



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*

# **50 years of British sociolinguistics: What do we know now that we didn't know before?**

**Paul Kerswill**

**University of York**

**19 April 2018**

‘Language variation’

# Research Seminar on Sociolinguistic Variation November 1976

- Organised by Euan Reid (Walsall College)
- Summing up by Robert Le Page (York)



West Midlands College

COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH UNIT

ABSTRACTS OF:

1976 RESEARCH SEMINAR ON  
SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION

**'... plan ... to gather together the quite  
small number of people working on  
studies of British English using a  
'Labovian' methodology ...'**

Edited by:

Euan Reid.

## Contents

R.B. Le Page	<u>Summing-up of the Seminar</u>
Peter Trudgill	On the Empirical Study of Grammatical Change
Jim & Lesley Milroy	Speech Community & Phonological Variation in Belfast.
Ellen Douglas	Sociolinguistic Variation in a Rural Community in Northern Ireland
R.B. Le Page	The Multidimensional Nature of Sociolinguistic Space
Joan Russell	Networks and Sociolinguistic Variation in an African Urban Setting
Funso Akere	Sociolinguistic Variation and Code-switching among Yoruba-English Bilinguals
Euan Reid	Social and Stylistic Variation in the Speech of some Edinburgh School children
Gerry Knowles	Identifying Phonological Variables in Scouse
John Esling	Articulatory Setting in the Community

David Sutcliffe	The Study of Dialect Selection in the Young Bedford Black Community
Joan Butterworth	'NOUS' & ON à la mode d'Orléans'
Peter Wright	Sociolinguistic Material from British Industries & City Dialects
Jean Ure	Register 'systems' of a Language in L1 and L2 Communities
Jeffrey Ellis	Some Aspects of Post-Creole and 'Post-Pidgin'
Philip Riley	Social Variation in Non-verbal Communication
Brian Torode	Irony and the 'I'
Philip M. Smith	Negotiative Characteristics of Interpersonal Speech Style Shifts
Janet Holmes	Investigating Subjective Judgments of New Zealand English
Graham Nixon	Aims & Methodology of the British Urban Linguistic Survey

# Le Page in his 'Summing-up':

- Several of the authors 'in quite different ways, were nevertheless concerned primarily with refining the linguistic description, whether it was of idiolect, or variety, or register, and then secondarily saying how the variety they have described was used'.

# Mixed languages?

- David Sutcliffe on Afro-Caribbean speech in Birmingham: ‘a macaronic mixture of lects’, though the speakers were clear about what they were speaking to whom
- Reminiscent of ‘translanguaging’ (Löpke)



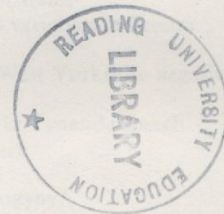
‘It became evident at an early stage of organising the meeting, however, that there was a much wider interest in the proposed seminar, and what eventually took place might more accurately be described as a symposium’

‘It seems likely from the response to the Walsall Seminar that a further meeting would be found useful in a year or two, and that one welcome development would be an attempt to escape from our ‘chauvinistic’ limitation to studies on variation reported in English’

# Sociolinguistic Patterns in British English

Edited by Peter Trudgill

WITHDRAWN FROM  
READING UNIV. LIBRARY



Edward Arnold

1978

# Language and Social Networks

Second Edition



1980/87

Lesley Milroy

Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 37

## Variation in an English Dialect

Jenny Cheshire

1982

CAMBRIDGE



# LOCATING DIALECT IN DISCOURSE

*The Language of  
Honest Men and  
Bonnie Lassies  
in Ayr*

Ronald K.S. Macaulay  
1991

# Sociolinguistics Symposium

- <https://www.ss22.ac.nz/about.html>

# UK Language Variation and Change Conference (UKLVC)

- **Reading University, 4th-5th April 1997 - First UK Language Variation Workshop**
- I am organising a workshop/symposium around the theme of language variation and variationist approaches to language change. This is in response to what I see as a need, particularly in the UK, for a forum at which variationists can exchange ideas relatively informally outside the context of large and successful conferences such as the Sociolinguistics Symposium, where the burgeoning and welcome interest in all things sociolinguistic has tended to swamp the variationist perspective.
- There will be a round table meeting over two days in Reading, with no parallel sessions and with contributions of around 30 minutes PLUS 10 minutes discussion. This would restrict the number of papers to around 12.
- I will also restrict the number of participants to around 40 (I don't want to organise anything huge!). My primary aim is to bring together UK researchers (those based in the UK or researching UK languages), though I would not discourage interested others.

