

The media engaging linguists: a two-way street?

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Introduction: linguistics, sociolinguistics and the media

- ‘Scientific’ topics
 - Language is a natural phenomenon which obeys its own laws
 - Origins, acquisition, genetics ...
 - It can be observed, heard, even seen
 - Best left to ‘experts’
 - Expertise is not questioned and experts are allowed to fight it out
 - Treated like nature, or meteorology, or astronomy

Language in context: sociolinguistics

- What happens when journalists attempt to talk about language as it is used by human beings?
- Language is closely tied in with human behaviour:
 - associated with different nations, classes, genders, ages, and religions. There is nothing neutral or non-contested about any of those things I've listed.
- So how do sociolinguists get on?

BBC1's The One Show

- A series of short programmes on regional accents across the UK
 - High production standards
 - Featured a number of British sociolinguists
 - Touched mainly on history
 - Interviewed local people
 - Non-standard speech shown in a positive light

The One Show ...

- But not sociolinguistically accountable
 - Accents and dialects seen as changing naturally and perhaps through mixing
 - No discussion of relationship between accent and power, including fraught relations with Received Pronunciation
 - In London, no discussion of race or class

Kiezdeutsch and Multicultural London English:

- a tale of two **multiethnolects**

Multiethnolect: *what's that?*

- Multiethnolect is a term often applied to the speech of young people living in multicultural and multilingual districts of large cities
- It's a variety of the majority language, formed in a community with a high proportion of 2nd language speakers
- It contains many new features, often not found in the majority language or in the contributing languages
- Stylistic uses are often more sensitive and variable than in the case of other types of accent or dialect:

Who speaks it and when?

- Multiethnolects occupy a continuum:



- Vernacular speakers are usually working class and live in areas of very high recent migration
 - Large number of languages, high degree of multilingualism
- Elements of multiethnolects, *especially slang*, available to other speakers, including middle class, as style

Labels

- Pejorative terms (invented, or at least propagated by the media):
 - *Kanak Sprak*
 - *Kebabnorsk*
 - *Smurfentaal*
 - ***Jafaican*** (origin obscure)
- Academics' terms:
 - *Kiezdeutsch* (Wiese 2012)
 - *rinkebysvenska* (Kotsinas 1989)
 - *straattaal* (Cornips et al.)
 - ***Multicultural London English*** (Kerswill/Cheshire)

Heike Wiese and *Kiezdeutsch*

- Wiese, Heike. 2014. The voices of linguistic outrage: standard language constructs and the discourse on new urban dialects. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies* 120.
- Wiese, Heike, in conversation with Louise Eley and Ben Rampton. 2014. Linguist in an ideological firestorm: Personal reflections on the *Kiezdeutsch* controversy. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies* 141.

Heike Wiese and *Kiezdeutsch*

- In 2009, Wiese gave an invited lecture at a meeting of the German Academies of Sciences
- Her topic was *Kiezdeutsch*
- In 2009 and 2012 after the publication of her book *Kiezdeutsch*, she received a large number of online comments and emails, many highly charged, and many personally threatening:

Heike Wiese and *Kiezdeutsch*

	number of sources	number of comments
general audience (Germany)	65% (13)	34% (469)
<i>national news media</i>	25% (5)	8% (112)
<i>tabloids</i>	20% (4)	18% (250)
<i>regional dailies</i>	20% (4)	8% (107)
general audience (UK)	5% (1)	7% (97)
student-targeted	5% (1)	21% (287)
Turkish-German	5% (1)	3% (41)
right-fringe	15% (3)	23% (309)
“language guardians”	5% (1)	12% (164)

Table 1: Distribution of media sources for comments over the corpus

Heike Wiese and *Kiezdeutsch*

Four themes:

- (1) “Broken Language” – Kiezdeutsch is a deficient version of German.
- (2) “Language Decay” – As a result, it threatens the integrity of German.
- (3) “Opting Out” – Speakers refuse to integrate into the larger society.
- (4) “Social Demolition” – As a result, they threaten national cohesion.

