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Language contact and language change in the multicultural metropolis

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Abstract: London, like many other large cities in Europe, is now home to immigrants from many different countries. In some areas of the city immigrant families now outnumber the White British families that have been living in the area for many generations. As a result the English spoken in these areas has changed rapidly, with many innovations that we argue are due to the indirect effect of multiple language contact. We discuss some of innovations in terms of why and how they have emerged, and consider the available evidence that can indicate whether the innovations are likely to survive.

Résumé : Londres, comme bien d'autres grandes métropoles européennes, accueille des immigrants venus de nombreux pays. Dans certaines zones de l'agglomération, les familles immigrées sont maintenant plus nombreuses que les familles blanches britanniques qui y vivaient depuis des générations. Il en résulte que l'Anglais parlé dans ces quartiers a changé rapidement, marqué par des innovations qui sont à nos yeux l'effet indirect d'un contact entre nombreuses langues. Nous discutons quelques-unes de ces innovations en nous interrogeant sur les causes et les moyens de leur apparition, et en examinant quels sont les indices disponibles de leur maintien.

Keywords: linguistic innovation, immigration and language change, multiethnolect, Multicultural London English

Mots clés : innovation linguistique, immigration et changement linguistique, multi-ethnolecte, Multicultural London English

1. Introduction

The English of inner city London has changed dramatically during the last fifty years or so. In the East End, the traditional working class dialect once characterised as *Cockney* has been replaced by what the media describe as *Jafaican*, a term that encapsulates lay perceptions that “it sounds black”. Young people in the area do not think they speak Cockney, but nor do they associate their way of speaking with “talking black”; if pressed, they say they speak slang (Kerswill in press). We prefer the term *Multicultural London English* (MLE) since this is a more accurate description of the origins of this way of speaking, which has emerged in multi-ethnic inner city boroughs now populated by recent immigrants from many different developing countries. Similar changes have occurred in the same period to the majority languages of many other European cities where there has been large-scale immigration: see, for example, discussions of *Rinkebysvenska* in Stockholm (Kotsinas 2001), *Straattaal* in the Netherlands (Cornips & al. ms), *Kiezdeutsch* in Berlin (Wiese 2009), *Jallanorsk* in Norway (Opsahl & al. 2008; see also Svendsen & Røyneland 2008), and the *Københavnsk multiethnolect* in Copenhagen (Quist 2008).

In this paper we describe our two recent research projects on Multicultural London English (MLE). We discuss some of the linguistic innovations that characterise MLE and consider why and how these innovations have emerged. We argue that language contact is a key factor, but that there are so many different languages involved that in most cases it is unrealistic to attribute the innovations to contact with any one specific language. Instead, the effect of language contact is indirect, resulting from the sociolinguistic setting in inner London where children from immigrant backgrounds acquire English mainly from their peers, with no consistent target model and flexible language norms. In the final section we consider the available evidence that can help decide whether the innovations will survive and become part of the future English language.

2. Research on London English (2004-2010)

2.1. Linguistic Innovators: the English of adolescents in London (2004-2007)

This research project (Kerswill & *al.* 2007) was the first ever large-scale sociolinguistic investigation in London, set up to determine whether London was the source of some current language changes sweeping through Britain, as was then supposed. We chose two research sites that differed in their relation to the sociohistorical changes that had taken place in London since World War II (described in more detail in section 3). One was in inner London (Hackney), the other in outer London, further to the east (Havering).

Hackney was traditionally associated with the dense social networks of working class white Cockneys, but during the post-war slum clearance and reconstruction of London many of the original inhabitants were transferred to new estates further east (including Havering) or to new towns in Essex (Fox 2007). Our sample of speakers from the inner city area consists of 49 adolescent speakers, 27 male and 22 female. Half of these speakers have a 'white London' background in that previous generations of their families have relatively local roots. We term this group of speakers *Anglo*. The remaining half are the children or grandchildren of immigrants, whose self-defined ethnicities are Black Caribbean, Mixed race (White/Black Caribbean), Black African, Bangladeshi, Moroccan, Chinese, Colombian, Portuguese and Middle Eastern. The ethnic diversity in the sample reflects the diversity of the local population, though not necessarily in the same proportions that the 2001 Census gives for the borough – the earliest date Census figures that are readily available (again, see section 3). This is because we wanted to record speakers in their natural friendship groups in order to obtain speech that was as spontaneous and informal as possible, given the constraints of the presence of the fieldworker and the recording equipment.

