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Review of *Voices of the UK: Accents and Dialects of English* (2010)

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This CD collection, published to coincide with the opening of the British Library exhibition, *Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices*, is an interesting supplement to the dialect material already available via the British Library's online sound archive (British Library 2011b, 2011a). The two CDs which make up the collection come in a large format CD case which is accompanied by a 30 page guide booklet. The packaging is well produced, with an attractive front cover including the title of the collection and an outline map of the UK surrounded by dialect words in a 'handwritten' font. However, the front cover, along with the text on the rear of the CD packaging, is potentially misleading. On opening the collection and listening to the contents, a listener who had hoped for analysis or guidance on dialect words and phrases might be disappointed.

The collection comprises two main sections: the guide booklet, and two CDs which contain 143 recordings from various locations in the UK, recorded throughout the 20th century. The guide booklet is an integral part of the collection and is divided into three discreet sections:

1. An introductory essay written by Jonnie Robinson
2. A guide to the collections from which recordings are taken
3. A track listing for each of the disks

Robinson's essay commences with some of the history of the publication of the collection, before briefly discussing the disparate archives from which the recordings on the CDs are taken. The essay contains some information on English accents and dialects, and supplies a very brief introduction to terms such as lexis, grammar, phonology, and discourse. Examples of tracks from the CDs which contain non-standard examples of each phenomenon are given. The essay continues by elaborating on the contents of the collection and providing useful commentary on notable recordings to be found on the CDs. Some of the decisions regarding the selection of recordings and the order in which they are to be found are also explained here. This enables listeners to appreciate why tracks on the first CD (covering the early part of the 20th century) are largely rural (having been supplied in part by what Chambers and Trudgill (1998:29) termed, in 'tongue-in-cheek' fashion (Bucholtz 2003:399) 'NORMs' [non-educated, older, rural, males]) and why tracks on the second CD balance this rural bias by largely being taken from urban areas.

This decision to offer geographical 'balance' across the two CDs does of course hinder the comparative usefulness of the collection, and it is not possible to listen to two recordings from the same place taken in different years. However for the general listener it means that the geographical coverage is greater, and one must assume that this was more important than comparability for the viability of the collection.

The collection brings together recordings from four separate archives, and the second section of the guide booklet contains information on these. The reader is introduced to the following archives:

- The Berliner Lautarchiv British & Commonwealth Recordings (BLBCR) (Doegen 1916-1938)
- The Survey of English Dialects (SED) (Orton and Deith 1950-1974)
- The Survey of Anglo-Welsh Dialects (SAWD) (University of Swansea 1968-1991)
- The Millennium Memory Bank (MMB) (BBC 1998-1999)

A brief history and description of each of the collections is given. This is useful as it aids understanding of the nature of the recording from each section of the archive. This section also sees a welcome addition for those who wish to explore the archives further in the shape of web addresses which permit the interested reader to access more information and/or sound files.

The track list section of the booklet offers a good amount of information about each recording with details supplied for each track relating to the track number and name, along with information about the speaker's name, birthdate and birth location. Further details relating to the recording location, date, and track duration are also given. Given this amount of detail, it would have been useful to explicitly state the original archive from which the track was taken. The listener is instead left guessing about the origin of certain tracks, which is unfortunate given the previous effort made to explain the original archives in the booklet.

The main part of the collection is of course to be found on the two CDs which contain the 143 audio extracts from the British Library Sound Archive. The recordings date from 1916 to 1999 and although the sound quality is poor for some of the earlier recordings (a fact acknowledged on the rear of the CD packaging) it is as good as could be expected for recordings of this date. As mentioned above, the first of the two CDs includes the earliest recordings (from 1916-1982) with the second CD containing recordings from 1998 and 1999. The recordings are organised first by UK region, and then by date (oldest to newest). The regional organisation is as follows:

- England – The North
- England – The Midlands
- England – East Anglia and the South East
- England – The West Country and the South West
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

For all regions, recordings from 1916 to 1917 are supplied from the Berliner Lautarchiv British & Commonwealth Recordings (BLBCR) (Doegen 1916-38) with the Millennium

