

8th International
Conference on
Youth Language
2016:
Youth Languages:
Variation –
Dynamics –
Continuity

Graz, 26–28 May
2016

Multiethnolects: vernacular, indexicality and style

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*Acknowledgements to Jenny Cheshire, Sue Fox
and Eivind Torgersen*

Starting point: the multiethnolect construct

Multiethnolect: a new variety, or pool of variants, shared by more than one ethnic group living in an area (Clyne 2000)

As an analytical starting point:

- Shared across minorities, but also by members of majority groups
- Non-ethnic in its indexicality
 - true at least in the community in which it is spoken
 - outside its own community it may sound distinctly ‘ethnic’
 - It is variably **vernacularised**:



Outline

1: MULTIETHNOLECT AS A *LECT*

2: INDEXICALITY AND AWARENESS

3: MULTIETHNOLECT AS *STYLE*

➤ Focus on Multicultural London English

1: MULTIETHNOLECT AS A *LECT*

1: MULTIETHNOLECT AS A *LECT*

- Lect = variety
- Describable in structural linguistic terms
 - ‘Language change’
- Variable, but within parameters set by language-internal constraints
 - Co-variation with non-linguistic (social) factors
 - Variability subject to quantification and statistical analysis

Multicultural London English

Taking a ‘lectal’ approach:

- What does Multicultural London English (MLE) sound like?
 - Phonetic and prosodic properties
- What are its grammatical characteristics?
 - Morphosyntax
- What are its lexical characteristics?
 - General vocabulary
 - Slang

Multicultural London English

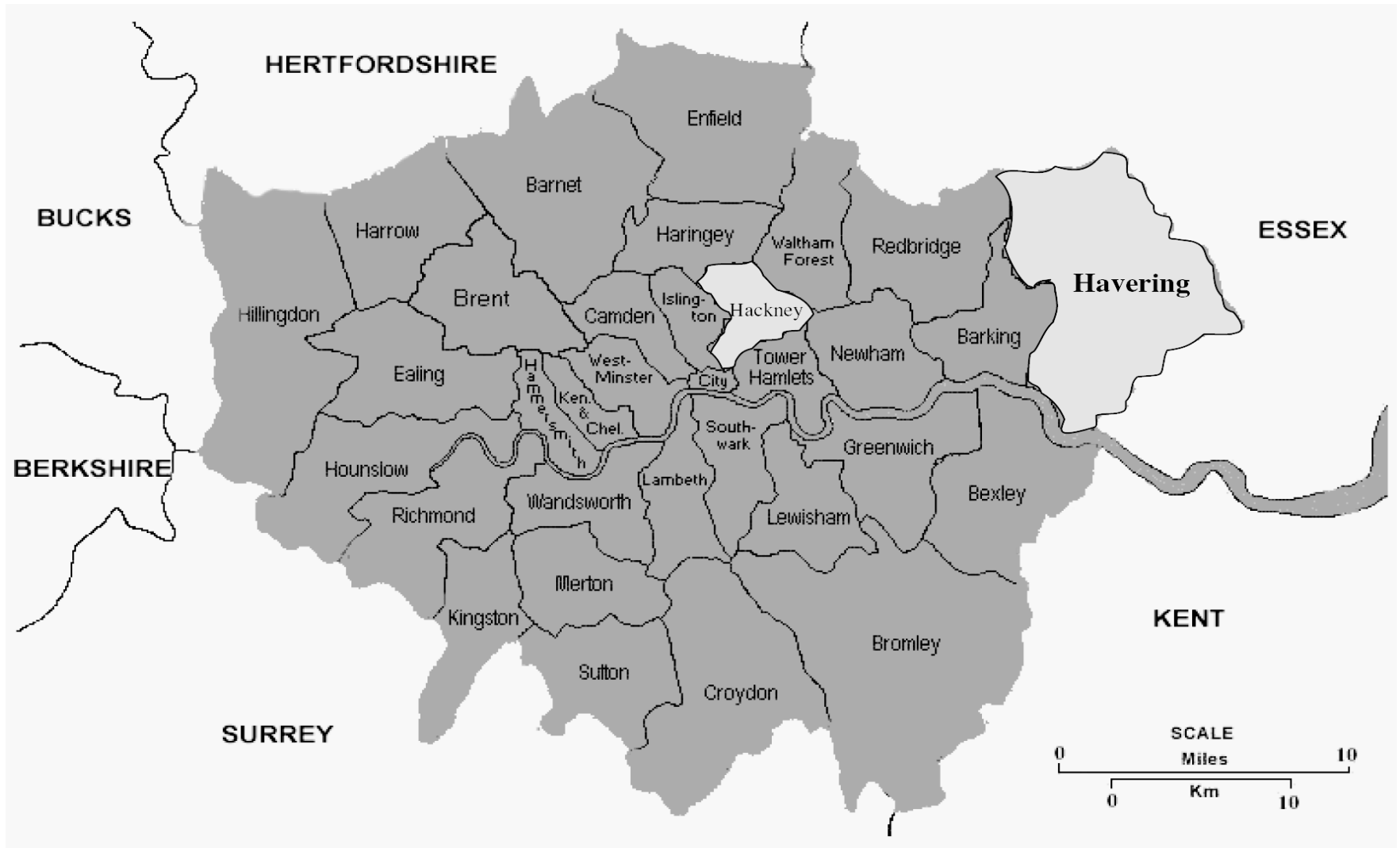
Variability in the 'lect':

