

CREATIVE TEAM

Writer and director: **Steve Gilroy**

Academic researcher and dramaturg: **Dr Heike Pichler**

Technical and stage management: **Liam Crozier, Kev Tweedy**

Lighting: **Kev Tweedy**

Performers: **Sharon Percy** (*I, Daniel Blake*), **Chris Connel** (*Pitman Painters*),

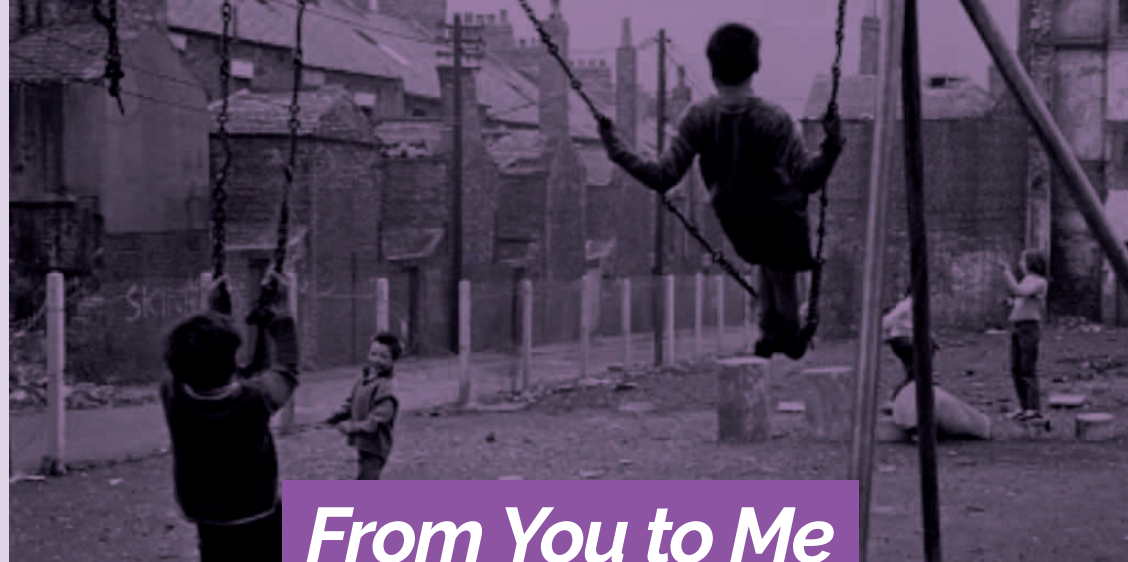
Jackie Lye (*BBC - The Archers*), **Tony Neilson** (*Northern Stage Ensemble*)

Steve Gilroy is a practice researcher specializing in the field of (auto-) biographical, politically-engaged documentary and verbatim theatre. In *From You to Me*, Steve is exploring how verbatim theatre and, more specifically, the method of 'recorded delivery' can intertwine personal testimony and human story with the sociolinguistic research done by Dr Heike Pichler.

Heike Pichler is a sociolinguist specializing in later-life language use. In the research underpinning *From You to Me*, Heike investigates whether linguistic differences among Tyneside adults aged 70+ reflect differences in their lived experiences. With Steve, she is exploring how verbatim theatre can be used to share this research with the wider community.

A big thank you to:

- The Tyneside adults interviewed for this research project and portrayed in this performance.
- The charities and voluntary organizations who have supported this project.
- Our interviewer and dear friend, 'Brenda'.
- Janet Plater and Kate Craddock.
- The team at Alphabetti Theatre.
- Our sponsors:



From You to Me

BY STEVE GILROY

"When I tell her different stories, she starts crying. She'll say, 'Grandma, why don't you write a book?' I says, 'Catherine Cookson wouldn't have a job if I wrote a book!'"

After the war, Tyneside was a tough place to grow up. But among the bombsites and blackened buildings, the children experienced a freedom that is almost unimaginable today. *From You to Me* shares stories of post-war Tyneside from those who were there: the street games, dance halls and Christmas stockings, but also the hunger and harsh discipline.

This verbatim show, where the actors speak the real words of the characters, provides a platform for voices often marginalized, and illustrates the richness of traditional Tyneside English. It presents the characters' views on modern society and its values, offers valuable insights into the relationships between generations today, and shows that the Tyneside dialect is as diverse as its people.