The population of Havering, by contrast, is predominantly white (95.2 percent according to the 2001 Census); more importantly, it is also predominantly monolingual. It contains two large housing estates built to deal with the incoming population from the slum clearance programme in London. Our sample for Havering consists of 36 adolescent speakers, 19 male and 17 female, almost all of white British background – also, then, reflecting the local population.

All the adolescent participants, in both locations, were in post-16 education, taking vocational courses such as bricklaying, painting and decorating and catering, and were generally from working class backgrounds. In addition, we recorded conversations with 8 working-class Anglo adults aged 65-80 (4 women, 4 men) in both Hackney and Havering, to act as a reference point for comparison with the speech of the adolescents.

Unsurprisingly, we found that the language changes currently underway in Southeastern Britain (and, in some cases, beyond) could all be observed in the speech of the adolescents in Havering. The elderly speakers in the same location used the new variants either much less

frequently or not at all. For example, adolescents in Havering tended to use a fronted [əʏ] vowel in the lexical set for GOAT, a form that occurs in levelled varieties of English throughout the South East. They also used the widespread *was/weren't* system for past forms of BE, with levelled *was* for all subjects in positive clauses and levelled *were* for all subjects in negative clauses (e.g. *we was going out weren't we? You weren't right, was you?*).

However, contrary to our expectations, inner London did not seem to be the source of these changes. Adolescents in Hackney tended to use a raised, back vowel in the lexical set for GOAT, [oʊ], differing both from speakers of the same age in Havering and from the elderly speakers in Hackney, who used the broad Cockney diphthong [ʌʊ]. Hackney adolescents also tended to prefer a levelled *was/wasn't* pattern for past BE, unlike young people in Havering (and elsewhere in Britain), and they sometimes used *we's* for *was*.

These were far from the only differences between the speech of the adolescents in Hackney and Havering. Hackney adolescents used a wide array of innovative forms in every component of language, none of which were used less often or not at all by the adolescents in Havering. Phonetic innovations include backing of /k/ before low back vowels to [q] and further changes in the long vowel system, including a narrow diphthong or monophthong for the lexical set of FACE ([eɪ] or [e] in place of Cockney [æɪ]). They also pronounced /h/ in lexical words such as *head* and stressed pronouns such as *him* or *her*, to an extent greater than in other SouthEastern varieties (the region, including London, is traditionally h-dropping). There is a more syllable-timed (staccato) rhythm (Torgersen & Szakay 2012) and a reduction of allophony in the form of definite and indefinite articles: *a* and unstressed *the* are used not only before consonants, as in *a banana*, but also before a following vowel, for example, *a apple* rather than *an apple*. Grammatical innovations include a new pronoun, *man*, with mainly first person singular reference (e.g. *I don't care what my girl looks like .. it's her personality man's looking at*). At the discourse-pragmatic level there is a new quotative expression: *this is* + SPEAKER, as in *this is me "let's go now"*. There are also camouflaged forms (Spears 1982): forms that are used in both Havering and Hackney but that have additional discourse functions in Hackney. For example, adolescents in Hackney use relative *who* as a topicaliser, to mark antecedent nouns that are candidates for topics (Cheshire & al. 2013). A further example is *innit*, which occurs in both Hackney and Havering with roughly the same frequency and with the same discourse functions but which has additional functions in Hackney, where it can also mark a topic or foreground new information (Pichler & Torgersen 2009).

There are innovations in vocabulary, too, in this case mainly borrowings from Jamaican English. They include *blood* and *bredren* ('friend'), *cuss* ('defame'), *ends* ('estate' or 'neighbourhood'), *tief* ('steal') and *whagwan* ('what's up').

All these innovations were used more frequently by non-Anglo speakers, and we assume that language contact plays an important role in their emergence. But they were also used by Anglos, especially those with highly multi-ethnic friendship groups, though the overall frequencies with which they used the features was lower than for non-Anglos.

We see Multicultural London English, then, as an ethnically neutral variable repertoire that contains a core of innovative phonetic, grammatical and discourse-pragmatic features. In addition, MLE speakers share some of the features used by young people elsewhere in Southeast England, including Havering. For example, even though inner city London does not appear to be the source of recent changes in Southeast England, the adolescents in Hackney, both Anglo and non-Anglo, do use th-fronting (e.g. *tooth* pronounced *toof*), /l/-vocalisation and GOOSE-fronting. They also use non-standard grammatical features such as negative concord (e.g. *I don't want nothing*) or demonstrative *them* (e.g. *look at them girls*), albeit more frequently than adolescents in Havering and elderly speakers in Hackney. The globally

innovating BE LIKE quotative is perhaps more grammaticalised in their speech in that they use it in a wider range of tenses and with a higher number of different grammatical subjects (Kerswill & *al.* 2007).