- Age, gender, ethnicity
- Change
 - In apparent and real time
- Mechanisms of change
 - What is the structural input to the new variety?
 - How do people generate it?
 - How do people acquire it once it's been generated?
- Taking a variationist approach, how does it relate to the idea of a vernacular?

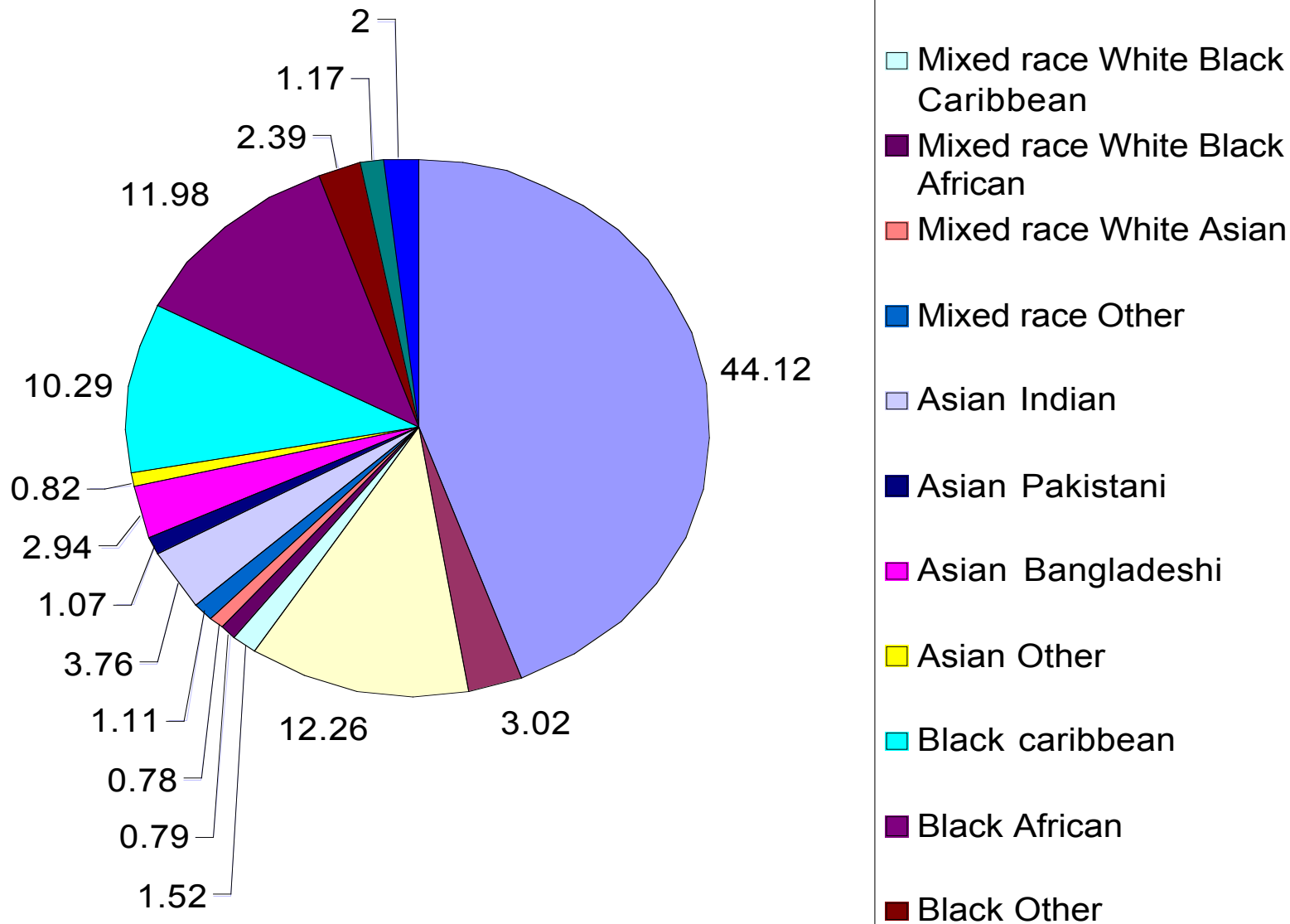
'Causes' of MLE

- Big increase in immigration to London from 1948
 - Accompanied by outward migration of existing populations to new social housing in suburbs and New Towns
 - Immigrants from the Caribbean, followed by India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka
 - From the 80s, West Africa, Somalia, Turkey, South America, North Africa
 - From 2004, European Union accession states

