

A study of accent and identity in the music of Oasis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how accent features can be used in singing performances in order to index a specific identity. In particular, the study considers the accent and singing styles present in the music of Manchester band Oasis. Previous studies have highlighted the prominence of American accent features used by artists like The Beatles, to emulate the success of popular American singers; whereas artists associated with the indie genre often purposely subvert these expectations by embracing their own 'real' accents in their singing. A quantitative analysis of the occurrence of features from Simpson's (1999) USA-5 model in the 1994 songs *Supersonic* and *Half the World Away*, sung by frontmen Liam and Noel Gallagher respectively, is conducted in this study. These results are also compared to the brothers' 'real' accents using data from a 1994 interview. It is argued, as Liam uses more British English features in his singing, similar to that of his real speech, and Noel uses more American features, that the band did not index one specific identity. Rather, their use of different accent features indicates a multimodal identity that both appeals to a global audience and complements the genre and style of each individual song.

Introduction

Music has long served as an outlet for self-expression, both for the artist in the way that they can utilise the art form to share their experiences and perspectives, and for audiences in the way that their favourite genres provide them with a sense of self and a community of others who embrace a shared identity based on their musical interests. As such, music provides an ability to construct one's identity in a specific way, conveying a particular meaning and identity associated with one's musical work. Indexicality refers to the relationship between social implications and linguistic choices which carry specific meanings and intended interpretations that convey information about the speaker (Silverstein, 2003). Subsequently, a common and recognisable method of indexing

identity is through the use of features associated with distinguishable accents and dialects that connotate specific characteristics attributed to the individuals and communities that use them (Bell & Gibson, 2011). While this initially indicates a level of authenticity in such methods of indexing one's own identity, the competitive nature of the music industry results in artists using the same techniques to index identities other than their own, in order to establish themselves as part of a certain genre, to appeal to mainstream expectations of the industry, or to create a unique persona – all in the name of generating success. This study investigated the music of the band Oasis in their debut year, and how the band's two singers, Noel Gallagher and Liam Gallagher, used accent in their sung performances to potentially index a specific identity for the band.

Across the history of popular music, the most typical accents to expect are of the American English variety (Jansen, 2018). The global dominance of America in the music industry, and indeed overall entertainment industries, spurred attempts to emulate such success and created an industry standard influenced by American linguistic norms. A trend of British pop singers emulating the singing styles of popular American artists began to emerge in the 1950s (Trudgill, 1983). However, as the century reached its end, and moved into the new millennium, a new pattern appeared. A wider range of distinct genres rose in popularity, each carrying their own conventions and expectations, veering away from an overall American influence and instead shifting towards a trend of ‘going local’ (Jansen, 2018, p. 116), referring to an artist using their own authentic dialect in their singing in order to express their own true identity musically. Both of these trends can be attributed to several bands that are known to have influenced the music of Oasis, indicating that a complex relationship towards singing in one’s own accent is likely to be expected from Oasis’ singers. One notable influence includes The Beatles whose success was so great that it altered industry norms (Everett, 2001), including singing using distinct features of their regional accents.

Notable in genres such as ‘indie’ and ‘Britpop’ is a geographically diverse trend of British English dialects, showcasing regional accents and identities from across the country that were previously lesser represented in popular media. Such authenticity, despite being a popular technique in the early careers of many artists attempting to establish themselves in these genres, declined as artists’ careers became more successful, and their global audience and monetary capabilities grew. Thus, *going local* is more heavily associated with an artist being true to their authentic identity and roots, whereas using dialect features that are not associated with their natural speech style is largely considered inauthentic, and a form of ‘selling-out’. The mass consumption of American pop culture, and the subsequent unconscious absorption of American-centric industry norms, contrasted with

the more purposeful choice to retain one’s regional dialect in musical performance. This provides an initial indication of the complexity of determining how an artist’s use of dialect features can index specific identities.

Rock-and-roll stars: Understanding Oasis

Oasis rose to fame in the 1990s and were associated with the rock-and-roll and Britpop genres of music. They were fronted by brothers Noel and Liam Gallagher, with Liam initially performing as lead singer before Noel began to share singing duties across the band’s time together. Their musical style and lyrics were heavily connected to their working-class backgrounds and upbringing, especially in their early career. They were also known for their rebellious attitudes, over-confident personas and intense sibling rivalry, all of which dominated media headlines from the outset of the band’s public introduction and has followed them throughout their careers (Grundy, 2009). Specifically, Oasis’ association with the working-class identity was emphasised by the media, including through the focus on the war between Oasis and Blur, with their class differences intertwined in this conflict (Scott, 2016). Both bands helped establish the Britpop genre of the 1990s by singing in their own accents, and subsequently the authenticity of this was brought into the rivalry forged between them as they sought to dominate the genre.

