

An aerial photograph of London, showing the River Thames, the Tower Bridge, and the dense urban landscape. The text is overlaid on the image.

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From cool to bad and back again: Multicultural London English and the media 2005–2018

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1. Youth languages and Multicultural London English: origins

Labelling urban youth languages

- Pejorative terms (invented, or at least propagated by the media):
 - *Kanak Sprak* (Pfaff 2001)
 - *Kebabnorsk*
 - *smurfentaal* (Cornips, Jaspers & Rooij MS)
- Academics' terms, often based on local usage:
 - *Kiezdeutsch* (Wiese 2012)
 - *rinkebysvenska* (Kotsinas 1989)
 - *straattaal* (Cornips et al. MS)

London's multiethnolect: **Multicultural London English**

- In north-west Europe, 'multiethnolect' is widely applied to the speech of young people living in multicultural and multilingual districts of large cities
- Multiethnolects are on a continuum:

Youth
style



Vernacular
variety

When did MLE start?

- 1950s on: In London, White British and African Caribbeans (mainly from Jamaica) formed the most numerous groups
- Their linguistic repertoires differed (Sebba, Hewitt):

	London vernacular (‘Cockney’)	London Jamaican (‘Patois’)
White British	✓	
African Caribbeans	✓	✓

The view from academe, c. 1984

- Mark Sebba and Roger Hewitt additionally noted an intermediate ‘**Black Cockney**’ or ‘**multiethnic/multiracial vernacular**’
 - Apparently for use in *adolescent peer groups only*
 - So not actually a native dialect, but more a style
- Seeds of MLE visible in these comments

A criminologist speaks

- Criminologist John Pitts notes the start of a new youth language among **young black people** in the East End in the early 1980s, when their deteriorating social position was preventing them from living up to their parents' expectations
- Pitts argues that the new dialect reflects a '**resistance identity**'.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gd3SJ6qakyY> (29 minutes in)

How was this repertoire represented in contemporary music?

- David Emmanuel (1963–2011), aka **Smiley Culture**, with 1984 hit single '**Cockney Translation**'
 - Plays on the possibility that newly-arrived Jamaicans might not understand Cockney
 - Beneath the surface is a recognition that Patois and Cockney are two non-standard dialects
 - Standard English doesn't get a look-in
 - No suggestion of any 'Jafaican'

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_ZDPMwrPDM

Looking back from the 2000s to the 80s

Reader's comment on Dave Hill's *Guardian* blog following the death in 2011 of David Emanuel/Smiley Culture:

- “Suddenly [**in the 80s**] our slang was cool and it didn't seem that alien anymore. It became the done thing to mix Cockney with Jamaican slang.
- “Now [**i.e. today**] you hear even people from the best private schools and universities speaking the now universal London accent - a Solicitor in a major city law firm calling to his friends saying 'Yo' (instead of Oi) and its not because he has Caribbean friends. I have heard Asian, White and Polish (oh yes) refer to their house as their 'Yard'.”

Moving forward 30 years: Are these the linguistic innovators now?



Dizzee Rascal



Plan B

2. Researching Multicultural London English

Linguistic Innovators: the English of Adolescents in London (2004–7)

Multicultural London English: the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety (2007–10)

Investigators:

Paul Kerswill (Lancaster University)

Jenny Cheshire (Queen Mary, University of London)

Research Associates:

Sue Fox (Queen Mary, University of London)

Eivind Torgersen (Lancaster University)

Arfaan Khan (Lancaster University)