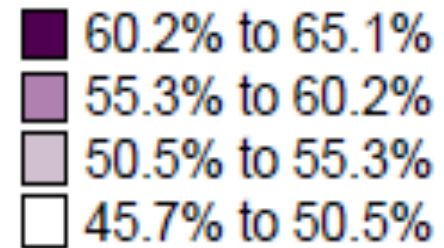
London boroughs



Hackney ethnic group percentages



Percentage of Ward Populations who are NOT White British



In 2011, 54 % of
primary school and
44 % of secondary
school children had
English as an
additional language

Hackney, 2001

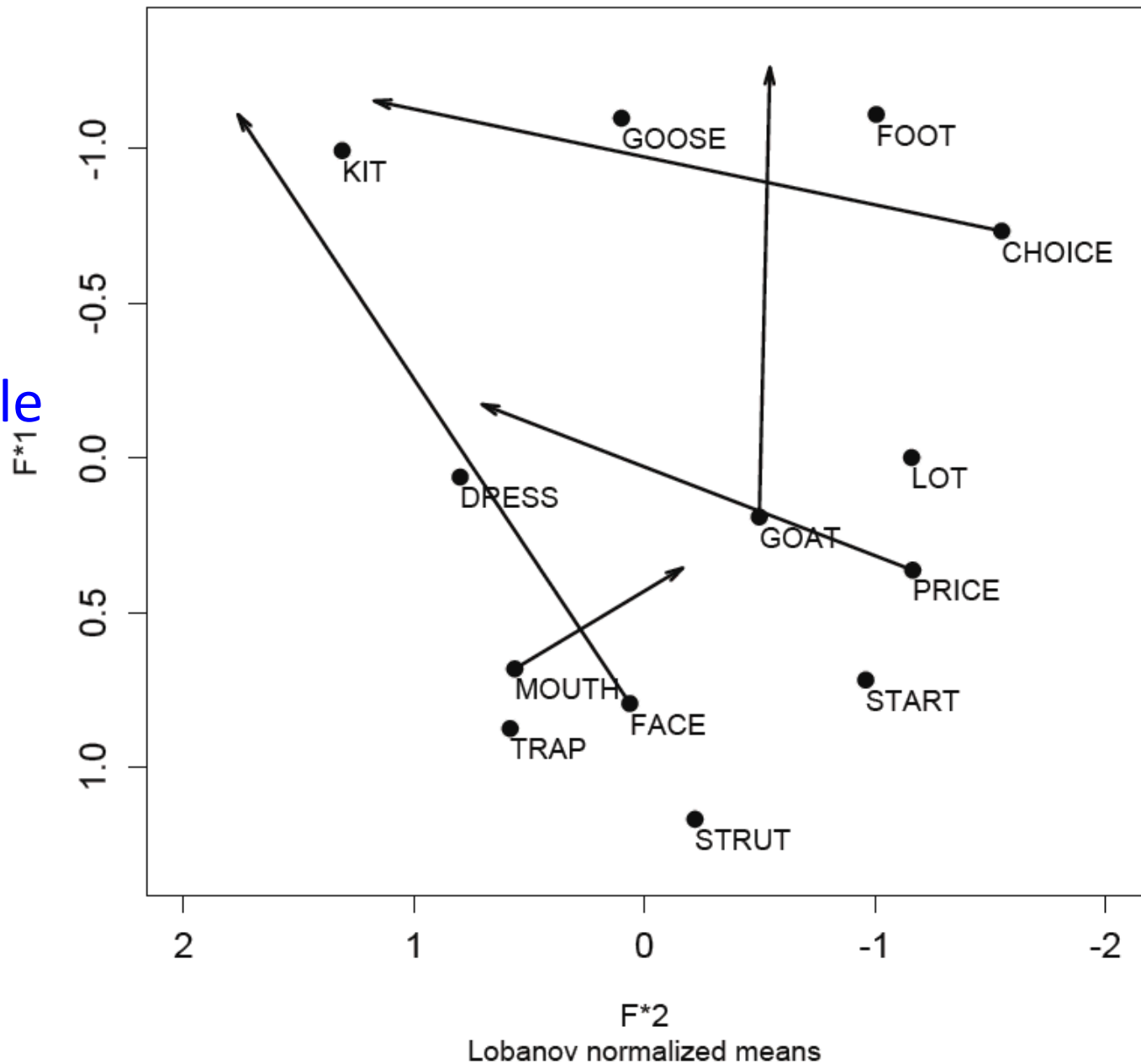
The London projects 2004–10

- *Linguistic Innovators: the English of Adolescents in London* (2004–7)
- *Multicultural London English: the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety* (2007–10)
- Jenny Cheshire, Paul Kerswill, Sue Fox, Eivind Torgersen, Arfaan Khan