Although the band split up amid the inner rivalry between the two frontmen, both Liam and Noel have enjoyed increasing solo success in recent years. Although the two largely dismiss any chance of a reunion, both men frequently discuss the possibility of reuniting in interviews as the topic of the band continues to define their careers even as solo artists (Beaumont-Thomas et al., 2023; Graye, 2023; Sky News, 2023). Despite their public feud, their reliance on the band’s name shows an awareness of the musical impact they have had as it enables them to maintain their relevancy within pop culture. The band’s music remains ever popular, as evidenced by the success of the 2021 release of a live album recording of their 1996 performance at Knebworth

Festival. Liam's own sell-out return to the venue in 2022 is further demonstrative of the artists' capabilities as solo performers that is both shadowed and supported by the legacy of Oasis which continues to contribute to their current careers. Thus, an examination of their linguistic legacy indicates how artists are able to construct their language use in specific ways, not only to help establish their careers, but also to re-establish themselves and still be successful after years in the industry.

Furthermore, the band's music is also commonly known to be heavily influenced by the music of The Beatles (Scott, 2010), reflected even in the band members' own admission to this being the case both musically and in a desire to replicate The Beatles' success. Specifically, Scott argues that both frontmen's voices can be said to be 'Lennon-like, [although] Liam retains a punk sneer' (p. 113), suggesting audible differences between Noel's and Liam's singing styles despite shared influences. Other musical influences include The Smiths, The Stone Roses and the Sex Pistols, highlighting a central influence from British punk rock bands, as well as American artists such as Elvis Presley (Scott, 2016). Notably, Noel has stated that other Manchester bands, like Happy Mondays and Joy Division, did not hold any significance when it came to influencing Oasis' musical style (Scott, 2016), suggesting that the band's musical identity was not associated purely with their local identity but rather with Noel's and Liam's personal preferences in music. This poses contradictory implications for the linguistic consequences of associating both with artists who have adhered to the Americanised linguistic standards of the music industry, such as The Beatles in their establishing years, and with genres that have resisted these expectations, as was common amongst Britpop artists (Simpson, 1999). This establishes the band Oasis as a curious source of investigation for a study into how accent is used by musical artists.

Literature review

Trudgill (1983) first proposed a list of features that

frequently occurred in the songs of British pop singers between the late 1950s and early 1960s, which resembled an American style of speech more so than a standard British style of speech. He stresses that while these elements are constructed features of speech, this is done 'below the level of conscious awareness' (Trudgill, 1983, p. 145). Rather, the dominance of America in the music industry and of American artists in the pop charts which resulted in an industry standard centred around American accents and speech styles, then emulated by other artists. However, he argues that these features were more so a representation of stereotypes of American speech that were commonly associated with the US by the British, rather than acting as a true emulation of Americanisms and the actual singing styles of American artists. Examples include the rhotic /r/ pronunciation that, while prominent in some American English varieties, was not present in the singing styles of popular and influential artists such as Elvis Presley.

Trudgill's examination of the decline of this Americanised singing style in British music by the mid-1960s charts the trajectory of these features across albums by Liverpool band The Beatles, identifying a pattern between the bands shifting through musical genres and social positions as public figures correlating with the decline in their compliance with Trudgill's model. Further supported by his investigation of punk rock singers in the 1970s, who had the 'intention to aid identification with and/or by British working-class youth' (Trudgill, 1983, p. 155), Trudgill uncovers a social consciousness concerning the insincerity of artists adopting the model and indexing identities too distant from their own. The linguistic changes that Trudgill charted across the music of The Beatles were reflective of the way that their image changed across the band's career. Indeed, the youthful and innocent image that launched them contrasted with the mid-1960s where they secured their popularity with releases that showcased the members' individual and personal styles (Gutzmer, 2019). Change occurred again in the later 1960s to early 1970s with a drug-inspired musical approach

and non-sensical lyrics, all of which was enabled by the safety net of already having established themselves and secured a fanbase that would likely listen no matter how their style changed (Gutzmer, 2019). The influence of this psychedelic era of The Beatles' music – such as *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* and *Strawberry Fields Forever* which were both released in 1967 – can be observed in Oasis tracks such as *Champagne Supernova* (Scott, 2016).