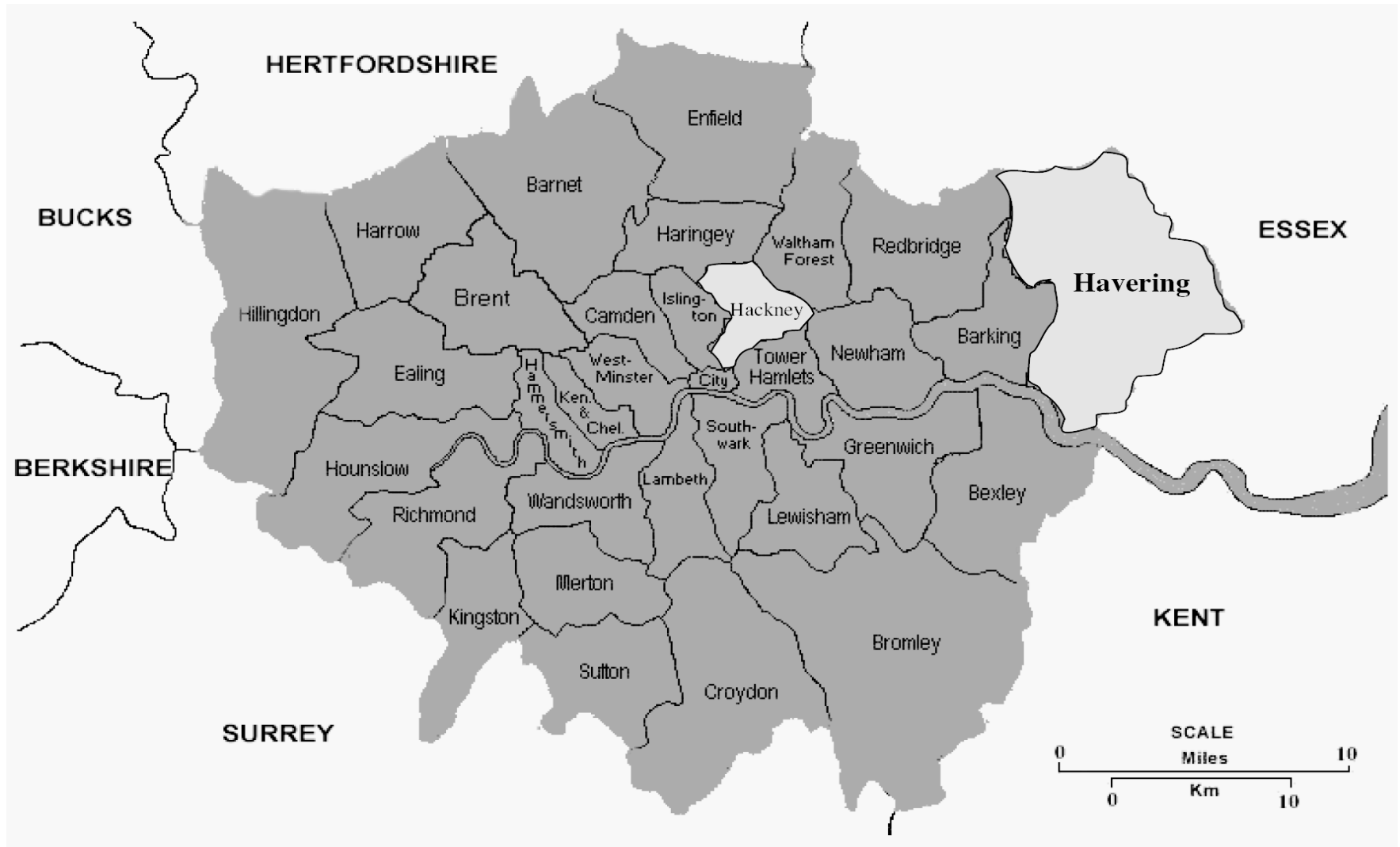
Sociohistorical context of the London multiethnolect

- High in-migration of population originating from countries other than the UK from 1950s onwards
- Poverty – Hackney has the **highest rating on indicators of deprivation out of all 355 boroughs** in England
 - Poverty leaves all groups in these boroughs with few opportunities for interaction with the wider mobile community
- Formation of close-knit family and neighbourhood networks
- Because the area is so ethnically mixed, there are contacts across ethnic groups among young people

