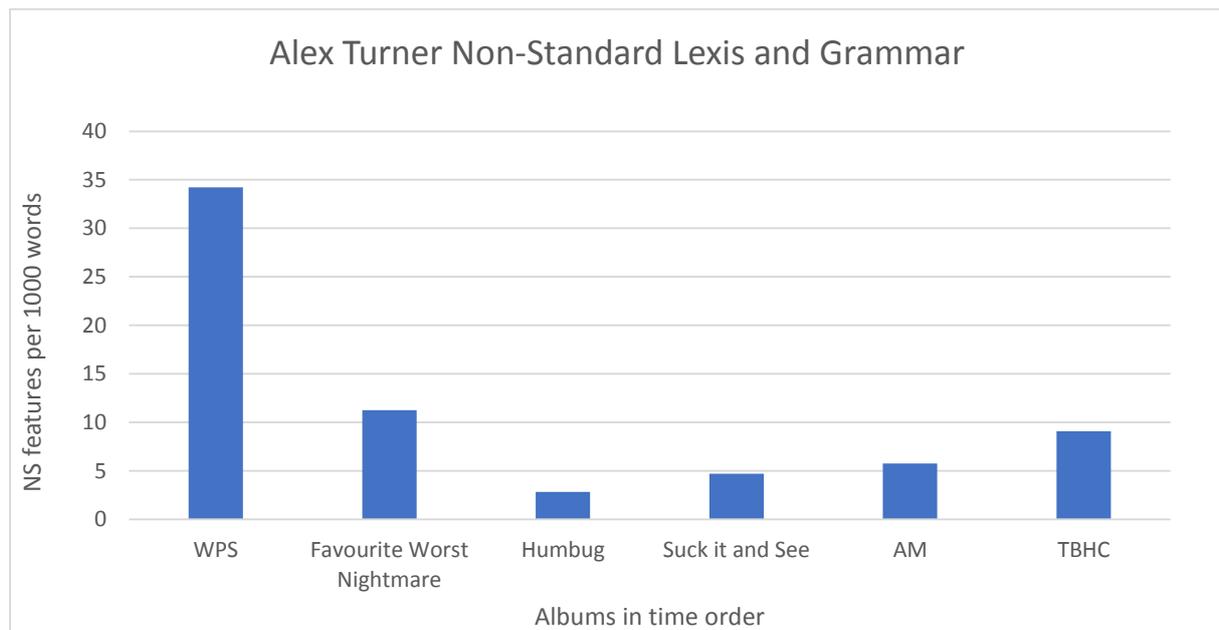


Figure 6. Trend graph of non-standard dialect forms over time.

As previously mentioned, the band’s debut album is particularly notable for its high proportion of non-standard grammatical and lexical features, compared to other albums. All 13 songs on the album feature non-standard lexis, with ‘Mardy Bum’ containing no less than 14 examples of this, including the local dialect word in the title, local colloquialisms such as ‘now then’, ‘right [= very] hard’ and ‘all [= very] argumentative’, and slang terms such as ‘you’ve got the face on’. Only one song on the album has no non-standard grammatical features, this being ‘Fake Tales of San Francisco’.

Non-standard lexis is more commonplace than non-standard grammar on all of their albums, with the exception being 2013’s *AM*. There is a very steep drop between the first two albums from 34 to 11 non-standard tokens ptw, with 2007’s *Favourite Worst Nightmare* featuring considerably fewer dialect forms than its predecessor, but considerably more than the subsequent two albums. *Humbug* (2009) drops down to 2.81 features per 1000 words, with most of these being lexical, and it is this album which, in terms of dialect, is the least

recognisable as coming from northern Britain. *Suck It and See* (2011) contains the fewest non-standard grammatical features, with the single token being ‘I took the batteries out my mysticism’, from ‘The Hellcat Spangled Shalalala’. Even this feature is only a subtle example of non-standard grammar, with the preposition *of* elided before the final noun phrase. While it contains considerably more non-standard lexis than both its predecessor and 2013’s *AM*, its successor has far more examples of non-standard grammar. The most recent album, 2018’s *TBHC*, is the album with the third most non-standard dialectal features, moving back towards the trends established at the start of their career. While the two most recent albums have higher numbers in terms of non-standard grammar than the band’s second album (3.52 and 3.16, compared to 2.11 ptw), the non-standard lexis is considerably lower (2.24, 5.93 and 9.15).

