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## 15 English as a contact language: the role of children and adolescents

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PAUL KERSWILL, JENNY CHESHIRE, SUE FOX  
AND EIVIND TORGERSEN

### 15.1 Introduction: children, contact and change

This chapter deals with language change resulting from face-to-face contacts between speakers. Such contacts take place in specific sociolinguistic contexts and extend over particular periods of time. This means that, in order to understand the mechanism of contact-induced change, we need to know, at the very least:

1. The particular social contexts of the contacts – for instance, whether they are contexts of trade, of social domination (as in master–servant relations), or of more intimate and equal relations such as peer-groups involving young people
2. The frequency and intensity of the contacts, and the period over which they take place – are they transient, as in the case of tourism, or are they protracted and intense, as in the case of immigration or invasion?
3. The ages of the people concerned – given that different age groups acquire language(s) in different ways, and given that children, adolescents and adults contract different types of social relations with other people.
4. The differences and similarities between the language varieties in contact: broadly speaking, are we dealing with language contact or dialect contact?

Because of the time-depth needed before changes to the structure of a language are apparent, it is not surprising that, at least in historical studies prior to the written record, we do not find any empirical, or even systematic consideration of the role of social context and speaker-type. Contact between speaker populations needs to be more than fleeting to have a long-term effect on language, and (we presume) needs to be regular even if individual contacts are merely transactional. Typically in historical linguistics we see discussions of the outcomes of contact with no specific attempt at a sociolinguistic explanation (see Fischer, Schendl, Wright, all this volume), with very few exceptions (one of them being Lenker 2000, who applies the social network concept to Old English). A mode of

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sociolinguistically realistic explanation is, however, provided by historical sociolinguistics which, using what is (in later periods) often a fairly rich written record including information about both writers and recipients, projects back from what is known about the sociolinguistics of present-day communities to past stages of a language (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003). So far, however, the methodology has not been explicitly applied to contact situations, nor has it been able to take a systematic approach to the age variable simply because the writers are all adults.

The extent of the problem for historical contact studies is considered by Trudgill (2010a), who, in a discussion of influences on early English, makes the claim that:

[I]n historical linguistics, something almost like a consensus about the importance of the role of Old Norse seems to have been achieved. For example, Poussa has it that contact with Old Scandinavian was responsible for ‘the fundamental changes which took place between standard literary Old English and Chancery Standard English, such as the loss of grammatical gender and the extreme simplification of inflexions’ (Poussa 1982: 84). Kroch *et al.* (2000) make precisely the same point . . .

Trudgill’s thesis is that it is essential to establish the sociolinguistic circumstances of the contact. The particular parameter he argues for is whether contacts were mainly between post-critical period speakers (adolescents and adults) or between speakers who are still within the critical period for language learning (i.e. children; Lenneberg 1967). He draws this conclusion from the relatively well-understood characteristics of dialect acquisition, typified by the work of Chambers (1992) (though Trudgill does not mention his work here). Research in this area (see also Roberts and Labov 1995) shows that, when faced with learning a new dialect, for example because they have moved to a different dialect area, children are more successful than either adolescents or adults in learning complex phonological features, while evidence (cited by Trudgill) from pidginization suggests that adults are not at all adept at learning irregular inflectional morphology and new morphological categories. Trudgill’s conclusion is that, in situations where it is mainly adults who are in face-to-face contact, simplification is likely to occur by way of an increase in morphological transparency – that is, a one-to-one correspondence between a particular linguistic form and its function – and by a loss of morphological categories, for example the disappearance of grammatical gender. Conversely, where the contact is between children – and this is most likely in cases where there is intermingling of populations over a protracted period – complexification can occur, particularly through the addition of new linguistic categories. Trudgill’s example is that of the Balkan *Sprachbund*, or language area, in which a number of languages have acquired (among other features) a suffixed definite article. The acquisition of such features, Trudgill argues, can only

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take place in ‘stable, long-term, co-territorial contact situations which involve childhood – and therefore proficient – bilingualism’ (Trudgill 2010a: 314)

The critical point for Trudgill is that the contacts between speakers of Old Scandinavian and Old English are thought to have been of precisely this kind, and so, rather than large-scale simplification taking place, one would expect at the very least some increase in complexity. He argues instead that simplification in Middle English is the result of contact with speakers of Late British (one of whose descendents is Welsh), where relations were very different: it is thought that Britons were in a state of subservience to the Anglo-Saxons, as slaves, and that their children would have learned Old English as an L1 in a simplified form based on their parents’ L2. This language would then emerge as the Middle English of the post-Norman Conquest manuscripts.

What is missing from Trudgill’s account is evidence that children, adolescents and adults actually do behave as he predicts. A linguistic typologist who comes a little closer to doing this is Nichols (2009), who shares Trudgill’s approach to the explanation of differences in complexity. Taking twenty-four Caucasian languages, she measures their complexity in terms of the number of contrastive phonological elements. Those languages which are located in centres of trade and which, importantly, have high numbers of adult learners have fewer contrastive elements, that is, greater simplicity. Yet this remains speculative: the study lacks a systematic investigation of contacts between speaker groups. Historical studies of contact which shift the focus firmly to the role of both children and adults are Omdal’s (1977) and Solheim’s (2009) investigations of the new dialect of the small Norwegian town of Høyanger, established in 1916, and Trudgill’s (2004a) presentation of a deterministic model of the formation of New Zealand English in the late nineteenth century. Yet even here we are dealing post hoc with contact, some considerable time after the new varieties emerged and well after the crucial generations of speakers had become fully mature or were no longer living.

Observing the role of children in any kind of *completed* change is in principle impossible without access to carefully gathered historical speech data from the relevant speakers. Even though we now have recourse to older recordings, systematic data from children and adolescents are rare, and studies comparing older and recent recordings of these age groups are relatively scarce. Kerswill (2003: 235–8) and Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams (2005: 154) contain brief comparisons of this kind for English, while Gregersen (2009) and Schøning (2009) provide more detailed analyses of Danish data.