A variationist approach

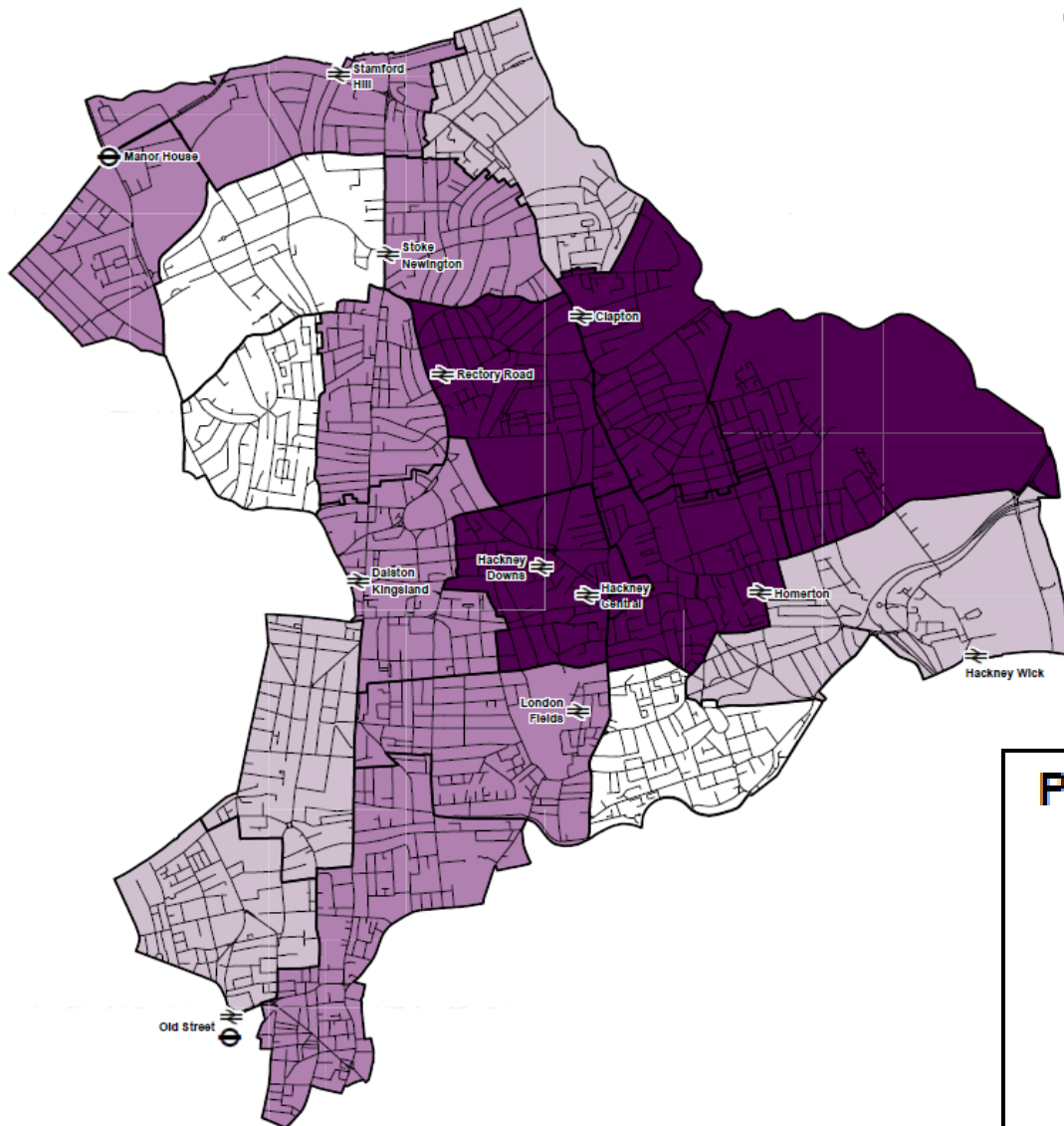
- Quantitative investigation of stratified judgement samples of young Londoners
 - N = c. 200
- Social variables: ethnicity, age, sex, borough
- Phonetic, morphosyntactic and discourse variables
- Sociolinguistic interviews (in pairs)
 - 2.5 million words