2.2. Multicultural London English: the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety (2007-2010)

For the second project we recorded more adolescents, this time from an inner city area in north London with a different minority ethnic population mix, to allow a comparison with the previous study. To investigate how MLE is acquired we recorded children aged 4-5, 7-8, and 11-12, plus the caregivers of some of the younger children, aged around 40. The caregivers were interviewed at home, usually on their own but sometimes with a child or another caregiver present. The children were recorded in two primary schools, a youth club and a Further Education college. After spending time observing and getting to know the participants, interviews were conducted in pairs or threes. There are also a number of self-recordings, used to investigate style shifting. In addition, a small group of 25-30 olds was recorded to test whether MLE continues into adulthood. In total, there are 127 speakers, of different ethnicities, including Anglos (children of families with more than three generations' settlement history in the fieldwork area) and non-Anglos (children or grandchildren of recent immigrants). As before, we selected participants on the basis of friendship groups, resulting in a sample containing members of ethnic groups representative of the area. This time the self-defined ethnicities include Turkish, Philipino, Kosovan, and more. Together, the corpus from the two projects comprises approximately 3 million words of transcribed, time-aligned transcriptions.

We found that many MLE features were quite well established among the youngest children, suggesting they acquired them from peers and older children, rather than from their parents, who were mostly not first-language English speakers. Young adults also used many MLE features, but less consistently than teenagers. Older adults did not, probably because they grew up before MLE had become established.

In perception tests, listeners from London could not distinguish ethnicity with any certainty, confirming therefore that MLE is an ethnically-neutral variety. More MLE-sounding voices were likely to be thought to be from London by listeners who were not Londoners.

3. From Cockney to Multicultural London English

To understand how such a large amount of innovation has been possible in such a short period of time, we have to consider in more detail the sociohistorical changes that have taken place in the East End of London

The elderly speakers in Hackney were born between 1918 and 1940, when the local area was a predominantly white working class neighbourhood with dense social networks. As mentioned in the Introduction, they were monolingual speakers of the local vernacular dialect, Cockney, and although there were some immigrant arrivals (mainly Jewish people from different European countries and people from Ireland), in general this generation rarely came into contact with speakers of other languages.

The postwar exodus to new housing in outer London left an ageing population in Hackney until, with the arrival of foreign immigrants, the population started to increase. The earliest immigrant group to arrive was from the West Indies, and today this group still makes up 10.3 per cent of the total population (again, according to the 2001 Census figures). However, they were soon joined by immigrants from a very wide range of countries. At first, immigrant

groups tended to interact mainly with their own group, isolated from the indigenous community, which was not always welcoming. Within these groups, children tended to keep the language of the home and the language of the school separate. Mainly, the bilingual children did not acquire English until they attended school, where the English that they heard was, of course, the local London vernacular. The caregivers in our second project were born between 1965 and 1975, during this period. Their English reflects the relative lack of interaction between different ethnic groups that was typical of that time: the Anglo caregivers speak traditional London English, like the elderly speakers in our sample, while the Afro-Caribbeans speak both London English and *patois*, an English-based Creole language. Sebba's research (1993) confirms that AfroCaribbean adolescents in the 1980s were bidialectal, switching between the Creole and London English. The other non-Anglo caregivers in our sample are more recent arrivals: they are either learners or non-speakers of English. It seems clear, then, that MLE is not acquired from the parents' generation.

By the late 1990s, when the adolescents in our sample were growing up, the linguistic ecology of the area had changed. Hackney was becoming increasingly multilingual, and residential segregation was less common. The area is now multicultural, home to many different minority ethnic groups. Baker and Eversley (2000) record 26 different languages spoken as a first language by schoolchildren in Hackney, a figure that underestimates the linguistic diversity of the area since it does not take account of the Creole languages spoken by immigrants from the Caribbean and from several of the African countries. White British people now make up less than half the total population of the area (44.9 per cent according to 2001 figures).