Notably none of these studies deals with language or dialect contact. Studies which deal with children’s and adolescents’ speech operate within the dominant variationist paradigm of a speech community in which the

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relationships between the language varieties depend on social differentiation along gender and class lines (or along other relevant parameters): this is the Labovian notion of ‘inherent variability’ (Labov 1969), by which the variation exhibited by speakers, both individually and collectively, is seen as both linguistically and socially structured. In this model, contact is seen as an external force impinging on the speech community, to be treated separately (Labov 2001: 20). For Labov, the principal contact mechanism is that of diffusion, in which linguistic features are spread across geographical space by adult-to-adult contacts (Labov 2007) – an approach which, as we argue shortly, may be only partially adequate.

Labov’s two basic scenarios (the canonical, contact-free speech community vs diffusion across geographical space) are not parsimonious: as we shall argue below, there are further community types where contact seems to be a defining feature – an inherent characteristic, in fact. However, his approach points up the crucial importance of the social contexts, including speaker age, through which language change is mediated, whether or not contact is implicated.

### 15.2 Children and adolescents in language change

Kerswill (1996) provides a general framework for the propagation of changes through populations, focusing on three key person-to-person relationships through which changes can be channelled:

1. Caregivers’ influence on infants and young children (from birth to age 6)
2. Influence of peer groups on preadolescents (ages 6 to 12)
3. Influences on adolescents (ages 12 to 17)

These relationships can be seen as prototypical dyads for these three life stages. As will become clear, they also take into account what is known about how children and young people acquire dialect features – both those of their own communities and communities they come into contact with.

#### 15.2.1 Caregivers’ influence on infants and young children (birth to age 6)

There is a burgeoning literature on the transmission of ‘sociolinguistic competence’ from adults to young children. Local’s (1983) longitudinal study of a young Tyneside child between the ages of 4;5 and 5;6 foreshadowed the results of later research. Local investigated the child’s acquisition of the morphologically determined Tyneside alternation between monophthongal [i] in closed syllables, as in *freeze*, and diphthongal [iɪ] in open syllables, as in *free* – a distinction which gives rise to *freeze* and *frees* as a minimal pair. The child did not at first use the adult vernacular distribution of the two vowels, as he sorted out those aspects of input variability which were linguistically relevant and those which were sociolinguistically

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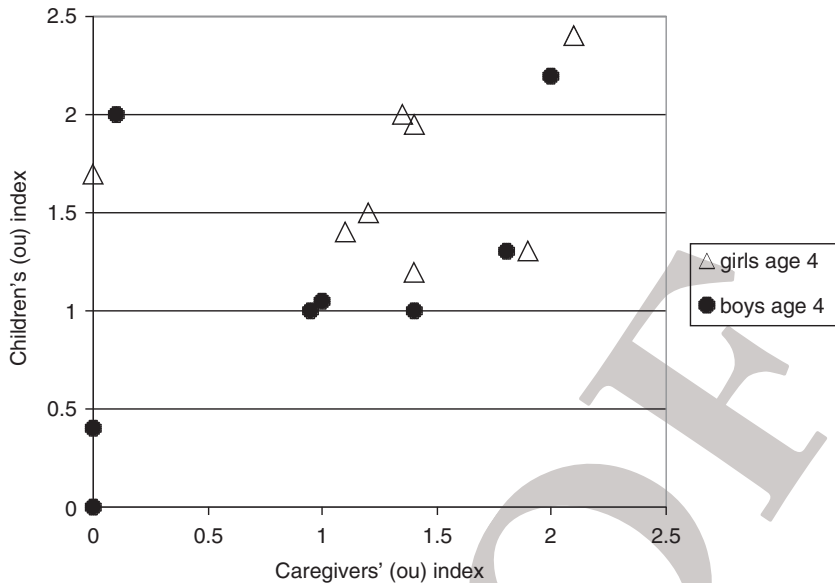


Figure 15.1 Fronting of GOAT: correlation of (ou) indices for 4-year-old children and caregivers (from Kerswill and Williams 2005: 1030)

salient. At the same time as acquiring the correct distribution, he used an exaggerated diphthongal variant in particular expressive sociolinguistic styles. The conclusion from this is familiar from later studies of the acquisition of first-dialect phonology: a child simultaneously acquires phonologically and sociolinguistically relevant variability during these early years, and does so by paying close attention to fine-grained phonetic variation (Foulkes, Docherty and Watt 2005; Smith, Durham and Fortune 2007). Importantly, the same phonetic cues convey both linguistic and indexical information.

15.2.2 *Influence of peer groups on preadolescents (ages 6 to 12)*

Preadolescence is the life stage where other children gradually become the decisive models for dialect acquisition at the expense of adults. We provide evidence from the first of our contact scenarios, the new town of Milton Keynes, which was established in the late 1960s (Kerswill and Williams 2000, 2005). As we will argue, the pattern for the particular variable we consider is likely to be similar to the pattern in old-established, low-contact speech communities. The variable is the vowel of the lexical set of GOAT (Wells 1982), which in the south-east of England is being fronted. Figure 15.1 shows the correlation between 4-year-olds and their principal (female) caregiver in terms of their use of fronted vs less fronted variants in

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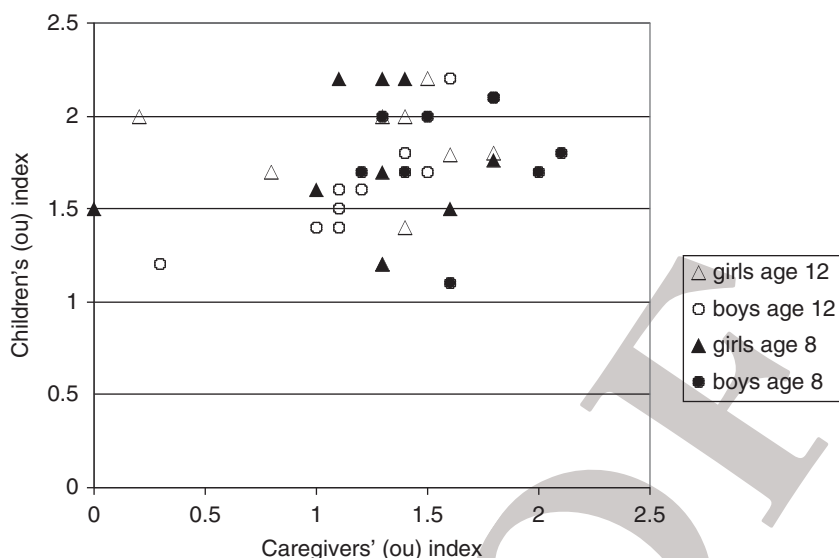