- 32 presentations

- **Jack Chambers:** SOCIAL EMBEDDING OF CHANGES
- **Paul Kerswill & Ann Williams:** DIALECT LEVELLING IN TWO ENGLISH TOWNS
- **Enam Al-Wer:** ANALYSING VARIATION IN ARABIC
- **Docherty & Paul Foulkes:** VARIATION IN THE REALISATION OF 'RELEASED' /t/ IN TYNESIDE AND DERBY
- **David Britain:** LEXICAL DIFFUSION AND THE A/A: SPLIT: EVIDENCE FROM THE TRANSITION ZONE
- **Juan Manuel Hernández-Campoy:** PARADIGMATIC COMPLEMENTARINESS IN LANGUAGE VARIATION RESEARCH: APPROACHES TO DIFFUSION
- **Gunnel Melchers:** PATTERNS OF LINGUISTIC VARIATION IN A BIDIALECTAL COMMUNITY: SHETLAND
- **John Widdowson:** HIDDEN DEPTHS: EXPLOITING ARCHIVAL RESOURCES OF SPOKEN ENGLISH
- **Clive Upton:** A SURVEY OF REGIONAL ENGLISH?
- **Jenny Cheshire and Jamal Ouhalla:** FOCUS AS A CONSTRAINT ON SYNTACTIC VARIATION
- **Susan Pintzuk:** LANGUAGE CHANGE VIA GRAMMATICAL COMPETITION: THE CHANGE FROM OV TO VO IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH
- **John M. Kirk:** VARIATIONIST STUDIES OF IRISH ENGLISH SYNTAX
- **Gisle Andersen:** I GOES YOU HANG IT UP IN YOUR SHOWER, INNIT? HE GOES YEAH. THE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF INVARIANT TAGS IN LONDON TEENAGE SPEECH
- **Ioannis Androutsopoulos:** EXTENDING THE CONCEPT OF 'SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIABLE' TO GERMAN YOUTH SLANG
- **Lesley Milroy:** VARIATION AS AN INTERACTIONAL RESOURCE
- **Peter Trudgill:** THE GREAT EAST ANGLIAN MERGER MYSTERY
- **Jean Aitchison:** FROM PREFERENCES TO HABITS TO RULES: A NATURAL PROGRESSION?
- **Sali Tagliamonte:** *WAS/WERE* VARIATION ACROSS THE GENERATIONS: VIEW FROM THE CITY OF YORK



# UKLVC 1 – areas

- Change across geographical areas (levelling, diffusion, mergers)
- Bidialectal communities
- Regional surveys
- Phonetic/Phonological variation
- Discourse variation
- Syntactic variation
- Using spoken and historical corpora to study variation
- Change in older varieties
- Slang, style
- Interactional (socio)linguistics

# 10<sup>th</sup> UK Language Variation and Change Conference

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UNIVERSITY *of York*

1—3 September 2015

# UKLVC 10 – York, 2015

- 115 submissions
- 24 paper acceptances (plenary-only sessions)
- 50 poster acceptances
- 123 participants
- Keynotes:
  - Benedikt Szmrecsanyi
  - Ghada Khattab
  - Lesley Milroy
  - Paul Kerswill

# UKLVC 10 – York, 2015

- Salience and exemplar models
- Levelling and diffusion
- UTI (ultrasound tongue imaging)
- Perception and cognitive representation
- Style and individual variation
- Celtic languages and Celtic varieties
- Indexicality
- Contact and geographical variation

# Three 'new' areas?

- Salience/exemplar models
- Perception and cognitive representation
- Indexicality
  - Silverstein and indexicality

- Social class, social structure and British sociolinguistics, 1974 (–2015?)