There is a rapid shift to English by the children of the migrants, unlike the previous generation of children. Even if their parents do not speak English at home, children acquire English at a very young age from older siblings and from their peers at nursery school. Their friendship groups are typically multiethnic. The conventional classifications used to distinguish different types of bilingual language acquisition are difficult to apply in this situation as the children differ a great deal in their acquisition profiles (see also Meisel (2010) with reference to heritage language speakers). Some are simultaneous bilinguals, others are successive bilinguals, but there are different degrees of proficiency in the heritage language. Some children have an interrupted acquisition of English because they returned to their parents' home country for a period. The children that we might want to consider simultaneous bilinguals, in the sense that they acquire English and another language from birth, are exposed to a wide range of different Englishes at home, since some parents speak a postcolonial variety of English such as Indian English, Nigerian English or Ghanaian English and others a Creole-influenced variety. Other parents are learning English and although they speak it at home there are various levels of proficiency. Anglo speakers are in a minority, so local models of English are less available than for previous generations. The target variety of English for many children is very often the English spoken by their peers, but since their peers include both Anglos and non-Anglos from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds the model is far from consistent, and norms are flexible. Of course, Anglo children are also exposed to the immense variation of their peers in the peer groups.

It is impossible to determine accurately the age at which the non-Anglo children reach different stages of acquisition of English. As Kerswill and Cheshire (2013, 272-273) point out, the non-Anglo 4-5 year old children in our sample are fluent in English in that they speak it a fast pace and have no problems of comprehension, but many have not yet acquired the syntax usually in place at this age for children whose primary caregiver is a native speaker of English and individuals vary greatly in their proficiency. The 8 year olds have now acquired the major patterns of English syntax but there are frequent indications that they are still learning the language: for example there is a frequent use of *thing* when specific words do not

come to mind, allowing speakers to maintain fluency and their turn in the conversation, as in (1), and they make frequent use of prefabricated phrases.

- (1) *he uhm he uhm he loves him first then thing . he gets all of James Bore's money and ra and give it to the bad guy* (Uzay, an 8 year old Turkish boy, talking about a James Bond film)

The English that develops in this situation does not fit neatly into conventional typologies of language varieties. It is a contact variety: “a language that arose by some historical process other than normal transmission [from caregiver to child]... comprised of grammatical and lexical systems that cannot all be traced back to a single parent language” (Thomason 1997, 74-75). Yet it is also a local dialect: “the particular combination of English words, pronunciations and grammatical forms that you share with other people from your area and your social background” (Trudgill 2004, 2). The contact situation in inner city London is perhaps best described as arising from the process group second language acquisition (see, for example, Winford 2003, 235-237), but there are far more languages in contact in London than in the situations usually considered in this way, and the linguistic complexity of inner city London makes it impossible and unrealistic to attempt to trace the direct effect of one language on another. Nevertheless it is this complex multilingual situation that has given rise to the innovations in inner city London (recall that few of the innovations occur in neighbouring monolingual Havering). Our data provide an opportunity, then, to investigate the origins of the innovations, which appear to lie in the more indirect effects of language contact.

4. Strategies promoting language innovation

In our previous work we have found it helpful to think in terms of Mufwene's model of a feature pool, with different inputs from individual speakers producing a pool of variants from which speakers select different combinations (Mufwene 2001). Many of the innovations listed in section 2 can then be seen as the result of strategies constraining the selections that speakers make from the feature pool. We will briefly consider three of these strategies, recognising however that it is often a combination of factors working together that produce an innovation.

Overt marking of information structure

It has been suggested that information structuring is a major driving force in language change (Escure 1997, 286), perhaps especially when language contact is involved (Wiese & al. 2009). Assigning a topic marking function to relativiser *who* can be explained in this way, as can the use of *innit* to signal topic shifts and foreground new information. The emergence of *who* as a topicaliser results from a feature pool containing two variants that function as a subject relativiser, *that* and *who*. However, unlike *that*, in our data *who* occurs only with animate subject antecedents. Topic is closely related cross-linguistically to both subjects and animacy, so it is a straightforward development for speakers to use *who* to mark topic as well as animacy and subjecthood (Cheshire, Adger & Fox 2013).

In addition, many of the languages spoken by the non-Anglos have forms used to mark different kinds of discourse prominence, as discussed in Cheshire & al. (*op. cit.*). In childhood, bilinguals may be guided by relevant forms in their other languages, as well as by a general communicative bias towards the overt expression of information structure. Language transfer, then, may be a further factor for some individuals. Another possibility is that parents or older siblings who are dominant in a language other than English innovate various constructions to mark discourse prominence. These second language constructions form part of the English input for second generation immigrant children, who may then conventionalise the different constructions they hear in the peer groups by limiting the

marking of discourse-prominence to an existing element, *who*, with related functions. This has the potential benefit that they cannot be easily ‘charged’ for divergent language use¹.