Simpson (1999) expands on Trudgill's theory to label the commonly used American features as 'the USA-5 model', which include similar features such as the use of a rhotic /r/, or the pronunciation of words such as 'bottle' with the /t/ realised as [d]. This model forms the basis of the present study. Simpson's model emerges from a new musical landscape in the 1990s in which identity is a more prominent feature of music culture, largely reflected in the societal fringe groups of collective identities associated with musical genres such as 'grunge', 'indie', or 'Britpop', the latter two of which are most relevant to the present study due to Oasis' own association with such genres.

Simpson himself finds Oasis to be a curious example of the USA-5 model in practice, their significant geographical and working-class identity prominent in their spoken speech styles contradicting his findings in their singing style. He suggests that this is not due to a wish to imitate American pronunciation, rather it is an imitation of British influences, such as The Beatles, who themselves were adopting American pronunciation in their early career (Simpson, 1999). This is further supported by Simpson's suggestion that Gallagher also adopted Liverpoolian dialect traits associated with The Beatles' accents despite this not occurring in their singing in the same way, which is similar to how Trudgill perceived British artists to be inaccurately imitating American artists based on assumptions and stereotypes (Trudgill, 1983).

Beal (2009) investigated the use of regional accent and dialect specifically in the songs of indie bands, in a case study of the Sheffield band Arctic Monkeys. She qualitatively compared a song's

performance to singer Alex Turner's speech in an interview, concluding that the two are linguistically similar and 'there is, therefore, some justification for the perception that Arctic Monkeys are singing in their "own" accents' (Beal, 2009, p. 236). She argues that this is not done to imitate the identity and speech of their target audience, but to ultimately serve as a 'divergence' from the pop mainstream; (Beal, 2009, p. 236), which authenticates them as part of the indie genre by portraying themselves musically as their 'true' selves. This evokes a sense of hypocrisy as their entire musical persona is constructed to indicate to their audience that they are not adopting a persona.

Nevertheless, Beal argues that 'regional pronunciations index authenticity and independence, whereas the "American" features outlined by Trudgill (1983) index conformity to the pop mainstream' (Beal, 2009, p. 238). As such, rejecting the use of these features is not seen as a rejection of an American speech style but a rejection of the mainstream as a non-conformance with the rules and standards of the music industry.

Later, Jansen and Westphal (2017) investigated how Barbadian singer Rihanna uses features from different varieties of English, including American standard forms and features of Caribbean English Creole. They conduct a study into 'Rihanna's multivocal linguistic performance in *Work* both on a morpho-syntactic and on an accent level' (Jansen & Westphal, 2017, p. 49), and found that she employs the two varieties at different stages of the song and when singing about different topics, such as using standard American features 'for expressing the romantic aspect of love while her Caribbean voice describes work in a more sexually suggestive way' (Jansen & Westphal, 2017, p. 51). They conclude that, unlike Trudgill's focus on conflict, Rihanna indexes "co-existing" identities' (Jansen & Westphal, 2017, p. 50) of her equally significant connections to both Barbados and America that are proportionately evident in her constructed public persona.

Method

The aim of the study was to discover the degree to which Noel and Liam Gallagher's singing styles used features indicative of their own accents, compared to how they adhered to the USA-5 model. Thus, the study was designed to compare both of the brothers' singing styles to their speech styles. Data was collected from two Oasis songs, each performed by Liam and Noel Gallagher individually. One, *Supersonic*, was the band's first single and was sung by Liam while the other, *Half the World Away*, was performed by Noel. Both songs were released in 1994 and, while both were written by Noel Gallagher, the way they were performed showcases the distinctly different singing styles of each of the brothers. The study compared the use of dialect features across the two songs to determine whether the two singers indexed conflicting identities, whether their singing styles created a coherent musical image, or if the band's identity overall was multifaceted through the use of multiple dialect varieties.

Then, in an approach similar to that of Beal's investigation of the Arctic Monkeys, this was compared to an interview that the two brothers gave in the same year (Beal, 2009). Conducted in August 1994, the interview took place in Sweden, where the band performed at Hultsfred Festival. By taking data from the same year in all instances, this ensured that influencing factors such as age, class and geographical background were similar, thus maintaining that similarities and differences found in the data can be attributed to stylistic choices and the indexing of a particular identity. Furthermore, the same interview was used to collect data for both Noel and Liam to ensure that any other environmental factors that may influence a person's speech, such as the speech styles of the other participants in the conversation, were controlled to focus on the purposes of the study.