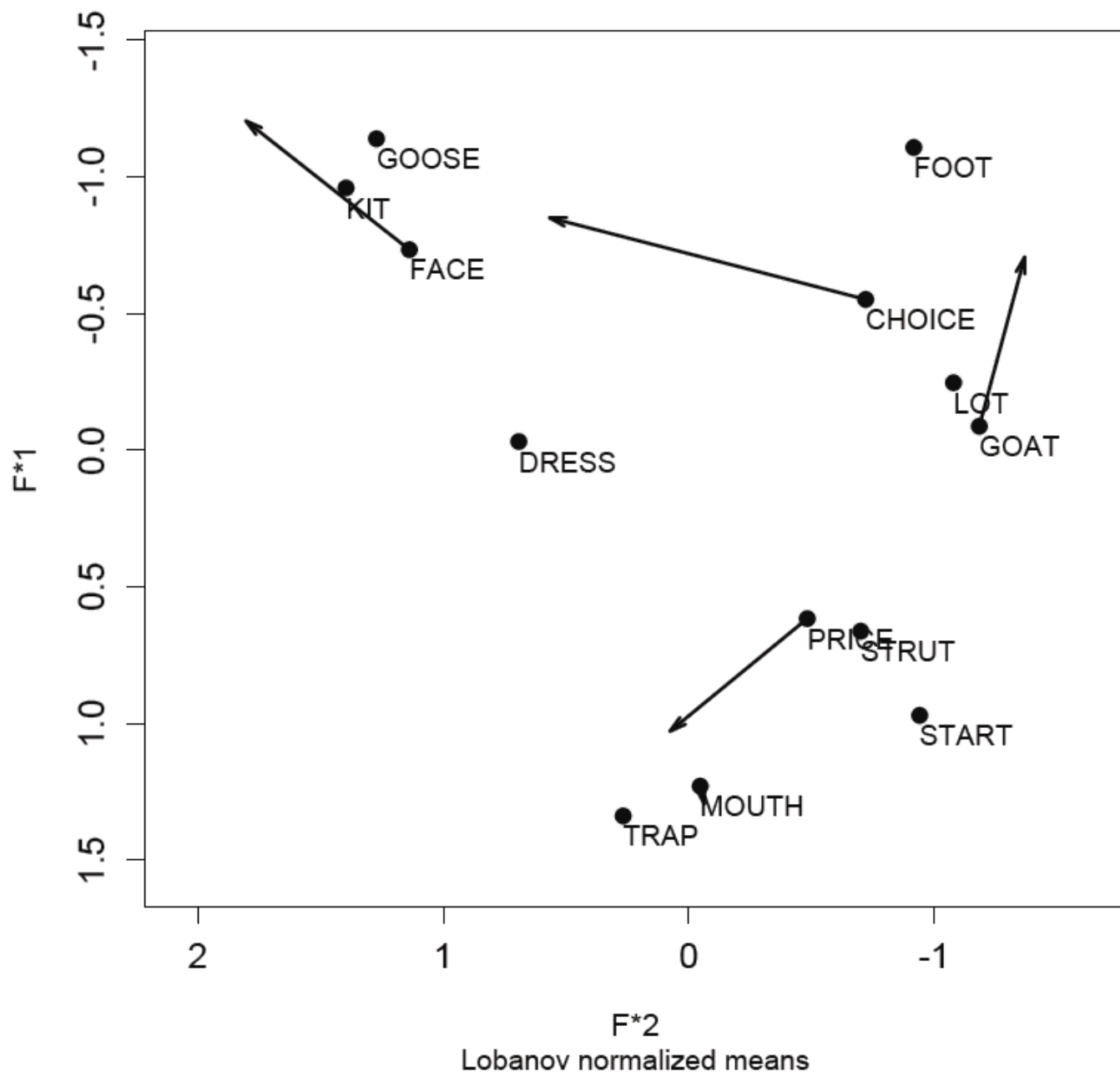
Alex, aged 16

<http://linguistics.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/alex-airport>

Diphthong
system of
elderly male
speaker
from
Hackney
born 1918



Diphthong
system of
young male
from
Hackney,
Afro-
Caribbean
origin, born
1989



/k/-backing

/k/ is backed to [q] in the environment of nonhigh back vowels:

– *car, cousin, course, college, talk, spark*

Reversal of /h/-dropping

/h/ is pronounced in e.g. *hole*

When did 'it' start?