Frequency

In some cases it is the sheer frequency of a form that seems to determine its selection from the pool of variants. One example is the high onset in MLE of the diphthongs in the FACE and GOAT lexical sets. These are similar to those of the English of various groups of immigrants: the Englishes spoken in the Caribbean, West Africa and the Indian subcontinent all have similar qualities (Kerswill & al. 2013, 270). Reduction of allophony in the definite and indefinite articles can also be seen as resulting from the frequency of the invariant forms in the input varieties. It is typical of Jamaican English, learner varieties of English, and contact varieties of English around the world to use *a* and unstressed *the* before nouns beginning with a vowel as well as before nouns beginning with a consonant. Furthermore, articles in prevocalic position are in general less frequent in speech than articles in preconsonantal position (Cheshire & al. 2011).

Similarly, the use of levelled *was* throughout the past tense system of BE (in both positive and negative contexts) is typical of English varieties with a creole history. It also occurs as an interlanguage form in second language acquisition (Cheshire & Fox 2009). Nonstandard *was* was also part of the traditional London vernacular, used with a rate of 52 per cent in positive contexts by the elderly speakers in Hackney. In London non-standard *were* does not occur at all in positive contexts: the form used with first and third person singular past forms of BE, then, is always *was*. The most frequent subjects in speech are first and third singular subjects. In negative contexts, frequencies of non-standard *weren't* (i.e. with first and third singular subjects) are relatively low in our data, at least compared to outer London. All this makes *was* the dominant form overall in the pool, in both negative and positive contexts (Cheshire & Fox 2009). There is enormous pressure, then, for speakers to select *was*.

Again, though, frequency does not seem to be the only relevant factor. The selection of both the *was* and the *a* and unstressed *the* variants are, at the same time, examples of simplification. In the case of *was*, speakers simplify the past tense system of BE by using a single form, and in the case of *a* and unstressed *the*, they simplify the strategies for hiatus resolution in English (Britain & Fox 2009).

Grammaticalisation

At least two of the innovations in MLE allow us to trace the early stages of grammaticalisation, the process whereby lexical forms, in certain contexts, gradually develop grammatical functions (Hopper & Traugott 1993, xv). The emergence of *man* as a pronoun derives from the noun *man*, for which adolescents in inner London have a range of different plural forms: *mans*, *mens* and, of course, *men*, but also *man*, which for them refers to a group of people is defined by the context, as in (2) and (3). In (2) the group is physically present; in (3) the following discourse makes it clear that the group consists of people riding past on their bikes.

(2) you **man** are all sick though

(3) some of my boys they were kicking **man** in the canal like from their bikes. people just driving past on their bikes. they're like out at ten o'clock kicking **man** in the canal and that

It is a short step from using *man* to refer to a contextually defined group to using *man* as a pronoun, which by its nature is contextually defined. Although it is unusual cross-linguistically for first person singular pronouns to develop from nouns referring to ‘people’,

¹ We thank an anonymous reviewer of Cheshire & al. (2013) for this point.

our data shows that speakers frequently use the pronoun to position themselves as a member of a group. For example, in (4), the speaker tells his friend and the fieldworker what he had said to his girlfriend when she annoyed him by bringing along her friends on a date.

- (4) “didn’t I tell you **man** wanna come see you I don’t date your friends I date you not your friends”

By using *man* to refer to himself the speaker portrays himself as a member of a group of people who would feel the same way, thereby presenting his reaction as perfectly reasonable, because it is likely to be shared. In addition, using the third person form *man* rather than *I* distances the speaker from what he is saying, making the remark less confrontational and face threatening for his girlfriend (see Cheshire (in press) for further examples and discussion). By positioning themselves in this way speakers can achieve a range of rhetorical functions, including giving their statements more authority or constructing solidarity with their interlocutors. Ultimately, then, grammaticalisation of *man* as a pronoun is driven at the outset by communicative pressures, which lead individual speakers to select an appropriate variant of the source noun for use as a pronoun.

The new quotative, *this is* +speaker, also reveals the early stages of the grammaticalisation process. The sequences *this is* and *this was* followed by a noun phrase are very frequent in the speech of the 8 year olds in our sample, perhaps because for bilingual children who are not yet fully proficient in English this semi-fixed construction is a useful way to keep the floor and maintain the fast pace of speech typical of interactions in their peer groups. Unlike speakers in the other age groups, the 8 year olds often use this construction with non-quotative functions, to report the actions or feelings of a protagonist in a narrative:

- (5) this is him there’s year six **this is him** he’s near the goal um I’m saying to I’m here

- (6) he’s sitting on a chair **this is him** like he’s drunk or something

The non-quotative use accounts for nearly half the *this is* +speaker (/actor) construction for this age group, as Table 1 shows. The Table shows that as children grow older, they refine their use of the form so that it (almost) always introduces only reported speech.