Example combining elements of all four themes:

10. ‘To call this chavvy babble a language is an absolute disqualification as a scientist. [...] Through my job, I have a lot to do with (failed) adolescent migrants and also with German-background adolescents, and I see every day how the Germans adjust to this Arab-Turk-Kurd language. In some cases, there are no “normal” dialogues possible anymore because the basic lexicon is already deleted.’ *Email*, 29/2/2012

Multicultural London English MLE)

What is MLE like?

- **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*
- **Slang:** bare, ends, mandem, brudda, feds, yute, blood, merked ... (Jamaican and African American origin)
- **Pronunciation:**
 - Strikingly different diphthongs in e.g. *goat, face, price, mouth*
 - Use of 'h' in e.g. *go home, my house* ...

When did it start?

- 1950s on: Anglos (white British) and African-Caribbeans (mainly from Jamaica) formed the most numerous groups
- Their linguistic repertoires differed:
 - Both Anglos and African-Caribbeans:
Cockney
 - African-Caribbeans: '**London Jamaican**' or '**Patois**'
- No MLE yet

The view from academe, c. 1984

- Mark Sebba and Roger Hewitt recognised the existence of this repertoire – a kind of code-switching
- But 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

A criminologist speaks

John Pitts:

- Start of a new youth language among **young black people** in the East End in the early 1980s, when their social position began deteriorating
- Pitts argues that the new dialect reflects a '**resistance identity**'.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gd3SJ6qakyY> (29 minutes in)

Tracing Multicultural London English in British newspapers

Kerswill, Paul. 2014. The objectification of 'Jafaican': the discoursal embedding of Multicultural London English in the British media. In Androutsopoulos, Jannis (ed.) *The Media and Sociolinguistic Change*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 428–455.

The multiethnolect in the papers

- Nexis UK database
- I searched for *Jafaican* (*Jafaikan*) and *Multicultural London English* in July 2012
 - 62 articles contained at least one occurrence of *Jafaican*
 - 29 contained *Multicultural London English*, of which 20 also contained *Jafaican*.

Jafaican pushes out Cockney

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 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 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.'

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 ...

.....

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.

Starkey, Jamaican and the riots: just how wrong could he be?

TEDxEastEnd talk, September 2011: “Who’s an East Ender now? Migration and the transformation of the Cockney dialect”

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

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



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.’

Linguist Geoff Pullum on Starkey (*THE*, 18 August 2011)

- ‘Did Starkey really mean what he said? Well, he gave an additional clear indication of believing that the dangerous blacks are marked out by their patois, while safe ones such as the MP for Tottenham speak white English. “Listen to David Lammy, an archetypical successful black man,” he said in his defence: “if you turned the screen off, so that you were listening to him on radio, you'd think he was white.” ...’

(Pullum)

- ‘It doesn't seem to have been a misunderstanding: Starkey honestly appears to believe that the Jamaican linguistic patterns he (wrongly) imagines he is hearing from young white Londoners come with a cultural infection that will help induce them to burn down a carpet shop.’

Starkey's double mistake

- He is hearing 'Jamaican', when actually he's hearing MLE
 - Wrong attribution of foreignness
- He ascribes a violent disposition directly to the language

19 August 2014

- James Foley's killer is heard speaking with a British accent
- Linguists (myself included) widely interviewed, and identified the jihadist in the video as a speaker of Multicultural London English
- 'Multicultural London English' appears dozens of times on the Internet closely associated with the jihadist

Consequences

- Media exposure makes accents more recognisable
- Media discourses strongly guide the way an accent is perceived socially
- MLE has become negatively stereotyped, after a brief 'honeymoon' back in 2006 when the term was first used by the press
- The riots and (especially) the explicit mention of MLE in the context of the Foley killing may well accelerate the negative stereotyping

January 2016 – Emwazi's 'replacement'

- Heard as having a broadly similar accent
- It is again asserted that the accent is MLE
- The accent is less obvious this time, and he seems to be more often stated as having a 'British' accent