Figure 15.2 Fronting of GOAT: correlation of (ou) indices for 8- and 12-year-old children and caregivers (from Kerswill and Williams 2005: 1031)

sociolinguistic interviews (as determined through auditory analysis), calculated as an index ranging from 0 to 3.

The four caregivers who score 0 or just above have northern England or Scottish origins: in two cases the child follows the caregiver's fully back vowel, while the remaining two prefer typical south-eastern central or fronted variants. The remaining caregiver-child pairs all have south-eastern origins, and for them there is a strong and significant correlation with an  $r^2$  of 0.355. Figure 15.2 shows equivalent data for 8- and 12-year-old children: in this case, there is no correlation at all. Moreover, the overall fronting scores are higher for the older children than for the caregivers, suggesting that the children are taking part in the general south-eastern fronting of this vowel – which raises the question of how young children acquire changes in the process of diffusing outwards.

These data suggest that, for children, the transition from being linguistically mainly caregiver-oriented to mainly peer-oriented takes place some time between the ages of 4 and 8 – probably at the lower end of this scale (see Chambers 2003: 185, who associates this with the start of pre-school).

The fronting of GOAT is a regular, 'Neogrammarian' sound change, with no lexical or phonological constraints, and is thus cognitively simple to effect. Later, we will examine another such change, the fronting of /u:/ as in GOOSE, which continues well into the late teens. Clearly, dialect contact is

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a defining characteristic of Milton Keynes. However, GOAT-fronting is widespread in the region, and almost all the adults are from precisely this region. We can assume that the pattern of transmission in other, non-contact towns will be similar. The fronting of GOOSE is also widespread, and this likewise differentiates it sharply from changes which are clearly contact-based. We return to this important point later in the context of a different contact scenario.

The cognitive ease of GOAT-fronting does not apply in cases where phonological restructuring is entailed. Chambers (2003: 177) shows that the cut-off for the acquisition of a new contrast is very difficult after around the age of 13: Canadian youngsters living in England did not acquire the distinction between /ɒ/ in LOT and /ɔ:/ as in THOUGHT if they had arrived after this age. However, caution is needed, since Sankoff (2004) shows that two northern English individuals in the TV series *Seven Up* had at least variably acquired the southern /ʊ/–/ʌ/ distinction in adulthood.

### 15.2.3 *Influences on adolescents (ages 12 to 17)*

The adolescent life stage is characterized by broadening peer-group involvement and the formation of youth subcultures. At the same time, the ability to modify phonologies (and probably grammars) has become restricted in the same way as for adults (Lenneberg 1967). Eckert (2000) shows that Neogrammarian vowel shifts are embedded in adolescent social structures, and that both advanced (newer) and conservative (older) variants of the vowels concerned serve indexical functions. This further demonstrates adolescents' ability to 'handle' such changes. The pattern, then, is similar to that for younger age groups, but the social functions change with the development of adolescent identities.

### 15.2.4 *Geographical diffusion, children and the difficult conceptualization of 'contact'*

In our discussion of GOAT-fronting, we focused on the shift from caregivers to peers as a primary linguistic model during childhood. We did not consider how this rapidly spreading feature is carried to a new location in the first place. Although Labov's (2007) diffusion model assumes face-to-face contact involving adult speakers, there is ample evidence that young children acquire features which are diffusing geographically – the fronting of both GOAT and GOOSE being cases in point. A further example in British English is *th*-fronting (the introduction of /f/ and /v/ for the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, respectively). This apparently became the majority vernacular form, from a zero base, in Norwich among cohorts born between 1959 and 1973 (Trudgill 1999b: 138). It is also a majority feature among young children in Milton Keynes, Reading, Hull and Durham, while this is



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not so for their parents (Kerswill 2003: 232–8). Clearly, the adoption of this feature has little to do with direct transmission from parents. A contributory factor may be the ‘naturalness’ of this merger, and interaction with older children will be important, too. This does not address the possible mechanisms through which the feature is actually adopted into the community. Stuart-Smith and colleagues’ study of the influence of television on the adoption of *th*-fronting in Glasgow suggests complexity and the presence of a number of weak effects acting in concert (Stuart-Smith 2006). Paradoxically, it is the working-class teenagers, the group with the least contact with outsiders, who use this feature the most. Within this group, engagement with London-based soaps, such as *EastEnders*, favours the use of *th*-fronting, as does contact with relatives living in the south of England and a positive attitude towards ‘Cockney’. In cases where a diffusing feature is being adopted by children, face-to-face contact remains a measurable factor which is, however, easily overridden by others, including social class (as a proxy, presumably, for an orientation towards standard language) as well as engagement with television as a part of everyday social practice. Children’s use of *th*-fronting for identity-marking purposes, rather than being seen as a failure to repress a natural process, is suggested by the fact (so far only reported anecdotally) that they may adopt it long after having acquired the less ‘natural’ dental fricatives.

### 15.3 Children and adolescents in language and dialect contact

We now consider contact scenarios as such, and the role of different age groups in contact-driven change. Where there is adult-to-adult contact, we can expect simplification to occur, as predicted by Trudgill and Nichols. That simplification will become part of a local vernacular if the contacts and the ensuing accommodation on the part of the adults are extensive enough.