Table 1. *Quotative and non-quotative uses of this is +speaker/actor.*
(from Cheshire & al. 2011, 175)

<i>this is</i> +speaker/actor	8-9 year olds	12-13 year olds	16-19 year olds
quotative uses	51% (N=27)	87% (N=13)	93% (N=38)
non-quotative uses	49% (N= 26)	13% (N=2)	7% (N=3)

Lack of full proficiency in English is not the only reason for the use of the *this is* +speaker/actor construction by the 8 year olds. This age group has a very lively narrative style: as Table 2 shows, they quote non-lexicalised sounds (for example *the dog went woof!*) and gestures nearly six times as often as the 5 year olds and the 12 year olds, and almost 12 times as often as the adolescent speakers.

Table 2. *Content of the quote for different age groups (percentage of all quotes).*
(from Kerswill & al. 2013, 279)

	4-5 year olds	8-9 year olds	12-13 year olds	16-19 year olds
direct speech	95.5%	74.5%	94.3%	94.5%
non-lexicalised sound and gesture	4.6%	23.3%	3.6%	1.9%
inner dialogue	0%	0.2%	3.6%	2.8%
Total N	44	494	557	977

The 8 year olds, then, use *this is* +speaker/actor with the general function of introducing mimesis: to perform reported actions, gestures and speech in a way that mimics the way they may actually have occurred. The pragmatic force associated with forms introducing mimesis is known to make these forms subject to innovation (Güldemann 2012). Again, then, we see that communicative pressures and, in this case, communicative style, can trigger the early stages of grammaticalisation: here, the grammaticalisation of a quotative expression from the *this is* +speaker/actor sequence.

As with the topicalising function for *who*, language transfer may be a further relevant factor. Many languages have deictics that highlight the source or form of a quote, or identificational or presentational structures that focus on the source of the quote (again, see Güldemann 2012; Kerswill & al. 2013, 280). It is important to note, though, that it is not only the bilingual children who use the new quotative: in the data from the 8 year olds *this is* +speaker occurs in the speech of 4 Anglo children as well as 3 children of, respectively, Turkish, Nigerian and AfroCaribbean descent (indeed, all the innovations are used by Anglo as well as non-Anglo children). We propose that it is the use of the form to introduce mimesis that makes it an attractive choice for children of this age, because of the narrative style that they favour.

Space does not permit further discussion of the origins of the innovations in MLE. It is relevant, though, that similar strategies seem to account for many of the innovations in the multiethnolects of other European cities (see the references given in the Introduction).

5. Language change or transitory youth language?

The flexibility of language norms and the extreme variability of linguistic forms in inner city London account for the creativity and innovation of MLE, but flexible norms and extreme variation may also lead to a variety that is unfocussed and unstable. Many of the innovations occur with low frequencies, and only in the speech of relatively few individuals. Some, therefore, are likely to be transitory, unlikely to survive. With others, however, we may well be witnessing the early stages of a language change, such that the features will disseminate to other sections of the community and to other parts of the UK – perhaps even beyond.

There are three types of evidence on which we can draw to determine the likelihood that a feature will survive. First, we can look for evidence that a feature is disseminating through the community via the usual channels. Second, we can look for evidence that it is acquired by young children, or that it continues to be used in young adulthood. Finally, evidence that a feature occurs beyond London may indicate that it is disseminating further afield. This is potentially the weakest of the three strands of evidence, though, since if the multilingual setting in other cities resembles the one we have described for London the feature may have been spontaneously created there.

Fox, Khan and Torgersen (2011) provides important evidence that in the case of the long vowels we are witnessing the start of a language change. Fox analysed the PRICE and FACE vowels in the speech of 17 Bangladeshi adolescents, 20 White British adolescents and 2 mixed race adolescents in a youth club in Tower Hamlets, the borough adjoining Hackney. Khan analysed the GOAT and PRICE vowels in the speech of 30 Black Caribbean, 29 White British and 41 Pakistani adolescents in Birmingham, the second largest city in the UK, located about 177 km to the Northwest of London. The results of their analyses are then compared with the realisations of the FACE, PRICE and GOAT vowels by adolescents in the Hackney *Linguistic Innovators* project. In all three communities there were very similar linguistic innovations, with a monophthongal GOAT vowel and front onsets for PRICE and FACE. In each community minority ethnic speakers led the innovations while the White British speakers tended to preserve the traditional local variants, but there was clear evidence

that the innovative variants were diffusing to the White British speakers through multiethnic friendship groups. The authors stress that their analyses were based on vernacular speech in sustained discourse, so it is unlikely that they were observing adoption of an out-group way of speaking by White British speakers for stylistic purposes. Instead, the variation they have documented indicates language change in progress – though they note that whether and how these changes continue will depend on the social networks of young people in these communities.