Memory Bank (MMB) (BBC 1998/99) survey providing recordings from 1998 and 1999. Five Welsh recordings are provided from between 1965 and 1982 from the Survey of Anglo-Welsh Dialects (SAWD) (University of Swansea 1968-91), supplemented with one recording from the Survey of English Dialects (SED) (Orton and Deith 1950-74). The SED also provides 51 tracks for the four English regions on the first CD. Recordings from the middle of the 20th century are not provided for either Scotland or Northern Ireland, and those listeners interested in historical clips from these counties must make do with the much earlier Berliner Lautarchiv British & Commonwealth Recordings (Doegen 1916-38). An overview of the coverage offered by the collection by country, region, and time is shown in Table 1:

Region	BLBCR	SED	SAWD	MMB
	1916-1917	1950-1974	1965-1982	1998- 1999
England – The North	✓	✓		✓
England – The Midlands	✓	✓		✓
England – East Anglia and the South East	✓	✓		✓
England – The West Country and the South West	✓	✓		✓
Wales	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scotland	✓			✓
Northern Ireland	✓			✓

Table 1: Collection and date coverage by region

As can be seen, each of the regions of England has a good coverage over time, as does Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland are slightly neglected in comparison. Although this is clearly due to a lack of extant recordings from these two countries, the booklet does not make this clear, and a listener from either country might feel slightly short changed as a result. Nevertheless, the overall time-depth that the CD collection offers is impressive, and the birth dates of the speakers (noted in the guide booklet) show that data is available from speakers born 112 years apart (1872 and 1984).

As mentioned above, there is a lack of diachronic comparability in the collection due to the decision to offer a wide geographical range of coverage. However, synchronic comparability is possible due to the inclusion of 15 extracts from the BLBCR (comprising speakers retelling the Parable of the Prodigal Son). The guide booklet rightly notes that caution should be used when listening to these particular recordings as they are performances and were presumably done under duress (the speakers were recorded by Doegen in Prisoner of War camps during the First World War). In this respect they are quite different to other recordings in the collection. Nonetheless they could be particularly useful to those wishing to listen to pronunciation differences amongst speakers recorded in similar environment by the same person almost 100 years ago. This is a clear justification for their inclusion, and despite the sound quality being quite poor at times, the inclusion of these recordings is to be applauded.

Other recordings appear to be well chosen, with each one giving the listener a good deal to focus on. The guide booklet aims to help listeners pick out specific features in some of the recordings and look for them in others. This no doubt contributes to the educational remit of the collection. It is clear from the packaging, introduction to technical terms and the overall presentation that this collection is designed to be used by non-specialists. However, there is no comprehensive guide to each of the recordings and non-specialists will likely struggle to get the most out of everything offered (listeners are directed to features in only 19 of the 143 recordings). Of course this would have been difficult to achieve practically – the booklet is substantial as it is - but some information about matters of interest in each of the recordings would have definitely increased the collection's usefulness. Although it is no doubt intended that listeners should look for parallels in recordings other than those directly referenced, a lack of specific details diminishes the usefulness of this collection for non-specialists.

Given the lack of information for non-specialists audience, it's possible that is the collection was designed to be used by those with more specialist knowledge. However, the overall 'feel' of the collection runs contrary to this idea and, in any case, interested specialists are likely to know about the extensive 'Archival Sound Recordings: Accents and Dialects' resource (British Library 2011a¹ []). The British Library site 'Sounds Familiar?' (British Library 2011b) is also freely available to all. Interestingly, each of the samples included on these websites have extensive information about the linguistic features that can be found within them, making these much more suitable for those wishing to focus on specific linguistic phenomena. The 'Sounds Familiar?' website (2011b) appears to be targeted at the same audience as the CD collection and its recordings have much more extensive information. For example, track 9 on CD 1 ('Baking Bread') is a sample from Welwick in Yorkshire. The guide booklet states that this recording contains an example of V-epenthesis and provides no further details about the sample. A longer version of this recording can be found on the 'Sounds Familiar?' website (2011b) where a listener can also access a simple transcript, a linguistic transcript, and a commentary. The discrepancies between the levels of detail given about the same recording in different locations highlight the limitations of this CD collection.

Despite its limitations, this collection is something that could still be of value to both the interested non-specialist and specialist alike. It collects recordings from various sources in one place for the first time and is accessible to those without UK academic institution status. Those without internet access can also listen to recordings in their own homes for the first time. The commitment to public engagement and education which underlies the production of this collection should not go unnoticed.

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¹ This resource requires access via a UK academic institution

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