Language (or dialect) contact involving children rather than adults occurs in at least three types of context. The first type is where there is community-wide language shift, with adults transmitting what is for them a second language to the children (as in Ireland in the nineteenth century). In the second, much more common type, language or dialect contact occurs when the children of immigrants or in-migrants grow up acquiring the host-community language, alongside or even replacing the parental variety. In the third type, systematic contact between child speakers of different dialects occurs in new-dialect (or koiné) formation, as in Høyanger and New Zealand. In all three scenarios, the speech communities are highly diffuse (in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller’s 1985 sense), with few focused norms for children to attend to as they mature sociolinguistically – by contrast with canonical speech communities.

Evidence suggests that the linguistic outcomes differ strongly between these scenarios. Language shift may lead to a substratum influence on the

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emerging L1 (Hock 1991: 481–5; see also Hickey, this volume). Outcomes for second-generation immigrants vary: complete adoption of the host-community language may be tempered by the use of an ‘ethnolect’, usually incorporating phonetic and sometimes discourse features adopted in modified form from the original L1 (Alam 2009; Stuart-Smith, Timmins and Alam 2011), with the use of these features being contingent on participation in particular peer groups as well as the features having an identity-marking function. Finally, in new-dialect formation, identity factors are initially weak (or, according to Trudgill 2004a, absent), with the result that the outcome is a new, mixed variety containing features from the contributing dialects in rough proportion to the relative numbers of speakers of those dialects in the original input mix, as well as some simplification, particularly of morphology.

How do these three scenarios fit in with the three-stage model outlined above? The model deals with adult–child and child–child contacts. A central part of the Labovian model concerns the transmission of language and language variation and change from older to younger generations. Incrementation is the mechanism by which changes are propagated, and it depends for its operation crucially on children detecting directions of change from the output of older speakers (older children and adolescents as well as adults). What characterizes contact scenarios is that there is a linguistic discontinuity between generations: where there is migration, parents are not members of the host speech community in a narrow sense, but have historical associations elsewhere, while their children are being socialized into the community in which they reside. In language shift, the community is constant but the language is not. Transmission of a community language or dialect, along with changes in it, becomes impossible by the canonical mechanism, so that we need to look for different modalities for language and dialect acquisition and the propagation of change. As before, these modalities involve contacts with other people (and other social-psychological factors, as we saw in the discussion of change in Glasgow), but now roles, relationships and social dynamics will be different. The three-stage model needs to be modified, in other words.

Horvath’s 1985 study of Sydney English is significant in that it incorporates language contact into an explicitly Labovian model. This study deals with the vowels of FLEECE, FACE, GOAT, PRICE and MOUTH, as realized by a sample differentiated by social class, gender, age and ethnicity. The interest for us is the manner in which Australians of Greek and Italian descent were sampled, with most of the older group (mostly in their 40s) having arrived as young adults, while the younger participants (aged around 15) were Australian-born. A principal components analysis (which serves to group speakers by overall linguistic behaviour) revealed what Horvath refers to as a ‘core’ and a ‘peripheral’ group, with the latter composed entirely of adult Italians and Greeks (Horvath 1985: 71). This is no surprise, given the foreign ‘accented’ nature of

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their speech. However, among this group are a number of users of native Australian variants which she labels 'Ethnic Broad'. These take a phonetically more extreme form of what is assumed to be the direction of change for these vowels (resulting in what Wells (1982), discussing London Cockney, calls 'diphthong shift'). But this direction of change is not confirmed by comparing the young speakers with the older age group. While middle-class Anglos (Australian-born of British/Irish descent) seem to be following the direction of the vowel shift, this is not true of either the working-class speakers or any of the Italian and Greek adolescents, whose vowels are actually less shifted. In fact, Greek and Italian adolescents are in the lead in this shift reversal (1985: 94). Horvath argues that this runs counter to expectations, since the 'ethnic' adults have the most shifted vowels: the youngsters have moved right away from the parental model, even those parents who are (near-)native speakers of English. This kind of disjunction is one we return to. The Sydney shift reversal shares some characteristics with one found in multiethnic districts of London (Kerswill, Torgersen and Fox 2008), where non-Anglo young people are similarly in the lead. However, while the Sydney shift reversal seems to have a socially unmarked, mainstream pronunciation as its target ('General', in Australian terminology), in London the move is towards a new 'multiethnolect' containing some features of minority origin. Later, we return to the very different contact situation in London.

Khan's (2006, 2009) study of young working-class teenagers in Birmingham (England) contrasts three major ethnicities, Pakistani, Black Caribbean and White, but does not investigate adults. There are striking patterns of vowel variation, with many Whites favouring both traditional variants and levelled, relatively non-regional pronunciations, while the other two groups use pronunciations of both English and minority-language origin. For all three groups, there is use of both English and minority features, depending on the speaker's expressed identities as well as the ethnicity of social networks. As in Sydney, there is a tension between transmission of local features and the adoption of non-local ones of either English or foreign-language origin, drawing from a shared pool of variants. Again, we return to this finding in the context of London.

Similarly, Fox's (2007) study contrasts adolescents in Tower Hamlets, London, where the population is predominantly of Bangladeshi origin, especially so in the younger age groups. In the main, the Bangladeshis do not adopt the traditional London variants but use pronunciations of minority-language origin (with some modification for those who interact with Anglos). The Anglos do use traditional variants but show evidence of adopting variants used by their Bangladeshi peers. Friendship networks are shown to play a key role, with those Anglos who use more of the minority-language-influenced variants being those who have the most social interaction with Bangladeshi friends. This is in keeping with the findings reported here for the London context to which we turn now.

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### 15.4 Children and adolescents in language change: the multilingual metropolis

A particular high-contact scenario is increasingly found throughout Europe: that generated by the high level of immigration of people of different language backgrounds, often from the host country's ex-colonies, to working-class neighbourhoods of major cities, followed by the socialization of the incomers' children in communities whose linguistic profiles become transformed by their presence. Our case study is inner-city London, which has seen very high rates of immigration in the last forty years and where we have recently carried out two large-scale research projects. Both language contact and dialect contact have been common in London throughout its history. As the capital city it has always been a destination for immigrants, and we assume that the innovation that has long been associated with London English (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003: 165) is in large part due to the language contact that has typically occurred there. The role of children and adolescents in the emergence of innovations has not so far been investigated, however.