The interview is an attempt to observe the 'real' accents of the singers, in comparison to a performance. However, it should be acknowledged that as a recorded and televised interview,

participants may still be creating a specific persona in order to portray an intended public image for themselves (Beal, 2009). This means that the interview used here may not be entirely reflective of the Gallaghers' everyday conversational styles. Although this does not constitute the 'high performance' (Coupland, 2007, p. 146) that the performance of a song necessitates, interviews such as the one chosen here, conducted in a natural and relaxed setting and without an audience present at the time of recording, are the most accessible data sources for comparison of the Gallaghers' 'real' speech styles and dialects. Indeed, these two types of performances are distinguished by Bell & Gibson (2011) as 'every-day and staged' (p. 557), with the latter constituting a more deliberate and pre-planned performance. Specifically, the song recordings used here are 'perhaps best distinguished as "mediated performance"' (Bell & Gibson, 2011, p. 558), as they are not live but rather pre-recorded, edited and repeatedly streamed, preserved in one unchangeable state that will always be the same for any listener. Still, the accessibility and commonality of such methods for music consumption for modern audiences makes this 'the primary channel of public performance' (Bell & Gibson, 2011, p. 558) of music in today's age.

This study examines the use of three features of the USA-5 model. These include the unrounded vowel pronunciation in words such as 'body', the pronunciation of [ɪ] in words such as 'life' rather than the standard British diphthong, and the pronunciation of [æ] rather than the standard British English [ɑ:] in words such as 'dance'. However, as this is also a typical feature of northern English dialects, it is stressed that the American influence is best judged through the pronunciation of words such as 'can't' and 'half,' which are pronounced as [ɑ:] even in northern British dialects but not in American English dialects (Simpson, 1999; Trudgill, 1983). Subsequently, instances of the former in the data, that being the pronunciation of 'chance' and 'circumstance' in the interview, are more indicative of the subjects' northern British English dialect than of them indexing an American accent. Thus, these instances have not been included

in the data. Other features associated with northern English dialects, such as /g/ dropping in the pronunciation of the *-ing* suffix, also occur frequently in both the song and interview sets of data. However, this feature has been excluded, as it was from the original USA-5 model, as such features 'are typical of most informal styles' (Trudgill, 1983, p. 141).

Rationale for the approach used

Using data from early in the band's career demonstrates how Oasis wanted to establish their identity and how they wanted to be viewed going into their career. This encompasses both their working-class, Manchester-based roots, as evidenced in the lyrics of their music, as well as their association with musical genres such as rock and Britpop. However, there has been criticism that the band were portraying their geographical origins in a misleading way, depicting an upbringing in an 'inner-city hell' (Huq, 2010, p. 94) when they were actually raised in the outer-city suburbs of Manchester. This is indicative of how the band were constructing and performing a specific identity to help establish themselves as principal figures of Britpop and to appeal to those audiences as relatable figures who had faced similar adversity and shared a similar outlook on society.

While the idea that this image was a construction does not negate any hardships the band members faced growing up or discount their affiliation with a working-class identity, it does limit the authenticity of the band's identity. This is indicative of a performative patriotism present in the 1990s, with the rise of Britpop icons such as Oasis, as well as Blur and Pulp, signalling the cultural significance of British identity, reflected even in the political and social landscape of Tony Blair's premiership (Gerwin, 2017). Subsequently, these bands have been criticised for lacking the political substance that was so definitive of the punk rock genre in the decade prior, implying that Britpop bands at the end of the century were building their careers on the aesthetic of the genre rather than on an authentic association (Huq, 2010). As such, linguistic tools

such as using features of regional accents were a method of gaining entry into the genre without needing to make any attempt at social commentary. Selecting data from their early career, therefore, indicates how Oasis wanted their identity to be perceived before they had established a position of power for themselves to make statements through their music.