The research sites

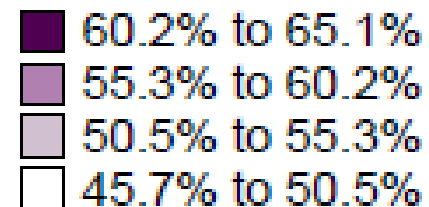


CENSUS 2001: Ethnic Groups - Percentage of Ward Populations who are NOT White British

London borough of Hackney



Percentage of Ward Populations who are NOT White British



Children acquiring English in London's inner city boroughs

- Inner city
 - The 'variety pool' (Mufwene) – many languages and varieties of English; many variable features
 - Both minority and White British children are linguistically socialised in an environment with 50%+ second-language
 - Leads to innovation
- Outer city
 - None of the above

Alex, aged 17

I mean I literally walked past two thugs that I didn't not knew but they just grabbed me by the hood swang me in a alley and had me at **knifepoint**. and I couldn't do nothing but I said . and they said "where you from?" I said "east london that's where I'm from" **this is them "don't be funny"** cos they're . I was right in a bit of east London so they said "don't be funny with me like that cos I'll stab you" and I said "I'm not trying to be funny" **this is them** "what area are you from . what part?" **this is me** "I'm from Haggerston . Fields" and then like they just said "oh yeh I don't like that area where area" and then like some hero. thank god there is some typical heros who. and it's like if you're short don't even bother come **over** because you're just gonna get stabbed yourself like .



What is MLE like?

- **Discourse markers:** *I got the right moves innit but I ain't telling you though **still** . I ain't telling you*
- **Indefinite pronoun *man*:** *I don't really mind how my girl looks.....it's her personality **man's** looking at*
- ***This is* + Speaker quotative:** ***This is me*** “I'm from east London”
- **Vowels:**
 - Raised FACE
 - Raised and backed GOAT – no GOAT fronting!
 - Strong GOOSE fronting
 - MOUTH and PRICE have low-central onsets

3. MLE and the media

The multiethnolect in the *Urban Dictionary* (wiki)

- Deciding on a search term: Jafaican/Jafaikan
- 7 entries for *Jafaican* and 1 for *Jafaikan*
- Two meanings:
 1. Someone, black or white, who would like to be Jamaican and acts/dresses/speaks like one:
 - “Anyone with an obsession with Jamaican music, hairstyles (dreadlocks), and clothing. They tend to listen to Bob Marley and other types reggae ...”