The *Linguistic Innovators* project (Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox and Torgersen 2004–7) recorded 49 adolescents aged 16–19 in Hackney, an ethnically diverse inner-city area where some ninety-five different languages are spoken as a first language by schoolchildren (Hackney Council 2010; see Baker and Eversley 2000). We compared the English of the Hackney adolescents with that of 8 older speakers in the borough as well as with 49 adolescents and 8 older speakers in a different borough in outer London, Havering. Havering is predominantly monolingual; in fact, many of the original inhabitants of Hackney were relocated there as part of the London slum clearance that took place after World War II. The second project, *Multicultural London English* (Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox and Torgersen 2007–10), focused on the ages at which different features of London English, including the innovative ones, were acquired in a neighbouring north London borough that was multiethnic and multilingual in the same way as Hackney. We recorded 120 individuals in the following age groups: 4–5, 8–9, 12–13, 16–19, about 25 and about 40 (the latter group consisting of the caregivers of some of the children).

We turn first to the diphthong system, which has undergone a rapid and massive shift which is in part a case of 'diphthong shift reversal' (Torgersen and Kerswill 2004), taking a more extreme form than that of the young Sydney speakers referred to above. Figure 15.3 shows the vowel system of an elderly Anglo Londoner, recorded in 2005 (see Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox and Torgersen in press for a full account of the vowel study). This contrasts sharply with that of a young Londoner of Caribbean ancestry, shown in Figure 15.4.



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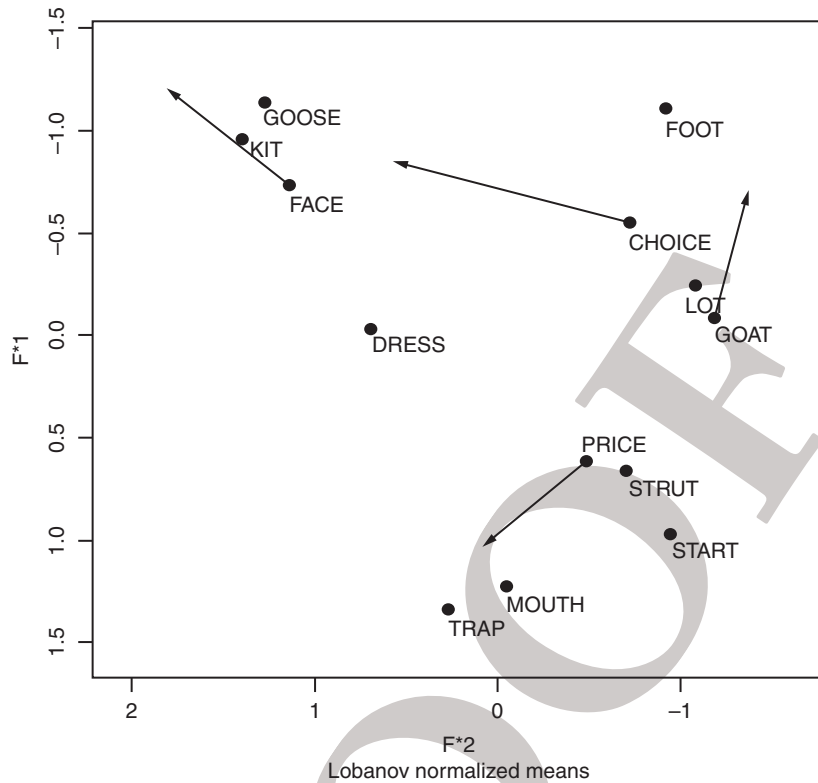
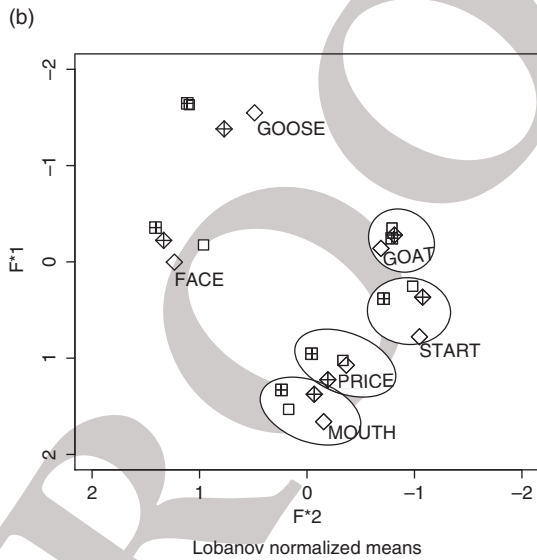
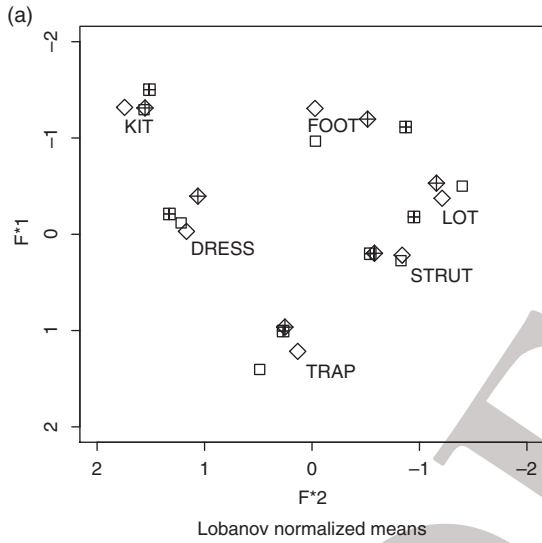


Figure 15.4 Diphthong system of young male from Hackney, Afro-Caribbean origin, born 1989

Figure 15.5b displays the diphthongs plus GOOSE and START of female and male 8-year-olds of white British (Anglo) and other (non-Anglo) ethnicities. As can be seen, the positions of the onsets of the diphthongs are similar to those of the adolescent Afro-Caribbean in Figure 15.4, though there are some differences related to ethnicity, in that non-Anglos have lower onsets for FACE and MOUTH. Figure 15.5a shows that, for FOOT, the Anglos have a much fronter pronunciation than the non-Anglos. There is one major difference between the adolescent and younger age groups: GOOSE among the younger age group has not yet reached the degree of fronting found among the adolescents.