Despite lacking the expected substantial messaging connotative of the genre, Oasis were known for projecting a rebellious, rock-and-roll image, indicative of the punk rock bands that began to reject societal norms, and the standards of the USA-5 model, in the 1970s (Trudgill, 1983). However, the band were also honest about how they aspired to mainstream success. Indeed, in the interview used in this study, Liam and Noel reject the 'indie' label and its connotations, expressing their aspirations for global success and that 'if you start a band, and don't want to be The Beatles, there's no point starting a band'. This is indicative of the influence of The Beatles on the music of Oasis, due to their prestige within the music industry overall, which alludes to the use of features of the USA-5 model which The Beatles themselves used, especially in their early music (Trudgill, 1983). Furthermore, their objection to the idea that becoming 'mainstream' is a negative thing suggests that, unlike later indie bands such as the Arctic Monkeys, Oasis did not wish to fully separate themselves from the mainstream music industry or the conventions associated with it (Beal, 2009). Therefore, this further indicates that features of the USA-5 model are to be expected in their music.

Results and discussion

Results were initially analysed quantitatively in order to numerically compare the usage of each feature by each brother both to each other and to themselves across their singing and speaking data. Secondly, the linguistic environment in which the resulting variants occurred were also analysed in order to identify patterns in the data of when Noel and Liam were using variants of American and British English. This demonstrated not only that the

speaker or singer in question was using different dialectal features, but also how they were doing so in a specific linguistic environment. It is these choices that a speaker makes that determines the effect that said choices create and the subsequent meaning that is indexed. Table 1 presents the results for Noel's use of each of the three features in both the singing and speaking data, for both the American standard features and British standard features. Table 2 presents Liam's results in the same layout.

Table 1: Quantitation of American or British English variants as sung or spoken by Noel Gallagher in 1994.

	Singing		Speech	
	US	British	US	British
/a/	9	0	0	0
/aɪ/	21	23	0	7
/o/	2	2	0	7

Table 2: Quantification of American or British English variants as sung or spoken by Liam Gallagher in 1994.

	Singing		Speech	
	US	British	US	British
/a/	0	2	0	1
/aɪ/	1	16	7	19
/o/	1	13	0	2

In the singing performances, Noel produced more standard American English variants of the included features in his performance of *Half the World Away* than Liam did in his performance of *Supersonic*. This differed from the results for both Noel and Liam in the interview as they both used more standard British English variants over American English variants. These variants occurred in a range of words, some of which were produced multiple times by one speaker and some of which were produced by both Noel and Liam using British and American English variants on different occasions. There were also some instances where the same word was produced using both the British and American English variants. This was done by both brothers,

although not for the same words or variables as each other, and occurred in both sung performances as well as Liam's speech data. The exact linguistic environments in which each variable was produced are examined in this section.

Despite his preference for the American English variants in his singing style, Noel produced none of the three American English variants in the interview. In *Half the World Away*, Noel produced 32 American English variants and 25 British English variants. Whereas, Liam produced 31 British variants compared to only two American variants in *Supersonic*. These were American English variants of the /aɪ/ and /o/ variables, produced separately from each other and only produced using this pronunciation once in each case. Indeed, in the interview, Noel produced no American variants of any of the variables studied here. He used British English variants in all of the 14 instances where the three variables occurred. However, at no point in the interview does Noel produce the /a/ variable whatsoever, and there are therefore no instances of either the British or American variant of this feature. This then poses complications for comparison of this variable to the data from Noel's singing performance and Liam's data from his singing and speech.

Contrarily, Liam produced more of the variables overall in the interview than Noel, producing 22 of the British English variants and seven of the American English variants in his speech data, although neither brother produced the American English variant of the /a/ variable or the /o/ variable. However, they differ when compared across data sets to their singing as Liam produced no American English variants of the /a/ variable in either his singing or his speech, whereas Noel produced no British English variants of the same /a/ variable across both of his sets of data. Across all of the results, the total amount of features used is widely disparate between the two subjects, as well as within their own data between their singing performances and their speech in the interview. Therefore, the percentage use of these features is demonstrated in the following graphs. Figure 1

presents Noel's results and Figure 2 presents Liam's.

Figure 1: American or British English variants as sung or spoken by Noel Gallagher in 1994.

