

Scouse: the historical, linguistic and cultural aspects

Scouse is the accent and dialect of English found in the city of Liverpool, and in some adjoining areas of Merseyside. The Scouse accent is highly distinctive and sounds wholly different from the accents used in the neighbouring regions of Cheshire and rural Lancashire. Inhabitants of Liverpool are called Liverpudlians, but are more often described by the colloquialism ‘Scouser’.

The word ‘Scouse’ was originally a variation of ‘Lobscouse’, the name of a traditional dish made of lamb stew mixed with hardtack eaten by sailors.

The roots of this accent can be traced back to the large numbers of immigrants into Liverpool in the 18 – 19th c. including those from the Isle of Man, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The influence of these different speech patterns became apparent in Liverpool distinguishing the accent of its people from those of the neighbouring areas. It is only recently that Scouse has been treated as a dialect. The ‘Survey of English Dialects’ ignored Liverpool completely and the dialect researcher Ellis said that Liverpool had ‘no dialect proper’. For many years Liverpool was simply seen as a melting pot of different accents. But according to the leading language experts, nowadays, Scouse is going strong and far from at risk of extinction. Fritz Speigl and Phil Young, who have both written extensively on the city’s sound, have defended it in response to the gloomy predictions from Andrew Hamer, an accent and English language specialist at Liverpool University. They have declared that the Liverpool sound, although it has undergone some changes since the 50-s of the 20th c., is still thriving.

But the dialect under discussion is not merely an accent. It has its own peculiarities, both in grammar and vocabulary, worth studying. The phraseology of Scouse is unique, imaginative and witty. All this reflects the uniqueness of the community speaking Scouse, their place and role in the society.