- 1950s on: Anglos (white British) and Afro-Caribbeans (mainly from Jamaica) formed the most numerous groups
- Their linguistic repertoires differed:

	London vernacular (‘Cockney’)	London Jamaican (‘Patois’)
Anglos	✓	
Afro-Caribbeans	✓	✓

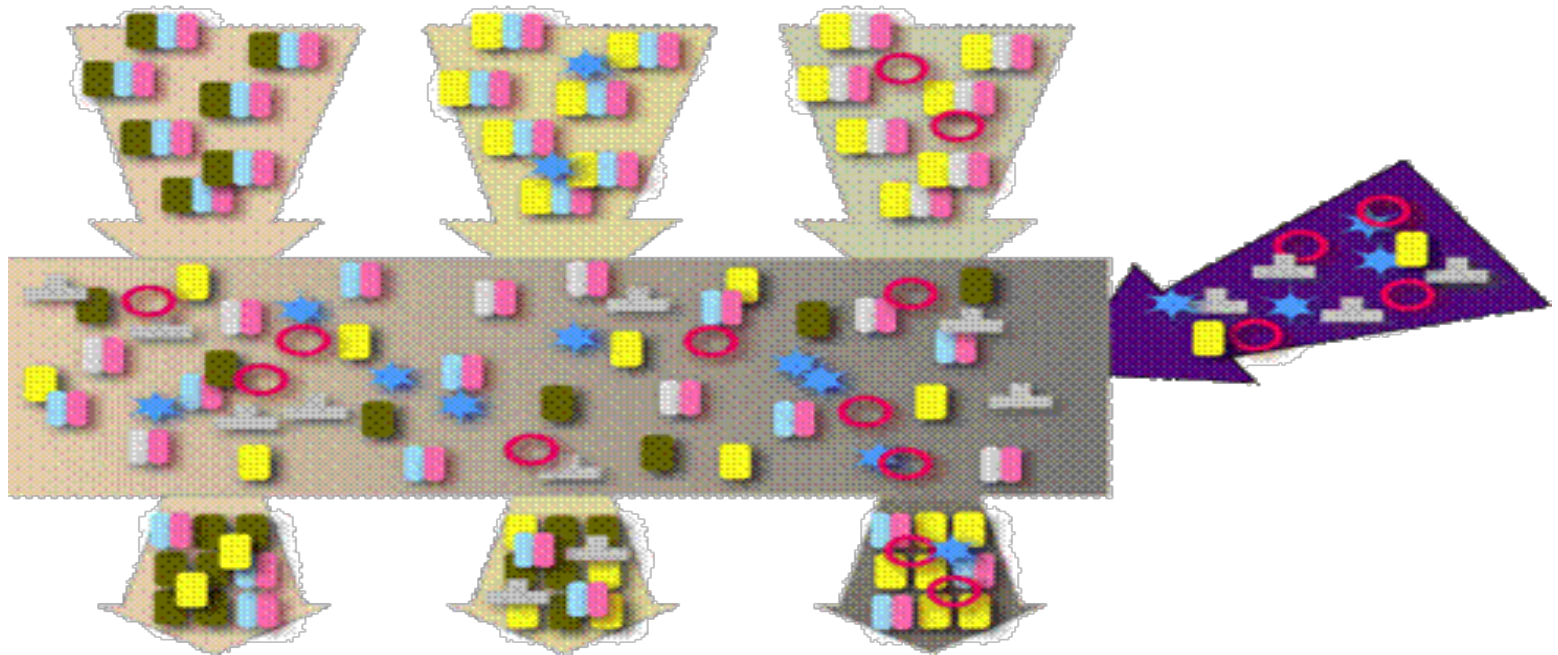
The view from academe, c. 1984

- Mark Sebba and Roger Hewitt also 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)

Competition and selection in the feature pool (Mufwene 2001)



The feature pool includes features from at least:

- Englishes of the Indian subcontinent and Africa
- learner (L2) varieties of English
- Caribbean Creoles and their indigenised London versions
- African English Creoles (e.g. Sierra Leone, Nigeria)
- traditional 'Cockney' features from the existing Anglo communities
- Standard English from various sources

All children, bilingual and monolingual alike, are exposed to all these features from a very young age

The social ecology of London's East End

- Immigration
- Poverty – at the time of the 2001 census Hackney had 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, mainstream, mobile community
- At the same time, there is the formation of dense, neighbourhood networks

Linguistic Innovators project: ethnicities of 16-19 year olds

Anglo	22	Moroccan	2
Mixed race	8	Jamaican	1
Afro-Caribbean	6	Colombian	1
Bangladeshi	6	Portuguese	1
Nigerian	2	Ghanaian	1

MLE project: ethnicities of young speakers, aged 5-17

Anglo	19	Bangladeshi	2
Afro-Caribbean	12	Ghanaian	2
Mixed race	10	Moroccan	2
Turkish	8	Kurdish	2
Nigerian	6	Portuguese	2
Bengali	3	Somali	2
'Black African'	3	Albanian	1
Turkish	3	Philipino	1

Language histories are very varied

- Dom** aged 17; parents Colombian; came to London aged 2; parents speak no English; he and his younger sister interpret for them; speaks English, Spanish, Spanglish; acquired English at school.
- Alex** aged 16; mother German; lived with her and Antiguan stepfather till 13; since then he and his brother have lived with Maltese grandmother; father Maltese/Ghanaian; father has never lived with them but he and Alex work together; understands Maltese and speaks a little.
- Dumaka** aged 8; parents Nigerian; came to London aged 4; parents speak Nigerian English and Yoruba; he, twin sister and older sister speak some Yoruba and understand it.
- Uzay** aged 8; parents Turkish; came to London aged 3; parents now learning English; goes to Turkish school on Saturdays; 1 brother still in Turkey, another in Canada (he sees them both).