The question you're dying to ask (?):

- Did I get any hate mail?
- Only once, and that was for wasting taxpayer's money
- Despite media appearances over several years, we have never received more than a couple of personal letters

Online comments on YouTube continue

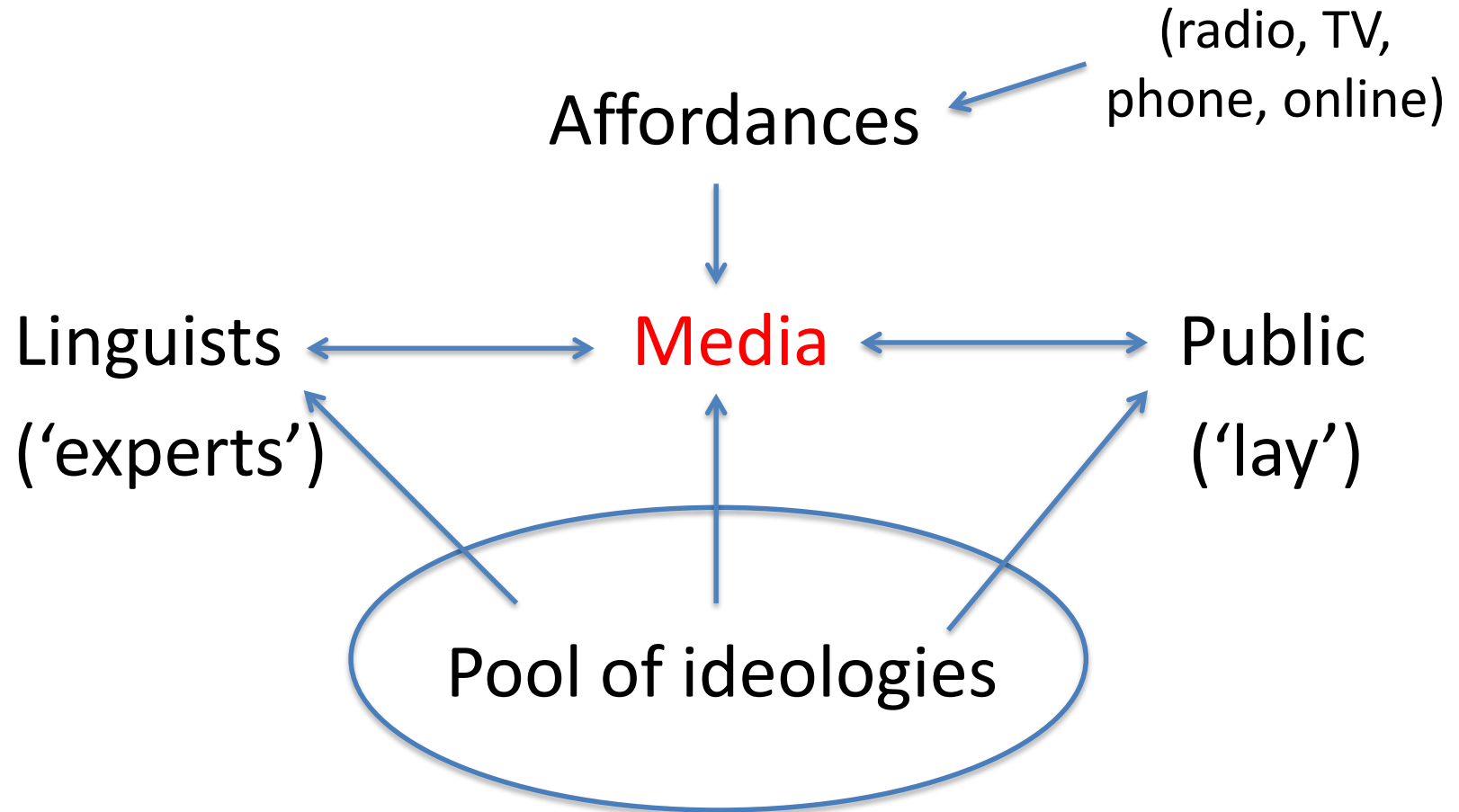
E.g. on *How To Do South London Accent* by Jade Joddle Speaking Skills:

- I am from south london and she is not speaking south london she is speaking ghetto jamaican/chav. she should learn london speak.
- Very inner city jafkan talk.. Annoying!
- That is the ugly, uncultured youth accent. Proper south London accent is "cockney" and sadly it is nearly extinct
- You're speaking like a ghetto wannabe black thug . Not representative of a south London accent I grew up in Stockwell and it sound similar to an east end accent not like fucking that.
- No..it's - Multicultural London English... and it is, of course ... absolutley disgusting....you get me!.. ;D
- I am from Manchester and I think that London accent is amazing

What are relations really like between sociolinguists and the media?

- A model of media as mediator
- An online questionnaire

The media as mediator



Online questionnaire

- Sent to 44 UK-based sociolinguists

1. For the particular media story in this submission, please choose one of the following:

- The media outlet initially contacted me
- I initially contacted the media outlet

3. What was the story about? How did you get involved?

6. Please describe how, in the final piece, you were positioned in relation to the story and to the other people involved. Were you set up in an adversarial relationship? Were there conflicting ideologies expressed in the piece?

7. To what extent did you feel your views were fairly represented?

8. Did you receive contacts from members of the public, and what did they result in?

9. What kind of follow-up was there to the story, not necessarily involving you?

10. Do you think you were able to influence anybody's actions or views, including those in authority as well as other people?

Regional dialect	Youth language	Multi-lingual-ism	Apostrophes	Accommodation, social class, linguistic pejoration	LADO (Language analysis for the determination of origin) and forensics	Other
Location of north-south boundary (undergrad project; radio, TV, newspapers)	Rise of Multicultural London English (One Show – TV)	‘Which languages are worth learning?’ (radio)	Birming-ham CC abandon-ing apo-strophes (TV, radio)	Beckhams reducing stigmatised forms (undergrad project; radio)	LADO scandal (radio)	Female voices used in computer apps etc. (newspaper)
Death of Cromarty dialect (radio, newspapers)	Article in The Sun on the emergence of Multicultural London English (newspaper)	Research on Punjabi comm. of West London (radio, TV, newspapers)	Apostro-phes on signage (TV)	British pop singers sounding American (One Show – TV)	LADO scandal –same one as above, different respondent (newspapers, radio, TV)	Language of internet trolls and child protection issues (radio, TV, newspapers)
Project on stigmatised urban dialect (newspaper)	Interview i <i>The Sunday Times</i> n about Multicultural London English (newspaper)	Benefits of multi-lingualism for Brits/ London-ers (radio, news-papers)		Radio programme on language and social class (radio, then news-papers)	Research on acoustic effects of facewear (radio, news-papers)	Contribution to article on how men can make themselves attractive to women (Men’s Health)
Use of Kent dialect in stage vn of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang (radio)	Interview on London youth language and multiculturalism , tolerance of language variation (radio)			Racial demonyms’ pejoration (radio, news-papers)		Reaction to film on ‘gay voices’ and lang and sexuality (newspaper)
Tour de France ban on Yorkshire terms of endearment (radio)				Comment on Clarkson’s use of ‘pikey’ (radio)		Reaction to voice on Jihadi John’s videos (radio, newspapers)
Aberdeen dialect (One Show – TV)				Article reflecting on Teesside primary school’s ban on slang and dialect (newspaper)		Fashion words losing plural marking (radio, newspapers)
Death of Cromarty dialect (radio, TV, newspapers) Article in The Sun on the language in The Only Way is Essex (newspaper)						Identification of Jihadi John’s accent as MLE (TV, newspapers)

Summary of results

- 33 stories submitted by 15 sociolinguists
- Contacts instigated by the media outlet: 31
 - Story in 1 or 2 media outlets: 17
 - Story in 3 – 5 media outlets: 8
 - Story in 6 or more media outlets: 8

Were you set up in an adversarial relationship?