# Random sampling and class

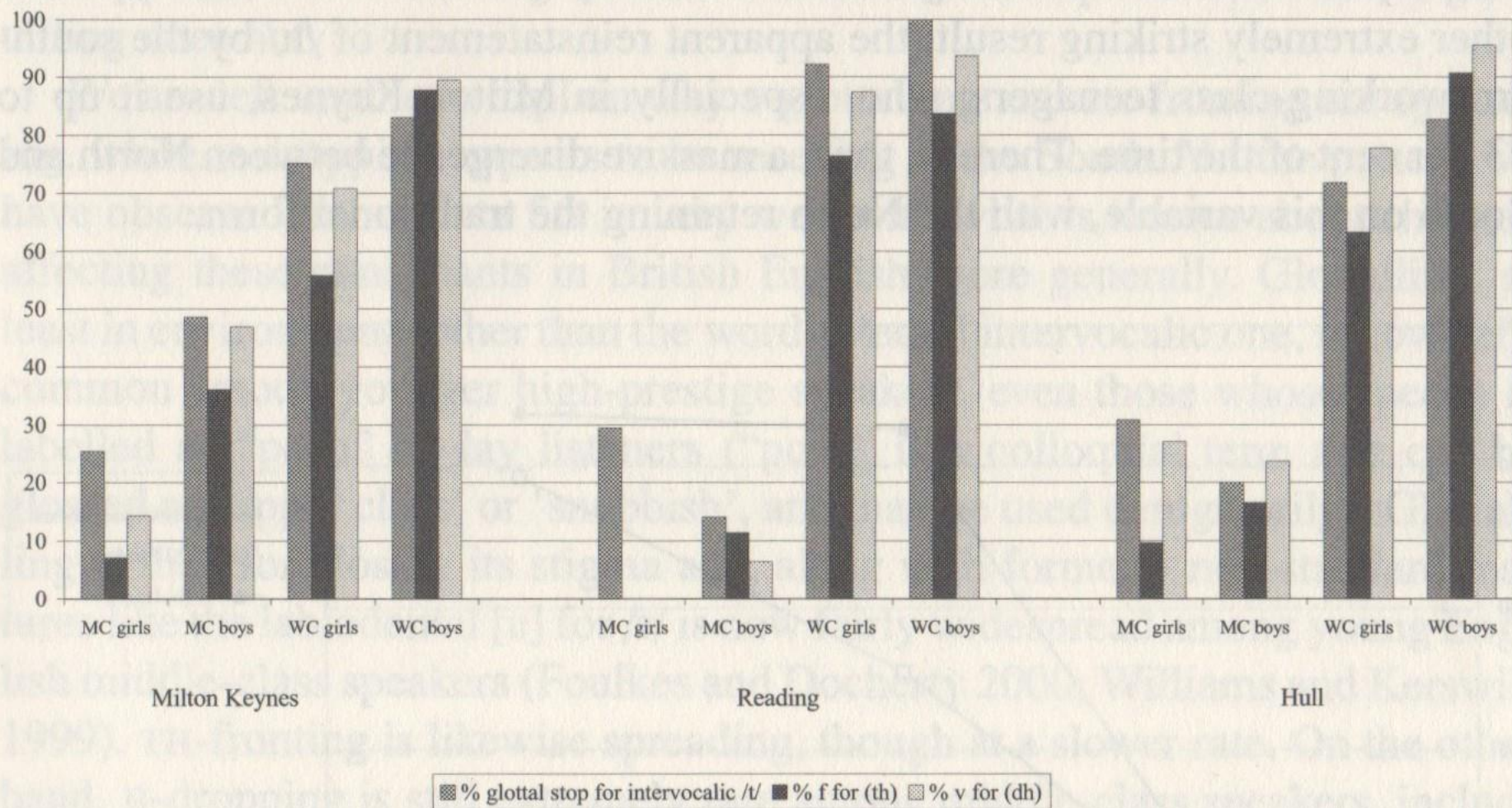
- Peter Trudgill (Norwich), 1974
- Tyneside Linguistic Survey, 1972
  - Now part of Newcastle's DECTE project

# Class (over?)simplified

- Phonological Variation and Change (Newcastle and Derby, mid-90s)
- Milton Keynes (early and mid-90s)
- Glasgow (1990s)



# Glottal stop and th-fronting in Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull



# Great British Class Survey 2013

(Savage, Devine et al.)

- “We devised a new way of measuring class, which doesn't define class just by the job that you do, but by the different kinds of **economic**, **cultural** and **social** resources or '**capital**' that people possess.”
- “We asked people about their income, the value of their home and savings, which together is known as 'economic capital', their cultural interests and activities, known as 'cultural capital' and the number and status of people they know, which is called 'social capital’.”

Source: BBC website

GBCS class	% (of representative sample)	Average age
<b>1. Elite:</b> Most privileged class with high levels of all three capitals. Their high amount of economic capital sets them apart from everyone else.	6	57
<b>2. Established Middle Class:</b> High levels of all three capitals although not as high as the Elite. They are gregarious and culturally engaged.	25	46
<b>3. Technical Middle Class:</b> New, small class with high economic capital but less culturally engaged. Few social contacts & are less socially engaged.	6	52
<b>4. New Affluent Workers:</b> Medium levels of economic capital and higher levels of cultural and social capital. They are a young and active group.	15	44
<b>5. Traditional Working Class:</b> Scores low on all forms of capital although they are not the poorest group. The average age of this class is older than the others.	14	66
<b>6. Emergent Service Workers:</b> New class with low economic capital but high levels of 'emerging' cultural capital and high social capital. Young and urban.	19	34
<b>7. Precariat:</b> The most deprived class of all with low levels of economic, cultural and social capital. The everyday lives of members of this class are precarious.	15	50

# GBCS and sociolinguistics

- Blurring of the boundary between middle and working classes.
  - This also implies that there is no explicit stratification between the intermediate classes – this is how people conceptualise ‘class’ anyway
- The idea of ‘capital’ is already part of how sociolinguists analyse language use – especially through the idea of **linguistic capital** (i.e. what your way of speaking is ‘worth’ in a given context, such as work or leisure)
- BUT has yet to be operationalised in sociolinguistics!

# Multicultural, multilingual Britain

- Investigations of the Windrush generation:
  - David Sutcliffe 1982, 1986
  - Viv Edwards 1986
  - Mark Sebba 1986
  - Roger Hewitt 1986

# Urban contact dialects – a new way of creating a new dialect

- Multicultural London English
  - Jenny Cheshire, Sue Fox, Eivind Torgersen and me (2004 – 2010)

# Conclusion

- Do we know more now than we did then?
- Yes!!

# Conclusion

- Much more is actually known about how languages come to be spoken by different sorts of people, leading to ‘variation’
- Much more information now, much of it only made possible following the advent of audio recording
- Major advances in data storage
  - Corpora
  - Automatic instrumental analysis of data
- Theory?
  - Slow, but more knowledge now
- Think more about social good – ‘impact’



- Thank you!
- Questions, comments?