2. Reference to British (or London) youth language:

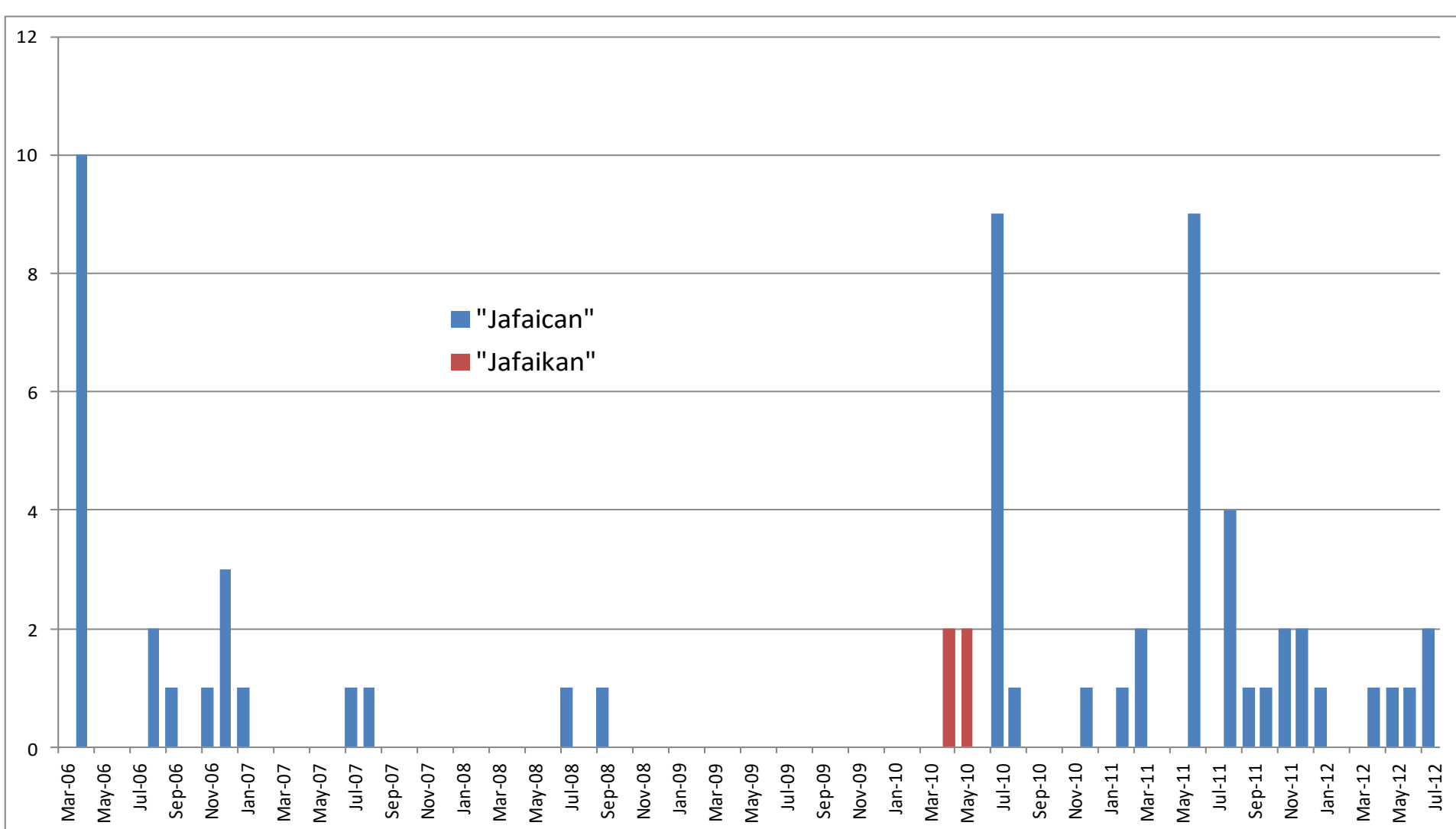
- “**Jafaikan** is the language of British people who talk in a fake jamaican accent and use words like 'bizzle' 'blad' 'shizzle' 'innit' etc etc etc. They arent always white either, theres a lot of asian and black Jafaikan speakers out there. “Chill out blad, look at them beanies cutchin over there innit tho“. "You what mate? oh right youre a fuckin **Jafaikan** yeah"?”

Finding MLE in the papers

- Nexis UK: online database of English-language newspapers and other publications, going back to the early 1980s
- Searched for *Jafaican*, *Jafaikan* and *Multicultural London English* in July 2012
 - 58 articles contained at least one occurrence of *Jafaican*, and a further 4 contained the variant, *Jafaikan*
 - 29 contained *Multicultural London English*, of which 20 also contained *Jafaican* (and none *Jafaikan*).
- Investigated dates of publication

First mention?