The questions of the origins of these vowel features and the contributions of the different age groups can now be addressed. The high onsets of FACE and GOAT result in vowels which are similar to those of the English of the various groups of incomers. Thus, both Caribbean and West African Englishes have similar qualities, as do those of the Indian subcontinent as



Key:

□ = Anglo female (N=3)

◇ = Anglo male (N=3)

◊ = non-Anglo female (N=9)

◻ = non-Anglo male (N=5)

Figure 15.5 London inner city vowels: Multicultural London English project, 8-year-old speakers. (a) Short monophthongs, (b) diphthongs plus GOOSE and START. (For diphthongs, only onsets are shown.)

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well as second-language varieties. However, the fronted GOOSE vowel is almost entirely absent from these varieties, though a similar vowel exists in Turkish. We must discount a contact origin for GOOSE, but look instead to its patterning by age and geography in England, where it is spreading. The fact that young speakers appear to increase the degree of fronting as they grow older is in line with findings in the region more generally (Kassab 2008). This patterning also resembles that of other features which are 'global' in scope, such as the spread of the quotative form BE LIKE – which we mention below. This contrasts strongly with the community-internal vowel changes, which, we claim, emerge from the particular high-contact situation of the inner city, and are found already among young children. In what follows, we describe in more detail the multilingual context in which these children are growing up, and the consequences for the acquisition of an English morphosyntactic feature and a discourse-pragmatic feature.

We turn now to non-phonological features. Adolescents in Hackney used several innovative grammatical and discourse features that we did not observe in the speech of their peers in Havering. These include an indefinite pronoun *man*, as in (1), *still* as a discourse marker, as in (2), the *why . . . for* question frame, as in (3) and a new quotative expression *this is + speaker*, as in (4).

- (1) it's her personality **man**'s looking at
- (2) I got the right moves innit but I ain't telling you though **still**
- (3) I said 'why you searching my jacket **for**?'
- (4) **this is me** 'I'm from east London'

We attribute the emergence of these innovations to the more linguistically diverse situation in Hackney: although there is dialect contact in Havering, in Hackney and elsewhere in the inner city there is also language contact, as we have seen, with many bilingual children acquiring English as a second language.

The 4–5-year-old children in the sample for the Multicultural London English project had been born in London, with parents that were recent immigrants from India, Jamaica, the Philippines, Turkey, the Congo, Nigeria and Bangladesh. In addition there were two mixed White British/Afro-Caribbean children. This mix of language backgrounds is typical of the children attending the multiethnic primary school where we carried out our fieldwork. According to our terminology, these children are 'non-Anglo', to distinguish them from white monolingual 'Anglo' children whose families have been living in London for several generations. The non-Anglo children are fluent in English in that they speak it at quite a fast pace and show no problems of comprehension, but many of them have not yet acquired the syntax that is usually in place by this age when the primary caregiver is a speaker of English. Consider, for example, the forms in (5) below used for negation by Yeliz, a 5-year-old Turkish–English bilingual child in this group, as well as her subject pronoun form *him* and uninflected third singular verb form *go*. By the age of 5 English L1 children have usually acquired English patterns of negation, subject and object pronoun



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form and present tense *-s* (unless, of course, there is a local dialect where these forms differ); see Brown (1973).

- (5) Yeliz: I not got a pony. not got it I not got the pony now  
Arfaan: you haven't? where is it? has it run away? where is he?  
has he run away? has he gone?  
Yeliz: him go there

Note that we avoid using the terms 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker' to refer to the Anglo and non-Anglo children, since it would be not only difficult but also counterproductive to categorize all the non-Anglos as non-native speakers, for the reasons given by Fraurud and Boyd (2006) with reference to a similar multiethnic setting in Sweden. The reasons include the problems of determining accurately the age of onset of the acquisition of English and the number and nature of the first language or languages that the children acquire: in the case of Yeliz, for example, Turkish is spoken in the home but her parents also speak English at home, so she is simultaneously acquiring both Turkish and English as first languages. However, for her parents English is a second language and we assume that their variety is an interlanguage L2 one – an example of the disjunction across generations already referred to; Yeliz's older siblings, however, have acquired English in London in a similar way to herself. Other non-Anglo children in the sample have different language histories, making any attempt at categorization hugely problematic. This, then, is a good example of the type of contact scenario mentioned earlier, where speech norms are highly diffuse. Children differ in the varieties of English to which they are exposed in the home (with some children not hearing English at all at home), and for them the peer group is an important influence on their speech. In the multiethnic schools that these children attend, though, the peer group consists mainly of children like themselves, so there is a great deal of variation in peer-group English.

By the age of 8, the children in our sample have acquired the major patterns of English syntax. Their English is now very fast and fluent, but there are indications that they are still learning the language. For example, there is a frequent use of *thing* when specific words do not come immediately to mind, allowing the speaker to maintain fluency and, as in (6), their turn in the conversation:

- (6) Uzay: he uhm he uhm. he loves him first then thing. he gets all of James Bore's money [Arfaan: yeah] and ra and give it to the bad guy (Uzay\_Dumaka 24.40)
- (7) Uzay: he's not my cousin he's my thing  
Arfaan: oh he's just your friend okay

The 8-year-olds have acquired English partly, of course, through the school, with some influence from their teachers as well as, in some cases,

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from their caregivers and older siblings, but the major influence has been the language of their friends. The language acquisition process is best described as group second-language acquisition (Winford 2003a: 235), where the language is acquired in an unguided way, in informal interactions. Some of the children's friends are 'Anglo' Londoners whose parents use traditional forms of London English, but many are non-Anglo Londoners who are acquiring English in a similar way to themselves. We assume that the fluidity of language norms and lack of a single clear target variety accounts for much of the linguistic innovation that has been characteristic of London English. Some of the innovations that occur will be idiosyncratic, transitory, and may not survive, but others may become used within the peer group and then be acquired by younger children. As Meisel (2010: 19) points out, if non-native speakers of the language that children are acquiring are the predominant group in the linguistic environment, the input for child language learners can contain the triggers for grammatical reanalysis and language change.