Confirmation that the innovations in these vowels represent the start of a language change comes from their use by children in our second London project. Non-Anglo children acquire the vowel pronunciations typical of MLE at a very young age; there was little or no similarity between the 5 year old children and their caregiver, unlike the case for at least one variable analysed in previous studies (Kerswill & Williams (2005) in Milton Keynes; Smith & *al.* (2007) in Buckie, Scotland). We take this as confirmation that children in multilingual communities in London attend to the speech of their peers at a younger age than in monolingual communities like Milton Keynes and Buckie, presumably because English is not spoken at home or, if it is, it is used mainly between siblings and so contains many MLE features.

The 8 year old children, Anglo and non-Anglo alike, also have a mainly MLE vowel system. Our sample of young adults is small and unbalanced, with only 2 female Anglos and 6 non-Anglos (1 female, 5 male), from a range of ethnic backgrounds; but the non-Anglo young adults also use the MLE vowels.

There is similar evidence to show that the reduction of allophony in the definite and indefinite article system represents a language change rather than a temporary phenomenon. Fox (2007) includes the first report of this feature: Fox found that Bangladeshi male adolescents in Tower Hamlets appeared to be influencing the English of their white Anglo male peers with respect to these features, with multiethnic friendship networks playing a key role in their diffusion. Like the long vowels discussed above, invariant *a* and unstressed *the* occur outside London: Guzzo, Britain and Fox (2008) demonstrated their use among third generation immigrants of Italian descent in the borough of Bedford where, once more, multiethnic peer group networks appear to provide the means of transmission between users. In Hackney, use of the forms by different age groups again indicates that we are observing a change in progress. Non-Anglos of all ages use the invariant forms with a high frequency. The frequency is lower overall for Anglos, and developmental factors have to be taken into account, but change is in evidence among the Anglos in that adolescent Anglos use the forms more often than the 40 year olds (Cheshire & *al.* 2011).

There is a similar story for nonstandard *was*. In positive contexts the 5 year olds have very high rates, as do the 8 year olds and 12 year olds. The adolescents, though, use more standard forms, presumably with increasing linguistic maturity. However all age groups use nonstandard *wasn't* more frequently than nonstandard *weren't*, suggesting an overall tendency to prefer the *was/wasn't* pattern to the *was/weren't* pattern that prevails outside London. Again, the trend is led by the non-Anglo children, and again use of the *was/wasn't* pattern was correlated with multi-ethnic friendship networks, for Anglos and non-Anglos alike, suggesting that it is disseminating through the community through normal patterns of social interaction.

The future of some of the other innovations is less clear. We have already seen that the new quotative expression *this is* +speaker is used by younger speakers as well as by adolescents; in fact it is used more often by the 8 year olds than the 12 year olds and the 16-19 year olds. This could be taken as evidence of language change in progress. However the feature is relatively infrequent, for all age groups. Of course, this is what we would expect if we are

observing the start of a language change, but the low frequencies make it difficult to make further predictions about its survival. It is relevant that *this is* +speaker is used beyond Hackney: an undergraduate study of narratives told by 18 speakers aged between 16 and 18 in Tower Hamlets (Mao 2011) found *this is* + speaker occurred 7 times out of a total number of 254 different quotative expressions (making up just 2.8 per cent of the quotatives, then); it was used by 3 non-Anglo adolescents whose parents came from, respectively, Nigeria, Korea and Vietnam. This is the same proportion found for 16-19 year olds recorded in 2008 for our second Hackney project (3.0 per cent), and slightly less than for the adolescents recorded in 2005 for the first Hackney project (4.8 per cent). The fact that the frequency has not increased in real time may not bode well for the survival of this feature; on the other hand, the time period for which we have data is very short, and the frequency has at least remained stable. A further potentially relevant fact is that *this is* +speaker is used by television personalities, usually in comedy sketches, to portray disaffected youth (Fox 2012)². Although the role of the media in promoting language change is not well understood, some believe that the use of linguistic forms in mediated performance can lead to a wider take up in everyday discourse, thus contributing to the spread of innovations (Bell & Gibson 2011, 559; Coupland & Kristiansen 2011).