- *New Scientist* article in 2005, co-written with US
 - Mentions ‘Multi-ethnic youth English’, but not ‘Multicultural London English’ or ‘Jafaican’



Occurrences of *Jafaican* and *Jafaikan* in English-language newspapers, showing monthly total of articles (Nexis UK database)

4. The multiethnolect in the papers: discourses

A chronological trawl

- Probably the most frequently occurring theme is the notion that Jafaican is ‘pushing’ Cockney out of its East End heartland
- The first article to mention ‘Jafaican’: *Evening Standard* 10th April 2006:

Jafaican pushes out Cockney: metaphors of threat and war

THE Cockney accent is being pushed out of its heartland by a new kind of speech.

Playgrounds and housing estates of London are alive with the sound of an accent that sounds Jamaican with flavours from West Africa and India.

The Standard can reveal that this new English variety is replacing Cockney in inner London, as more white children adopt the speech patterns and vocabulary of their black neighbours and classmates.

Teachers have dubbed the phenomenon **Jafaican** and TV's Ali G would understand it perfectly.

Evening Standard 10th April 2006

Jafaican as respectable academic topic

Linguistics experts from London University's Queen Mary College and Lancaster University are conducting field studies to assess the new variety of English and how widely it is spoken. Queen Mary researcher Sue Fox said: "The adolescents who use this accent are those of second- or third-generation immigrant background, followed by whites of London origin." Based on their preliminary findings, the academics are calling it "**Multicultural London English**".

An oldies' guide to today's yoof speak

creps: trainers

yard: home

...

...

BUT othering by
using word list
and eye-dialect
'yoof'

Jafaican as natural development

- David Roberts of the Queen's English Society said the move was part of the general development of language and should not be regarded as inferior to other codes so long as it was readily understandable to others. "The only purpose of language is to convey thoughts from inside one person's head to another as accurately and comprehensively as possible. Language must be able to adapt. If it hadn't we would all be addressing each other as thou and thee. You cannot put constraints on the development of language."

Independent 11th April 2006

Jafaican set alongside other stigmatised varieties: reified, labelled

Which of these sentences/dialects are you most likely to utilise:

- a) "Raaass man, me gwan me yard see me babymother/babyfather" (**Jafaican** for "I'm off home to my better half").
- b) "Issa paw show orroun', yarsk muy" (**Estuary** for "What a disappointment, on every count, in my opinion").
- c) "Orright geeeezaaaaah/treacle, owzit gan, 'en?" (**Mockney** for "How do you do?").
- d) "Air hellair, hi yu? Beck f'm Yurp? (**Home Counties** for "Good morning. Have you just returned from your continental holiday?").

Evening Standard 12th April 2006

Jafaican encoding conservative values

Conservative to the core: To celebrate today's street slang as fun and trendy is to ignore its deep-rooted misogyny

There is a new language on the streets of London and other British cities, according to academic research: "**Jafaican**", supposedly derived from Jamaican and African slang, is now way more prevalent than Cockney.

But when you read the newspaper reports, you can smell the benign neutrality wafting off the page:

- "Listen here, chaps. When youngsters today say 'jamming', they mean hanging around! 'Nang' might not sound like a word to you and me, but it means good. '**Sket**' is a loose woman, and '**bitch**' continues to mean girlfriend"

What all these words in fact have in common is that they define women by sexual function ...

Independent 14th April 2006

Jafaican and people 'in the know'

End-of-year quiz in the *Evening Standard*, 24th
December 2010:

'How did Nang, Greezy and Butters triumph in 2010?

- a) They are the producers who work on the X Factor winner's recordings.
- b) They are the stars of a new CBeebies show.
- c) They are "street" or "**Jafaican**" expressions which have overtaken Cockney slang terms.
- d) They are ingredients popularised by Delia Smith in her last Waitrose promotion.'

Jafaican as contemporary, classless, modern, stylish

It's significant that the message-board of the new Englishness is MySpace, the social networking website that somehow flattens out the traditional nuances of class differentiation. It's there, too, in the magpie lexicon from which the lyrics are drawn, with many of them delivered in the fertile hybrid of Cockney, the Queen's English and pretend Jamaican - what's it called? **Jafaican**? - that is the lingua franca of young southern England.