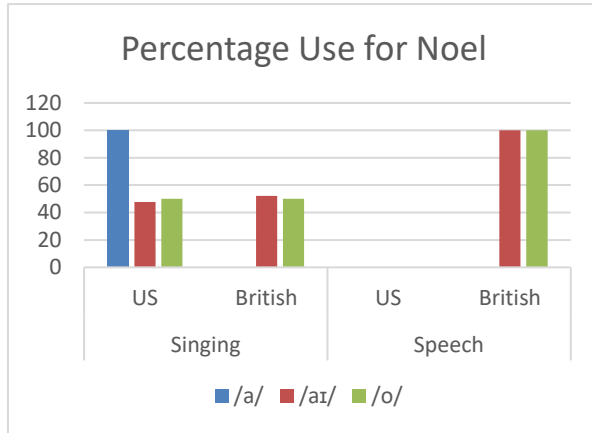
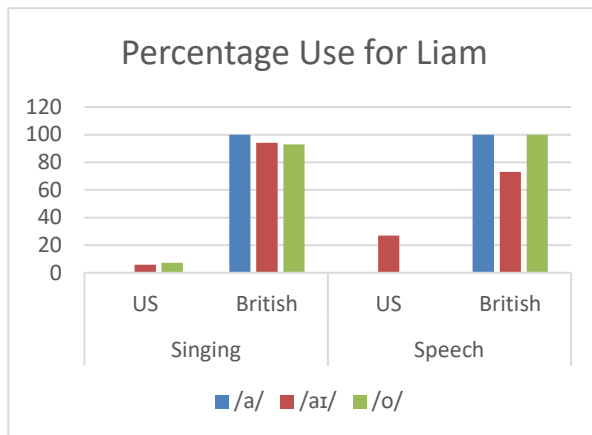


Figure 2: American or British English variants as sung or spoken by Liam Gallagher in 1994.



In the interview, Liam's only use of American variants occurred within his production of the phrase 'd'ya know what I mean', wherein 'I' was produced as the variable /aɪ/. This is a phrase which he was well known for frequently using in his speech and became associated with his persona. However, other instances of 'I' are realised as the British English variant. The occurrence of these different pronunciations of the same variable can be explained by their positioning in the utterances in which they appear, as it is the speed of the phrase 'd'ya know what I mean' as it is produced that results in a less fully realised variant.

Elsewhere in the interview, Liam produced other instances of this British English variant, with examples of this including 'I', 'right', 'like' and 'time'. Similarly, Noel's own production of the British English variant of /aɪ/ occur in the same words in the spoken interview, with this signifying similarities in their speech styles and everyday dialect that are reflective of their shared upbringing, which has resulted in such parallels. This further accentuates the contrast between the two in their approach to indexing as the same similarities cannot be found in their musical data. Indeed, in his sung performance of *Half the World Away*, Noel also produced 'I' as he did in the interview, which itself is realised as the British English variant five times and as the American English variant 19 times within the same song.

This is similar to the findings of Yang (2018) who studied 'accent-mixing' in the songs of Australian singer Lenka. Yang found that 'sometimes the same word in the same song is sung with a different accent' (Yang, 2018, p. 199), as is evident here in Noel's performance. This also occurs in the pronunciation of 'my' which is produced using the British English variant in five instances and using the American English variant in two instances. Similarly, Liam also mainly produces 'my' in his performance of *Supersonic* using the British English variant, apart from one instance where he produces the American variant while singing the word 'myself'. Thus, it is the linguistic environment of the variable that can explain the occurrence of this difference, as the British English variants were produced in isolation as opposed to the American English variant produced within the word 'myself'.

Here, a pattern emerges as linguistic environment affects other pronunciations of the same word in the data collected from the sung performances from both subjects. Primarily, this is recognisable in the differences between Liam's pronunciation of 'I', always producing the British English variant, and Noel's production of both American and British variants when singing 'I'. Notably, Liam's pronunciations of the variable are impacted by the rhythm of the song, with pauses occurring after 'I',

which results in more fully realised British English pronunciations. As these results are a consequence of linguistic and musical environment, they are less indicative of construction of speech and an indexing of identity.

Most notable is Noel's pronunciation of 'can't' and 'half' in *Half the World Away*. These are only produced using the American pronunciation when they occur in the song. Contrastingly, Liam's only instances of 'can't' are produced using the British English variant, although they are closer to a northern English pronunciation than a standard British English variant. Noel does not produce any /a/ variables in his interview data, so his usage in his sung performance cannot be directly compared to his real speech style. However, Liam does produce a British English variant in his pronunciation of 'can't' in his interview data. The other apparent similarities between Liam's and Noel's 'real' speech style in the interview suggest that this British English variant is reflective of both of their authentic dialect and speech styles, thus suggesting that Noel is adopting American features in *Half the World Away* that do not represent his own accent and speech, while Liam is adhering to his own accent when singing.