5. Discussion

It is unquestionable that Turner’s lyrical and vocal style has changed considerably during the 13 years he has been active as a singer-songwriter. The phonological features have shifted over time, demonstrating an orientation towards non-vernacular forms which are not the usual variants used in his local accent. This language crossing conforms to trends found by Trudgill (1983), Laing (2003), Thornborrow (2004), Pennycook (2007), and Coupland (2007), who found that performers are sensitive to institutional prestige forms. Petridis’ (2009) suggestions of the significance of Turner’s move to New York and his writing and recording far away from the environment in which early work was produced seem valid here, although it also seems probable that a shift in musical and lyrical style influences the language employed by the singer.

The TRAP/BATH variable is the one which is most straightforward here in that it has moved gradually and steadily away from the vernacular northern /a/, which is realised in 100% of tokens on the first two albums, but then sinks down to 17% by the time the latest album was released in 2018. This is clearly a linguistic marker, and most visibly illustrates the move towards an American-influenced accent. The STRUT vowel is similarly almost ubiquitous on the first two albums but drops again through the band’s mid-career period, in which the local forms are gradually replaced by incoming prestige forms when the band move to America and become more central to the music industry. The slight increase in Northern forms on the latest album is notable in both the STRUT vowel and the realisation of /h/; this may be explicable by the shift in musical direction exhibited by the band, with the

high concept and political content, and a musical style very dissimilar to all their previous work. It is logical to link this resistance to their recent history and perhaps to their developed identity as a mainstream band, to a return to slightly more vernacular forms.

Often the most interesting period for the band is that which encompasses their mid-career albums: 2009's darker, heavier *Humbug* and 2011's lighter, more poetic *Suck It and See*. These two albums represent a phonological transition period for Turner, and also exhibit the lowest frequency of non-standard dialect forms, and feature arguably the most deliberately 'non-British' lyrics as a result. This is where Beal's (2009) suggestion that Turner may be inclined to avoid non-standard grammar and lexis in his lyrics due to a perceived lack of appropriateness for the genre may be most notable. When Turner's writing is more poetic and represents a deliberate move away from the everyday realism of his earlier work, it makes sense that he would be more inclined to use a more formal language style that is also divorced from that realism. Petridis' (2009) observation that the art is so far away from their previous outputs is reflected in Turner's performance.

The return to their customary subject matter on *AM* (2013) brings a return of the non-standard dialectal forms as Turner perhaps feels a need to re-accommodate to his core audience demographic of young northern British people. However, the phonetic style (i.e. the performance) is increasingly stylised American and reflects the musical direction and the new home of the band. It is evident throughout the 13-year range of the data that Turner has access to both American and northern British styles, and produces them based on a set of competing motivations, which include subject matter, attitude to the music industry, musical style, and his own living situation. The trends exhibited in the language employed by the frontman reflect how his attitude to these entities has shifted from one album to the next. As such, his lyric 'the more you open your mouth, the more you're forcing performance' really holds perhaps a greater significance than Turner may have intended when writing it in 2007. Every utterance performed by Turner (and, by extension, by pop music artists more broadly) is a performance of linguistic identity: a language ideological act which expresses a range of attitudes in the performer towards their own selected place in relation to other actors and entities within the industry.

6. Summary

As noted earlier, Wiseman-Trowse (2008: 79) refers to the Arctic Monkeys as an example of 'the working-class folk voice', said to signal 'the opposition between the form and the

medium, between the music and the music industry'. The data here suggest that this was certainly true at the author's time of writing, after the band's second album in 2007. However, over time, Turner's singing style has notably shifted away from a delivery that is more in keeping with his local accent and identity, and more towards the institutional norms of the music industry. The fact that Turner's use of iconic phonetic variants changes from one album to another suggests, despite his claims to the contrary, that he does have an overt awareness of the different prestige accorded to the different varieties at his disposal. Turner's use of local British non-standard lexis and grammar show that he is still attached to the band's origins in Sheffield, but a gradual move towards American-influenced phonology reflects the changing identity of the band in terms of their musical genre and style. The slight upturn in vernacular features on the most recent albums may be associated with the return to more tangible subject matter, but it will be interesting to observe over the coming years whether this is indicative of a new trend, and whether the band's next album continues this return to their British roots, or if the balance between British and American influence in Turner's delivery levels out.

The efficacy of the data presented here in demonstrating the shifting away from Turner's vernacular justifies the decision to apply Simpson's (1999) model with variants particular to the subject of study; in this light, I argue that the USA-5 model is very effective for analysing trends in language practice, but is best viewed as a flexible and adaptable framework depending on the subject of study. The five variables studied here show that this is an intelligent singer who knows how to shift his style according to the audience, musical style and the overall desired effect. Whether this is the 'strategic inauthenticity' referred to by Coupland (2007: 154) is arguably a matter of opinion. It is important to recognise that popular music is a performance; and, by Turner's own admission, one that is forced.

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