Daily Telegraph 23rd December 2006

Jafaican associated with 'bad' social practices

- *The Independent on Sunday* on 5th June 2011:

Although it [a sitcom for children] dealt with teenage sex - or the lack of it - drugs, and parental rebellion, steered clear of any real issues, so there was no "Jafaican" spoken, no stabbings or gun crime, no teenage abortion.

Jafaican and the far right

Cockneys Have Become First British Group to be Ethnically Cleansed

<http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/cockneys-have-become-first-british-group-be-ethnically-cleansed>

The Cockney culture and language has been ethnically cleansed from London's East End as mass Third World immigration has pushed white people into minority status and destroyed the world-famous accent.

David Starkey comments on the London riots, Newsnight, 13 August 2011



Language and the riots: David Starkey

‘The whites have become black. A particular sort of violent, destructive, nihilistic, gangster culture has become the fashion, and black and white, boy and girl, operate in this language together, this language which is wholly false, which is this **Jamaican patois** that has been intruded in England, and that is why so many of us have this sense of, literally, a foreign country.’

David Starkey, BBC TV *Newsnight*, 13 August 2011

Link to a TEDx lecture by me on
Starkey, language and the August
2011 riots

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAnFbJ65KYM>

19 August 2014: Jihadi John

- James Foley's killer is heard speaking with a British accent
- Linguists were interviewed, and confirmed the jihadist in the video as a speaker of Multicultural London English
- 'Multicultural London English' appears in the UK press associated with the jihadist (and not 'Jafaican')

A bit OF FUN

But still serious

The Olympics 2012



The *TripLingo* series of apps have done a great job of deciphering popular slang in various foreign languages ... Now, with the London 2012 Olympics upon us, there's a special themed version out in the form of *TripLingo UK Edition*.

The app uses a “Slang Slider” to enable users to see four different ways to say each phrase, with the options of **Posh**, **Cockney**, **Scouse** and **Jafaican**. It's worth pointing out that Scouse isn't actually a dialect of London, instead being located in the North West of the country in the city of Liverpool, but it is a enjoyable comparison to make.

Time Out, 2nd August 2012

- Welcome to The London Citizenship Test.

.....

You have already demonstrated adequate speaking and listening skills in London's three key dialects (**Estuarine**, **Mockney** and **Jafaican**) and, having attained level two Posh, are able to buy shoes confidently in Knightsbridge ...

.....

Music

- Stormzy (2015):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqQGUIK7Na4>,

0:50 backup dancer

0:54 backup

0:55 comes everywhere

0:56 can't rumble

November 2017 update

**April 2006 –
July 2012**

- Jafaican: **58**
- Multicultural London
English: **29**

**August 2012 –
November 2017**

- Jafaican: **31**
- Multicultural London
English: **47**

Daily Mail 20th October 2017

IF YOU HAVE LOST THE WILL TO LIVE, PLEASE PRESS 3

BY RICHARD LITTLEJOHN

- Can there be anything more frustrating on earth than having to ring a telephone hotline? ...
- Thank you for calling Hotline 666. Your call is being recorded for training and data protection purposes. All our operators are busy at the moment ...
- The National Hotline is fully compliant with the Equalities Act. For English, press 1. For **Jafaican**, press 2. For several hundred other languages, including Scribble, press 3, ...
- We are pleased to offer you a choice of Muzak. For Vivaldi, press 1. If you voted Remain and would like to hear Beethoven's Ode To Joy, press 3.

Conclusion: Discourses around MLE/Jafaican

- Jafaican is a variety (set alongside other varieties)
- Jafaican is a part of natural language development
- Jafaican displaces 'old' Cockney
- Jafaican is foreign
 - and has no place here
- Jafaican is bad for social mobility
- Jafaican linked to bad behaviour, including criminality
- Jafaican is cool and modern
 - and fashionable people ought to know about it

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