We will discuss two of the innovations we find in the London data in some detail, to provide examples of the role of children and adolescents in promoting language change in this type of contact setting. In each case there is an interaction between developmental trends typical of child language acquisition and the linguistic flexibility typical of unguided group second-language acquisition. We begin by considering the acquisition of verbal morphology, specifically in the past forms of BE. The use of *was* and *were* is variable throughout the English-speaking world, except of course in standard English where *was* is used with first- and third-person singular subjects and *were* elsewhere. In present-day England, there is a widespread tendency to level the variation to a system that has *was* in positive contexts and *were* in negative contexts, as in (8); see Cheshire and Fox 2009 for details.

- (8) yeah the teachers weren't that good because they was always off  
(Jennifer J/S/A 6.20)

As expected, the adolescents in Havering had the variable vernacular *was/weren't* pattern typical of elsewhere in England. Non-standard *wasn't* did not occur in Havering at all. In Hackney, however, the adolescents used non-standard *was* in positive contexts less frequently than both their peers in Havering and the older speakers in Hackney; and in negative contexts they used both non-standard *wasn't* and non-standard *weren't*. The frequency of the latter form was lower than that of the Havering adolescents. They do not seem, then, to be acquiring the pattern that is widespread elsewhere, or at least not to the same extent.

There were significant ethnic differences in the use of both non-standard *was* and non-standard *wasn't* in Hackney, which we attributed to the language histories of the adolescents. The analysis is presented in detail in

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Table 15.1 Percentage (total N) non-standard *was*, *wasn't* and *weren't* in north London (from Cheshire et al. in press)

	4–5-year-olds	8–9-year-olds	12–13-year-olds	16–19-year-olds	Caregivers
Positive contexts					
non-standard <i>was</i>	78 (9)	56 (162)	77 (208)	37 (357)	45 (157)
Negative contexts					
non-standard <i>wasn't</i>	100 (1)	50 (10)	73 (15)	48 (27)	27 (15)
non-standard <i>weren't</i>	33 (6)	25 (32)	22 (54)	31.5 (89)	22 (59)

Cheshire and Fox (2009). Briefly, Afro-Caribbean speakers (most notably male speakers) used high frequencies of both non-standard *was* and non-standard *wasn't*, reflecting the fact that varieties with a creole history tend to use *was* throughout the past BE system (Bickerton 1975: 115). Bangladeshi speakers, on the other hand, tended to use mainly standard English forms, reflecting the social and cultural insularity of their childhood when they would have used Sylheti or another community language at home and with their friends, acquiring their English in more formal guided settings at school. Other speakers who had acquired English as their second language tended to use the *was/wasn't* forms that are typical of interlanguage varieties of English (Schumann 1978). The Anglo Londoners, growing up in a highly multiethnic area, were exposed to the speech of many different ethnic groups both at school and in their multiethnic friendship groups. Although the older speakers in Hackney used both non-standard *wasn't* and non-standard *weren't*, for the Anglo adolescents the overall rates of these forms was higher than for the older speakers in their community. Their overall rates also differed from those of their peers in Havering, who not only did not use non-standard *wasn't* at all but who also used non-standard *weren't* more frequently (again, see Cheshire and Fox 2009 for details). In Hackney there was a correlation between the Anglo adolescents' use of non-standard *was* and *wasn't* and the extent to which their friendship groups were multiethnic, confirming the influence of language contact on the variable use of past-tense forms of BE.

The data from the Multicultural London English project allows us to see how younger children are using past forms of BE. Table 15.1 shows that in positive contexts the 16–19-year-olds use non-standard *was* at roughly the same rate as the 16–19-year-olds in Hackney (the overall rate for this age group in Hackney was 42 per cent). The three younger age groups all have higher rates of non-standard *was* in positive contexts, especially the 4–5-year-olds and the 12–13-year-olds. All age groups use non-standard *wasn't* more frequently than non-standard *weren't*, suggesting an overall tendency to prefer the *was/wasn't* pattern to the *was/weren't* pattern.

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Table 15.2 *Percentage (total N) non-standard was in north London in positive contexts: age and ethnicity (from Cheshire et al. in press)*

Ethnicity (total no. speakers)	8-9- year-olds	12-13- year-olds	16-19- year-olds	Caregivers	Percentage for all age groups (total N)
'other' (11)	24 (17)	90 (39)	37 (19)		63 (73)
Anglo (27)	65 (49)	71 (108)	36 (100)	47 (116)	53 (373)
Turkish/Kurdish (8)	71 (28)	80 (25)	26 (68)		48 (121)
Black African (9)	43 (23)	70 (20)	45 (49)		50 (92)
Black Caribbean (18)	72 (25)	75 (4)	36 (95)	39 (41)	43 (165)
Mixed white/Black Caribbean (4)	78 (9)	92 (12)	54 (26)		68 (47)
Bangladeshi (2)	0 (11)				0 (11)
Percentage for all ethnicities (total N)	56 (162)	77 (208)	37 (357)	45 (157)	

Again, though, the language histories of the speakers is important. Table 15.2 shows rates of non-standard *was* in positive contexts for speakers organized into different ethnic groups.