- Yes: 3
 - LADO (Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin) case
 - Non-use of apostrophes
 - Radio 5 discussion of Clarkson's use of the word 'pikey'

Were there conflicting ideologies expressed in the piece?

- Yes: 2
 - E.g. A newspaper report on a project on a stigmatised urban dialect was given a headline focusing on the cost of the project, giving rise to a large number of vituperative online comments, while the report itself was non-conflictual.
- 30 of 33 stories were considered to be neither adversarial nor involving conflicting ideologies

How were you positioned in relation to the story?

- 'Expert' (or 'researcher'): 19

To what extent were your views fairly represented?

- “Very fairly”: 16. ‘Fairly’: 10
- ‘Oversimplified’: 3
- Many commented on the care with which the journalists had checked and double-checked quotes and points.
- In two cases, respondents felt that they had been able to change the journalist’s view on a topic, thereby changing the direction of the story.
- A couple of respondents commented on a ‘screw-up’ (or similar).
- Overall there was no difference between the newspapers in their level of accuracy and the kind of praise expressed by my respondents. But:
 - The ‘screw-up’ was in *The Independent*, while *The Daily Mail* did a ‘great job’ on the same story.
 - In my own experience, *The Sun* has treated language issues fully and seriously, while *The Economist* and *The Guardian* have been flippant and/or sensationalist.
- There were two comments about inappropriate and sensationalist headlines not reflecting the tone of the article.

Did you influence anybody's actions or views?

- Yes: 2
 - Story on internet trolls and child protection led to many contacts, including briefings to Parliament
 - Story on multilingualism in London led to positive contacts from the public, including from a business studies teacher who had noticed the use of bilingual language practices, and another who was interested in the possible economic gain arising from bilingualism
- 'Awareness of the issue': 4
- No: 21

Conclusions 1 / 4: a responsible media?

- The results didn't confirm my expectations at all.
- However, they did match my own positive experiences, which up to now I thought were the exception.
- Newspapers and radio and TV programmes take a great deal of care in getting the story right, and will check facts and listen and respond to the linguist.

- There is no tendency for tabloids to be more sensationalist.
 - In January this year, Peter Trudgill wrote a piece in the Eastern Daily Press explaining how 19th century author Arthur Ransome's Norfolk dialect was inaccurate, in spite of a claim to the contrary by an amateur linguist.
 - The Times got hold of this, and in its Editorial nonetheless found in favour of the amateur linguist
 - An example of sloppy writing

Conclusions 2 / 4: online comments

A considerable difference in online responses:

- Stories which are ‘general interest’ or perhaps ‘popular science’ give rise to relatively small numbers of comments. In my sample, this type of story was in a majority
- Stories which deal with social norms receive a much larger number of comments, usually from starkly opposing viewpoints, reflecting class-based attitudes and interests. Thus:
 - Insistence on linguistic correctness vs. celebrating local speech and diversity
 - Making fun of ‘uneducated’ language use vs. arguing against this as essentially classist
 - My suspicion of the presence of trolls, some perhaps belonging to or representing the views of right-wing parties
- This is an instantiation of the different ideologies which become salient
- Yet readers’ comments are sometimes balanced *very much in favour* of the non-standard varieties, suggesting a groundswell of public opinion that can be harnessed

Conclusions 3 / 4: impact

- My respondents were pretty sure they had very little impact
- Impact is two-faced, however
 - Sociolinguists will probably go for a liberal agenda
 - But impact assessors might be subject to a Dept of Education steer which has the effect of downgrading non-standard varieties of language
- What we can do, and what I have done, is, through our excellent relationships with the media, to sow liberal seeds in generally non-liberal environments

Conclusions 4 / 4: what next?

- Focus our attention on areas where sociolinguistic and lay opinion is divided:
 - **Non-standard varieties and languages other than English in educational and occupational contexts**
- Tolerance and promotion of these is a well-worn call-to-arms dating from the 1970s
- But the media landscape is quite different now, with new affordances – new ways of reaching the kinds of people we want to reach.

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