Similarly, although discarded from the initial data, the two instances of the northern British English pronunciation of the /a/ variable in the interview, are present in the pronunciation of the words 'circumstance', which is produced by Liam, and 'chance', produced by Noel. These similarly do not have comparable counterparts that occur in either of the songs examined here. However, their use in the interview does indicate that the brothers' usage of northern British English dialect features in their everyday speech are evident and as such highlight the contrast between Noel's speaking accent and his singing, as well as the similarities between Liam's speaking accent and his sung performance.

D'you know what I mean: Creating and conveying identity

In the song *Supersonic*, Liam Gallagher employed

British English features over American features, to a similar rate to his usage in his accent when speaking, as demonstrated in the interview. Conversely, Noel Gallagher mixed features of both American and British English standard dialects when singing *Half the World Away*. However, unlike singer Rihanna, Noel is not indexing dual identities of his own (Jansen & Westphal, 2017). Instead, he is appealing to a worldwide audience by using accent features from both Britain and America to establish a globally recognisable and relatable image (Yang, 2018). This aligns with his own admission, from the interview itself, that he was striving for global success even at this early point in his career. This is demonstrative of the significance of the audience in the way that staged performances 'tend to be *for* the audience, rather than simply to the audience' (Bell & Gibson, 2011, p. 557, emphasis in original). Indeed, this idea also applies to the results of *Supersonic*, as the song appeals more so to the British working-class youth, of which Liam Gallagher's own identity aligned with at the time. Thus, Liam's singing performance can be said to be indexing his own identity more so than Noel's singing performance.

However, as they both presented a working-class image as part of their public persona, as well as both expressing a desire for global success, these results are indicative of a multifaceted identity for the band overall, indexing a specific identity rooted in their background without limiting their capacity for global appeal. Furthermore, the aim to appeal to an audience is not to say that it is the accent or speech style of the desired audience that is being indexed. Rather, constructing a public identity through linguistic choices relies on the recognisability of the features being used and the ability of the audience to associate said features with a specific accent or identity. Here, the role of stereotypical elements of accents, as highlighted by Trudgill, are of significance.

The differences in the features used between the two songs can also be attributed to the different genres and musical styles that each song can be categorised as. The style of *Supersonic* aligns with the rock

genre, where features of working-class British English dialects are more typical (Trudgill, 1983). Whereas, *Half the World Away* is slower and 'more complex, contemplative, [and] poetic' (Trudgill, 1983, p. 153). This opposes Trudgill's findings for The Beatles where they began to use less of the American features as they moved away from the 'rock-and-roll' style later in their music career and became more experimental and existential (Trudgill, 1983). This is despite the expectations that Noel and Liam Gallagher would demonstrate similar patterns to The Beatles due to their admittance that The Beatles heavily influenced the music of Oasis. However, this is more evident in some of Oasis' later music once they had established their own unique position and identity within the industry, which is similar to the trajectory of The Beatles' career in terms of becoming more experimental with musical style once they had established themselves within popular culture. Rather, these results are more indicative of the changes in the music industry itself from the time of The Beatles' career in the 1960s compared to that of Oasis in the 1990s, after different genres had already begun indexing their working-class and localised British identities through their pronunciation when singing (Simpson, 1999; Trudgill, 1983). This also reflects similar patterns found by Flanagan's (2019) study of style shifting across Arctic Monkeys songs. Similarly, in some Arctic Monkeys songs from a few years into their established career, which were more poetic and explored themes that moved away from the realism of their earlier work, singer Alex Turner produced less non-standard British English forms compared to his earlier songs that had more Britain-centric themes. This supports the explanation of the disparities between *Supersonic* and *Half the World Away* as the differing genres and themes of the songs influenced the singers' approaches to language style and pronunciation choices.

Another influencing factor is the topics that are explored in the songs (Trudgill, 1983). Liam sings mainly nonsensical lyrics in *Supersonic*, a commonality in Oasis' music which has been criticised for contributing to the nature of 1990s

Britpop as unsubstantial social and political commentary compared to the genre's previous efforts (Huq, 2010). However, by containing references to drug use and alcohol, *Supersonic*, among other Oasis songs from their debut studio album *Definitely Maybe*, such as *Cigarettes and Alcohol*, referenced features of the everyday for working-class and rebellious British youth and thus resonated with these audience members, with this relatability only emphasised by the use of recognisable features of a regional accent in the song's performance. Contrastingly, Noel sings more existentially about escaping monotonous, everyday life.