With all the progress experienced through the second half of the 20th century and a refusal to 'be old', were ultimately these baby boomers the luckiest generation of all? They certainly didn't all have their Tyneside accent knocked out of them.

From You to Me is a collaborative project between Newcastle and Northumbria Universities. Based on research that explores language variation among Tyneside adults aged 70+, *From You to Me* uses the verbatim theatre's 'recorded delivery' method to illustrate, explore and celebrate this variation.

TYNESIDE ENGLISH AMONG THE OVER-70s

In this performance, the actors will illustrate and explain how the Tyneside dialect spoken by adults aged 70+ is as diverse as the Tyneside people themselves. Below, we provide additional information about some of the dialect differences discussed by the actors.

Pronouncing <ing>

There are two equally valid ways of pronouncing words that end in the spelling <ing>: with an 'ng'-sound (*morning*) or an 'n'-sound (*playin*'). The 'n'-pronunciation is not a sign of sloppiness or laziness. The existence of alternative pronunciations reflects a complex historical development going back to Old English. At one point, the 'n'-pronunciation was even considered the standard pronunciation! It is only because we have come to use the letter 'g' in writing that some people incorrectly assume that we should also have to use it in speech.

'n'-substitution occurs across all varieties of English but is generally more frequent in the North of England than the South. In fact, Tyneside adults aged 70+ replace 'ng' with 'n' about 80% of the time – more so in 'action'-words (*playin*') than 'thing'-words (*morning*). So, as Tynesiders, if we stigmatized people who use the 'n'-pronunciation, we would be stigmatizing ourselves.

Saying 'like' and 'you know' (or 'y'knaa')

Youth in Tyneside – and elsewhere in the English-speaking world – make a lot of use of 'like': *Well, I was at like this like summer school. And there was like people there from like Sunderland.* Tyneside adults aged 70+ also use 'like' occasionally. The phrase they use a great deal is 'you know': *But I do feel because of, you know, Facebook and selfies, people are quite self-obsessed, you know.*

Both 'like' and 'you know' can appear in many – though not all – places in an utterance. Both 'like' and 'you know' ensure that speakers' messages are understood as intended; they keep conversations moving and highlight important information. Yet while the word police do not comment on older adults' frequent use of 'you know', they emphatically and incessantly denounce young people's extensive use of 'like'. Why would that be? It is because language policing is an effective way of demeaning and oppressing certain social groups: the young, the powerless, and the vulnerable.

Pronouncing 'custard' and 'raisins'

Some Tynesiders pronounce the first vowel in *custard* like the vowel in 'strut' while others, including some aged 70+, pronounce it like the vowel in 'foot'. Some Tynesiders pronounce the vowel in *raisins* like they pronounce the vowel in 'face' while others, of all ages, pronounce it with minimal tongue movement. The latter pronunciations tend to be stigmatized, even by those who use them. But unlike some of the grammar school teachers mentioned in our play, we do not condemn these or other local and regional pronunciations. Why?

Condemning certain ways of speaking means denying individuals their basic right to speak the accent and dialect of their choice. Worse still, perpetual stigmatization of certain ways of speaking can lead to linguistic discrimination in education, employment and housing, i.e., it can contribute to social inequalities. Instead of silencing non-standardized accents and dialects, we should relish and celebrate the diversity of voices we hear around us.

Using Tyneside words and pronunciations

Tyneside residents from of all ages and social backgrounds share words and pronunciations that are not widely used beyond Tyneside or the North-East, such as: *gan, nowt, cannit, knaa, toon*. Because language variation is linked with speakers' social characteristics, backgrounds and identities, some Tynesiders use these features more than others. The most regular users of traditional Tyneside dialect features tend to be male, working class, early school leavers and over 75. Does this mean the Tyneside dialect is dying out? We don't think so.

Our idea of what constitutes Tyneside English will inevitably change. Accents and dialects always change, and increased mobility – both social and geographical – may accelerate these changes. But that does not mean that the local dialect will die out. There will always be distinct language elements associated with those hailing from Tyneside, not least because language is so closely tied to who we are.

Our team of sociolinguists at Newcastle University, led by Dr Heike Pichler, are working to better understand why not all Tyneside adults aged 70+ speak the same. Is it because of their different educational aspirations, career opportunities or movements within Tyneside? Or is it because they experience later life in different ways – some regularly talking to youth and others being socially isolated? If you would like to find out more about this research, please email us at: fytm@ncl.ac.uk.