Language contact in inner-city multiethnic London

- Much diversity in children's language backgrounds
- Much diversity in the way that children acquire English, including group second language acquisition for many non-Anglos
- Much diversity in the 'feature pool'
- Some bilingual children have to communicate with their friends in English before they are fully proficient
- Lack of a focused target model for the acquisition of English
- Flexible language norms

Simplification

- Loss of indefinite and definite article allomorphy:
 - *They swang me in a [?] alley*
 - *The [?] apple*

Grammaticalisation

e.g. pronoun *man*:

*I don't really mind how . how my girl looks if she looks decent
yeah and there's one bit of her face that just looks mashed
yeah I don't care it's her personality **man's** looking at . I'm not
even looking at the girl proper like* (Cheshire 2013)

a new quotative:

this is me “don't be funny” (Cheshire et al 2011, Fox 2010)

Direct language contact?

Vocabulary as a sign of cultural influence:

- *ends, whagwan, yardie, batty man, mandem, boydem, bredren*
 - Almost all of Jamaican origin

Forms developed from the communicative context, the result of indirect language contact:

- *This is + speaker* quotative

Their frequency of use correlates with **ethnicity** and with **the ethnicity of a speaker's friendship group**

A study of rhythm in London: Is syllable-timing a feature of Multicultural London English?