As with previous findings of singers indexing a working-class identity, the topics in *Supersonic* align more with ideas associated with the lives of working-class youth in the 1990s; it subsequently elicits more British English variants than American (Trudgill, 1983). Whereas, the themes that *Half the World Away* explores are more universal feelings with a slightly wider appeal to audiences of different backgrounds, which is reflected in the 'accent-mixing' (Yang, 2018, p. 184) that he demonstrates in his singing, as he avoids indexing a specific regional identity. Trudgill also highlights a frequency of this occurrence of features from both accent varieties, creating a struggle between identities through the mixture of both styles within one piece of music. Oasis' contradictory usage of accent features across the two songs in this study align with Trudgill's understanding of the multiple subconscious influences on artists that result in both American English and typically British working-class speech features simultaneously occurring in the work of one musical artist.

However, the divide between Noel and Liam in their personal and professional lives suggests that differences in their application of the USA-5 model is more demonstrative of how they index their own identities as individual artists and their personal visions for how they wanted the band and their careers to be perceived rather than of a cohesive yet multimodal identity for the whole band. Thus, their different approaches to indexing identity in their

music is indicative of early tension between the two that resulted in the brothers' relationship breaking down and the band's eventual split.

Somewhat ironically, Liam Gallagher was critical of the Arctic Monkeys when singer Alex Turner began using features of the USA-5 model in their later music from the band's 2013 album (Ley, 2022). Ley suggests that criticisms of this nature were a result of a sense of inauthenticity which was associated with the shift from an artist using local dialect features in their early musical work and then adopting American features in later music, after having achieved more mainstream success, thus no longer being seen as 'indie' as they had garnered global attention and popularity (Ley, 2022).

While this initially suggests hypocrisy from Liam as Oasis themselves used American English accent features in their music, the pattern of how the model applied over their career is what differs between the two bands. Oasis used features associated with both American and British English dialects in two songs from the same year, the first of their established mainstream career. Thus, Oasis had not indexed a specific local identity through their accent and pronunciation in their music, which defined their style as their career was being established, to then later alter this style. Rather, when speaking in interviews such as the one included in this analysis, their use of northern British English dialect features indexed both their working-class and Mancunian identities, which was further bolstered by the continued use of such features in their music, although not exclusively. This suggests that there was an, albeit unconscious, effort to construct their public personas outside of their music. By allowing themselves to speak in their natural regional dialect, and speaking candidly about their music, desires and attitudes towards life, their boisterous and over-confident identities as artists became associated with their pride in their geographical origins. This is more so evident in their speech than their musical performances as they do succumb to industry practices by adhering to the USA-5 model in some instances.

However, by using features of both their own regional British English dialect and features of the American English standard variety, they were able to maintain an authentic image of a young working-class Manchester band with the capacity for global appeal in the establishing year of the band's career. Liam favouring the British English variants more so than Noel, however, is indicative of conflicting styles between the two singers. While this establishes a versatile identity for the band as a whole, it is indicative of the distinction between the two brothers as musical artists and singers, which was carried across the band's career and remains intrinsic to their solo efforts today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data from the two songs included in this study indicate that Oasis were not indexing a particular identity through the accents that they were singing in across their music. While the lack of USA-5 model features in their first single *Supersonic* does suggest that this was the case, instead favouring British associated variants, the frequent use of American features in the song *Half the World Away*, released in the same year, suggests that they quickly adapted to the mainstream linguistic conventions of the music industry as their success and audience rapidly grew and the opportunity to achieve the fame they desired presented itself.

Furthermore, the data also suggests that the two singers differed in their approach to indexing identity through their singing styles. As the interview demonstrates that their everyday speech and use of dialect features were similar, Liam can be said to be indexing a British working-class identity more so than Noel, who used more of the American features when singing. Thus, Oasis as a band did not index a specific identity consistently across their early music. However, observing this as construction by the band as a whole presents a cohesive display of indexing identity according to the nature of the specific song itself and the intended message and audience of said song.

Further research could consider the current careers of both Liam and Noel Gallagher in order to provide an indication of how they have adapted their musical styles individually and of how the standards of the music industry have changed in relation to the significance of the USA-5 model and the 'going local' trend.

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