The future of the *man* pronoun is equally uncertain. Like the new quotative, frequencies in our data are low. The pronoun is used by only 6 speakers (but 3 from each of the two projects – in two different London boroughs, then). It is certainly more widespread than these figures suggest: it can be heard on the streets of London, some of my students use it (though not to me) and it can be heard on the media, both in spontaneous sustained discourse (for example in a *YouTube* Biography of the UK rapper Giggs³) and in scripted UK television sitcoms set in multicultural areas of London, such as *Phoneshop*⁴ and *The Youngers*⁵. In these sitcoms the pronoun, together with other linguistic features and the dress and ethnicities of the actors, seems to index a social meaning associated with the persona of a ‘cool’ streetwise male Londoner. It is also used by actors in *Anuvahood* (Deacon 2011), a 90-minute urban comedy filmed in Hackney. It also occurs beyond London: adolescents in a multiethnic youth club in Birmingham use it (Drummond 2013), as do young people in *One Mile Away*, a 90-minute Channel 4 TV documentary about street gangs in Birmingham⁶. Use of the pronoun in mainstream TV performances suggests that it is a socially marked feature, stereotypical of a multi-ethnic urban youth speech style and used, perhaps, for stylisation; on the other hand, in our data, Drummond’s data, the Giggs Biography and *One Mile Away* it occurs in spontaneous sustained discourse.

The feature that seems the least likely to survive on the basis of the available evidence is *who* as a topicaliser. *Who* is used this way only by adolescents in Hackney. There is no evidence of its use by adolescents in the North London borough that was the site of our second London project. Furthermore it is not used by younger speakers or by the young adult group, though the number of relative clauses that these speakers produce is too low for this conclusion to be definitive. However, even if the emergence of the topicalising function for *who* turns out to be a temporary feature of MLE, it can still give us insights into how innovations emerge in situations of intense language contact such as those found in present-day inner city London.

² An example of a sketch illustrating the use of *this is* + *speaker* is at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwNqf08Kxsw>>.

³ The Giggs Biography is at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px3Q8zbu79s>>.

⁴ <<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/phoneshop/4od>>.

⁵ <<http://www.e4.com/youngers/>>.

⁶ <<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/one-mile-away/4od>>.

6. Final remarks

The factors we have drawn on to account for the selection of features from the immense variation in inner city London English include many that are often mentioned in research on language contact. Siegel (1997), for example, discusses the principles that guide the selection of substrate features in the development of Pidgins and Creoles. He claims that the likelihood of a lexical or structural feature being selected is greater if it is more frequent and more regular (and also more salient or more transparent). We appealed to these factors in our discussion of levelled *was* and the reduction of allophony in definite and indefinite articles (we assume that simplification in these cases can be seen as resulting in a more regular system). Similar principles govern the outcome of both dialect contact and language contact, which differ by degree rather than in kind. Winford (2003, 99) implies that this is the case; Hickey (2013, 4) is more explicit. Schneider (2007, 85) notes with reference to the development of postcolonial varieties of English that grammatical innovations typically start at the interaction of grammar and lexis, “where the regular meets the chaotic”. Typically, high frequency individual words adopt characteristic but marked usages (*op. cit.*, 46). The emergence of *man* as a pronoun can perhaps be seen in this way. Camouflaged features are also characteristic of postcolonial varieties. Hulk and Müller (2000), researching bilingual child language acquisition, claim that language transfer is more likely to occur when an interface level is involved, such as the interface between syntax and pragmatics. Features that mark information structure such as the new functions of *innit* or *who* fall into this category; so too does the emergence of the new quotative expression *this is* +speaker.

Many researchers in the field of language contact, however, are investigating the transfer of features from one language (or sometimes languages, in the case of creoles) to another. In London, direct language transfer may well be partly responsible for some of the innovations that have emerged, but we see the contact setting itself as more important than potential substrate features. We would like to stress that the immense linguistic variation in the English spoken by different individuals in inner city London is accompanied by great flexibility in linguistic norms, and the drive to communicate takes precedence over the forms used to do so. This allows for innovation, and the innovative forms that crystallise from the variation reflect fundamental principles that drive language change generally, in all varieties of language (see also Schneider 2007, 110; Mufwene 2001). The emergence of innovations in multiethnolects such as MLE allow us to reflect further on the nature of these fundamental principles.

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