Eivind Torgersen

Sør-Trøndelag University College

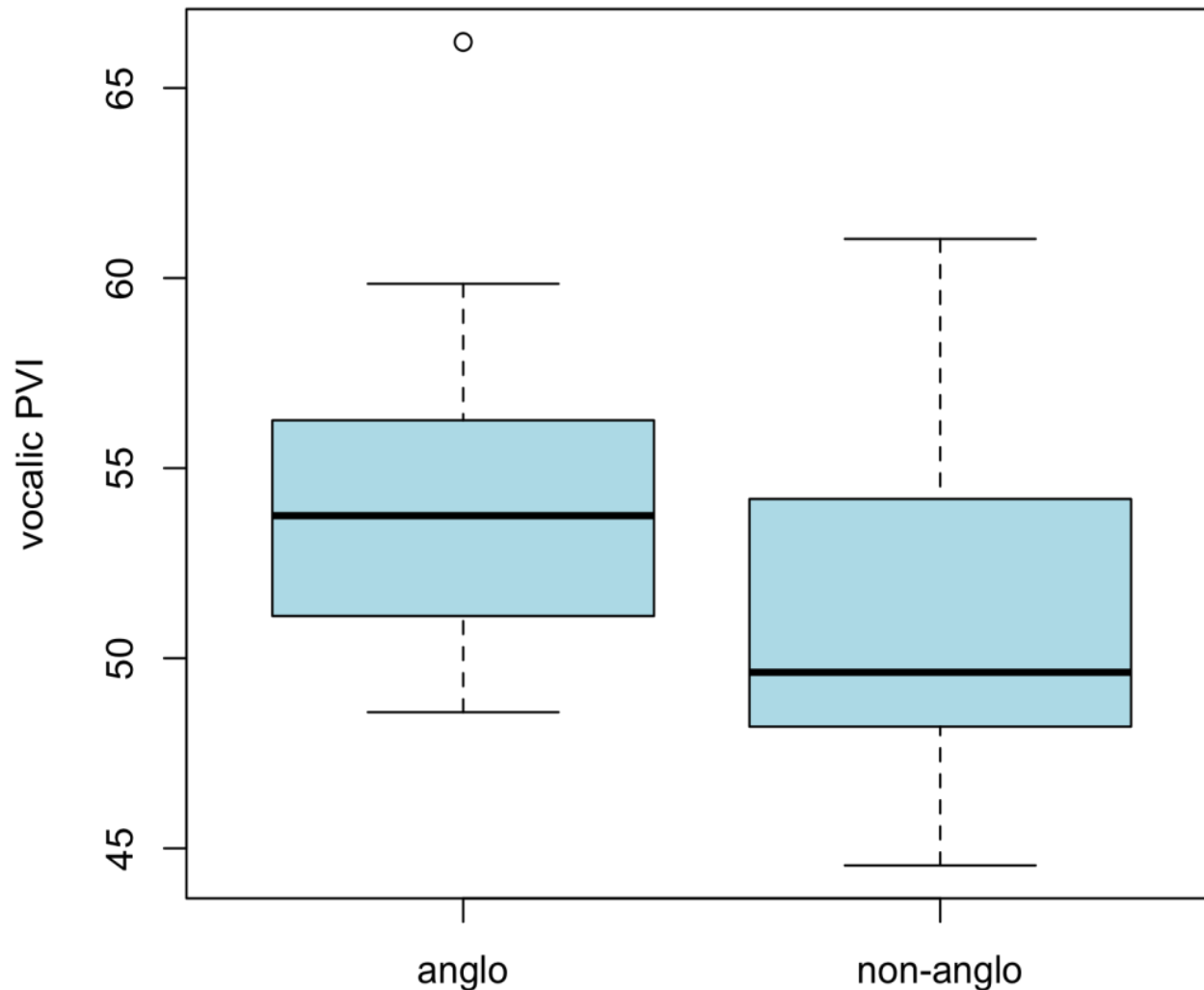
Anita Szakay

University of British Columbia

Vocalic PVI: ethnicity (Torgersen & Szakay 2012)

non-anglo group is more syllable-timed

Wilcoxon-test: $W=488.5$, $p=0.012$



The multiethnolect as a lect: some questions still to be answered ...

- Boundaries
- Acquisition
- Age grading
- Style shifting

2: INDEXICALITY AND AWARENESS

- ‘Lectal’ approach identifies **first-order indexicality**
(Silverstein, Johnstone): statistical association with demographically defined speakers
- What about **second-order indexicality**: recognition of speaker characteristics?
- And **third-order indexicality**: linking of clusters of features with particular sets of identities?

- Int.: what about **Cockneys**? do you think you're **Cockneys**?
- Will: no .
- Ryan: I hate them ..
- Will: isn't that . Essex sides .. or not? Hackney's not really **Cockney**
- Int.: okay so you hate **Cockneys** what ... what how would you describe a **Cockney** then? ...
- Ryan: white . er . **chavs** . that's one word . I hate them
- Int.: are there any in this area?
- Ryan: ah there's loads . innit? .. loads .
- Will: there's **black Cockney** people as well .
- Ryan: oh? .
- Will: there's **black Cockney** people as well though ..
- Int.: where do the **Cockney** people come from?
- Ryan: Eastenders
- Will: I thought it was Essex
- Ryan: Bethnal Green, Bow and places like that
- Will: yeah

2nd order
indexicality:
Naming
social
groups
(without
reference to
language)

3rd order indexicality: positioning of self in relation to other groups, identified linguistically

- Int.: not too quickly!
- Mark: <reads word list>
- Tina: alright then right . all of these words
- Int.: as naturally as you can
- Tina: do you know you actually sounded **Cockney** when you were saying the first words Mark and then you went into this deeper voice
- Mark: is it?
- Tina: yeah . alright, ready? <starts reading in mock Cockney voice>
- Mark: no that's not really her normal way of speaking!
- Tina: <laughing> alright alright <continues in a mock Received Pronunciation voice>
- Mark: neither is that . you got to say it **normal**!
- Tina: <continues in the mock RP voice>
- Mark: there's no point if you're not doing it right
- Tina: I am doing it right Mark, alright? <reads word list in her own voice>

3rd order indexicality: positioning of self in relation to other groups, identified linguistically by gender (Drummond forthcoming)

The 'breadbin' and 'bredren' story (Manchester):

- Leah: D'you know like, d'you know like you get boys that go “what you on **bredren** ['bredrɪn]?”
- Int.: Yeah Yeah
- Leah: Well you know to take the piss you say ‘**breadbin**’.
- Georgia: D'you get it?
- Int.: Yeah.
- Leah: Thicko here [referring to Georgia] didn't have a fuckin noggins what it means.
- Georgia: I don't get it.
- Leah: D'you know when **boys** say to each other “yes what you on **bredren**?”
- Georgia: Yeah
- Leah: Like well you know **breadbin**
- Georgia: Well why would you call someone a **breadbin** anyway?
- Leah: Fuck off Georgia.

Media: transition from 2nd order to 3rd order indexicality

2nd order indexicality: The media reporting an apparently new linguistic phenomenon

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**”.

The Evening Standard 10 April 2006

3rd order indexicality: media appropriation

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 ...

Time Out, 2nd August 2012

3rd order indexicality: the public association of a linguistic variety with the supposed collective behaviours of a social group

‘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 on BBC’s *Newsnight*, after the 2011 London riots

3rd order indexicality: guilt by association – return to ‘objective’ news reporting in situation of perceived national emergency

MLE in the news, August 2014: ‘Jihadi John’:

- The killer is said to be from London’s East End, and part of a murderous team of UK-born militants dubbed The Beatles by captives.

He is thought to be one of 500 British nationals fighting with the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Do you recognise the hooded man speaking with a London accent?

Prof Paul Kerswill, a linguistics expert at the University of York, said the executioner spoke in “**multicultural London English**” usually found in the East End.

Daily Mail

3rd order indexicality: stylised performance

you ready to hear my new randxx **still**
proper London **thing** (right
goes like this

yo

man's cat got stuck up in a tree
so **man** went to rescue **man's** cat from a tree
but

man got stung by a bumble bee
oh

man says "**whagwan**" I say "**yo**"
oh

I got arrested by **the feds**
accused of **jacking** bags from garden sheds
but they had no evidence
so they had to let **man** go

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtB1W8zkY5A&feature=plcp> 0:50

3: MULTIETHNOLECT AS *STYLE*

Style shifting in MLE

Courtney and Aimee: Afro-Caribbean girls aged 18

- ❖ Courtney's GOAT vowel at the beginning of the interview is [əʊ]
- Sue: alright so . so yeah er tell me a little bit about what you're doing at college then ..
- Courtney: we're **both** [əʊ] studying forensic science we're in the same class erm . that's it really . come in . **go** [əʊ] to our lessons
- Aimee: and then **go** [ɔʊ] **home** [əʊ]
- Courtney: use the library then **go** [əʊ] **home** [əʊ] .

❖ Courtney's GOAT vowel in banter style is [ɔʊ]

- Aimee: I'll be more allowed to bring home a woman than a African
- Dexter: yeah .
- Courtney: I **don't** [ɔ] **know** [ɔʊ] about **.no** [ɔ].

Style shifting among middle class youngsters

- With her ear glued to her mobile phone, my 11-year-old daughter, Millie, was deep in conversation, her brow furrowed as she discussed some arrangement with a friend.
- I listened in, *as I made jam in the kitchen*. ‘*Lol*, that’s well *sick!*’ Millie said. ‘*DW*, *yolo!*’
- This indecipherable code-speak (‘sick’ means awesome, ‘DW’ is don’t worry and ‘yolo’ means you only live once) was delivered in an accent I could only place as somewhere between South London, downtown Los Angeles and Kingston, Jamaica.
- It certainly isn’t indigenous to our home village of Ashted, in *the rolling Surrey hills*.
- When Millie ended the call, she turned to me, smiled and asked: ‘What’s for supper please, Dad?’ in perfect *Received Pronunciation*.
- It seems that after less than a month at secondary school, my daughter is now bi-lingual — but it is not French or German in which she is suddenly fluent.
- Her new language, comprising alien words and abbreviations delivered with faux West Coast American inflections, will not stand her in good stead when she embarks on *a school trip to visit museums in Berlin*.
- Millie now speaks a version of what academics call ‘*Multicultural Youth English*’, or *MYE*, which she has picked up from her friends — *middle-class girls from the Home Counties*.

Nick Harding, *Daily Mail*, 11 October 2013

Notes to last slide

- Blue highlights indicate journalist's deliberate indexing of (upper) middle class identities
- Red highlights indicate references to language.

- Two manifestations of style shifting
 - How can we make sense of them?
 - Core vs. peripheral speakers and the ‘vernacular’ construct
 - Style and indexicality

Notes to last slide

- These are two manifestations of style-shifting, but they are motivated by similar conversational functions. Both involve shifting between standard and less standard forms. Linguistically they are dissimilar: in the first example, we see phonetic variation, in the second lexical. In the first, the variation is within a phonetically highly circumscribed range of variants, with no change of referential meaning, while the second is open-ended. (Cf Lavandera.) But while the first is integrated, the girl in the second case is borrowing a small number of forms she is familiar with, which are emblematic of the variety she is imitating. She probably wouldn't be able to switch to MLE of the type Courtney uses. But in each case, speakers are shifting towards styles which index particular kinds of speakers and speaker characteristics.
- There's still a problem with 'core' vs. 'peripheral' speakers, though, and this has to do with the assumption that we can easily tell what is the 'baseline', Labovian vernacular of a given speaker in a given piece of linguistic data. Each piece of data is produced in an unfolding conversation, and the same kinds of work are being done through variation. We can't be sure that we've identified a speaker's vernacular, and this can't be done using conventional sociolinguistic models.
 - Reason: especially in socially variable, communities, language acquisition takes place in many different ways.

Sharma & Rampton's 'Lectal focusing in interaction' (2011)

- The idea that some speakers style-shift a great deal in moment-to-moment interaction, while others maintain a more even style.
- Systematic differences between the two types reveal differences in individuals' experiences and need for identity projection.
- Thus, for London Asians, they argue there are 'more agentive "acts of identity" among older men, [while there is] more broad group marking, possibly below the level of consciousness, among younger men'.
- Contradictions between lect, indexicality and style are reduced, and become a matter of research orientation

Notes to last slide

- This removes the need to distinguish between core and periphery. It deals with agency, while still recognising the macrosocial, socioeconomic and social processes that the speakers are subject to.

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