Grouping speakers in this way is problematic: for example, in the 4-5-year-old group there are too few tokens and the language backgrounds are too diverse for us to subdivide the children in this way, and the 'other' group consists of a diverse set of speakers for whom the number of tokens would have been too low had we attempted to group them into separate ethnic groups. Nevertheless the table allows us to see that the two Bangladeshi children again use only standard forms whereas most of the other 8-9-year-old and 12-13-year-old groups (with the exception of the younger Africans) have very high rates of non-standard *was*, including the Anglo children. The 4-5-year-old children were 'non-Anglos' whose language histories could explain their high use of non-standard *was*: as mentioned above, *was* is common both in interlanguage varieties and in varieties originating from an English-based creole. It is also usual for young children to use *was* throughout the past BE system when they first acquire English (Brown 1973). Although we might have expected the Anglo children to be adding some *were* forms to their grammar by the time they reach the age of 8, we assume that the fact that their peer group includes many non-Anglo friends accounts for their high frequencies of non-standard *was* forms (and correspondingly low frequencies of *were* in positive contexts). The peer group is an important influence on the 6-12-year-old age group, as we saw earlier. By contrast, the 16-19-year-olds all have lower rates of the non-standard form, perhaps indicating a growing acceptance of standard forms at this age.

The number of tokens of past BE in plural negative contexts is too low for us to make anything other than a broad categorization into Anglo and

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Table 15.3 Percentage (total N) non-standard *wasn't/weren't* in north London in negative contexts: age and ethnicity (from Cheshire et al. in press)

	8–9 years	12–13 years	16–19 years	Total
<i>wasn't</i>				
Anglos	0 (1)	50 (8)	50 (4)	46 (13)
non-Anglos	100 (7)	50 (22)	62 (29)	
<i>weren't</i>				
Anglos	78 (9)	39 (28)	41 (17)	46 (54)
non-Anglos	0 (21)	4 (23)	24 (67)	16 (111)

non-Anglo speakers; however, we can see from Table 15.3 that the non-Anglos appear to prefer *wasn't*, as we might expect (note that in non-standard *weren't* contexts the 8–9-year-olds' score of zero means of course that they use only (standard) *wasn't*). The Anglos use both patterns, but non-standard *wasn't* occurs with frequencies that are as high or higher than non-standard *weren't*.

These figures confirm that inner London has both the *was/weren't* pattern and the *wasn't/mere* pattern, and that it is not following the wide-spread trend elsewhere in England towards a levelled *was/weren't* pattern. The reason, we suggest, lies in the language contact that exists in inner London. Older speakers in Hackney used both non-standard *wasn't* and non-standard *weren't* (with frequencies of 30 per cent and 17 per cent respectively). They also used non-standard *was* in positive contexts, at a rate of 51.5 per cent. We assume that their usage represents an earlier system in London English. Non-standard *mere* does not exist in London in positive contexts, so *was* also occurs in the most frequent contexts for past BE (First and third singular forms in positive contexts). The tendency of second-language learners and English-based creole speakers to prefer *was* in positive and negative contexts alike further increased the numbers of the *was* form in the pool. Children tend to use only *was* in the early stages of acquisition, and we assume that this tendency was reinforced as they grew older, as a result of the high rates of *was* (both standard and non-standard), in their linguistic environment. The adolescents seem to have decreased their use of non-standard forms as they become more sociolinguistically mature, but their earlier high frequencies means that the net result for their speech is a higher use of *was* overall, than for previous generations of Londoners. The process recalls the new-dialect formation scenario, where the outcome of variation depends on the overall frequency of different variants (Trudgill 2004a).

However, frequency is far from being the only relevant factor determining the outcome of language contact in the multilingual metropolis. The new quotative expression *this is + speaker* owes its emergence to communicative pressures and discourse style rather than to frequency, as we will briefly

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Table 15.4 *Quotatives in north London (from Cheshire et al. in press)*

	4–5 years	8–9 years	12–13 years	16–19 years
<i>say</i>	93.9 (46)	39.5 (202)	25.4 (163)	17.0 (218)
<i>think</i>	–	0.6 (3)	1.9 (12)	7.2 (92)
<i>go</i>	4.1 (2)	31.1 (159)	23.8 (153)	7.3 (94)
<i>zero</i>	2.0 (1)	2.0 (10)	14.5 (93)	12.5 (160)
<i>be like</i>	–	17.0 (87)	25.9 (166)	45.7 (584)
<i>this is + speaker</i>	–	5.3 (27)	2.0 (13)	3.0 (38)
<i>tell</i>	–	1.6 (8)	0.3 (2)	2.2 (28)
others	–	2.5 (13)	1.6 (10)	2.7 (34)
Total no. quotatives	49	512	642	1279

explain (for a fuller discussion, see Cheshire *et al.* in press, Fox in press). Unlike *was*, *this is + speaker* does not occur very often: in the data from the Hackney adolescents, for example, it accounts for only 4.8 per cent of the total quotative forms used (61 tokens out of a total of 1282; see Cheshire *et al.* in press, Fox in press). In the north London data it is also relatively infrequent, as Table 15.4 shows.

Like non-standard *wasn't*, the form was available in the pool of variants in inner London, though in this case perhaps in embryonic form (Gordon and Trudgill 1999): there is one token of *this is me* as a quotative in the recordings of London Jamaican made by Mark Sebba in the early 1980s, and we are aware of two tokens in the COLT corpus recorded in the 1990s, from ethnic minority speakers of unspecified origin (Fox in press). Although the form is still relatively infrequent in London, it is robust, used by all the child and adolescent age groups in our sample except the 4–5-year-olds (these speakers use quotatives infrequently, and most use only *SAY*).

Table 15.4 shows that the 8–9-year-olds' use *this is + speaker* more frequently than the other age groups (and by contrast, we note in passing that the 'global' quotative *BE LIKE* increases with age into late adolescence, in accordance with findings elsewhere, e.g. Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2009). Importantly, *this is + speaker* is used not only by non-Anglo children (in the data from the 8–9-year-olds it is used by three children of, respectively, Turkish, Nigerian and Afro-Caribbean descent) but also by four Anglo children. The fact that earlier attestations are from minority ethnic speakers suggests that the form may originate in the speech of Afro-Caribbean or bilingual children and is then acquired by their monolingual peers: if so, this would confirm Meisel's argument that grammatical change can occur in monolingual L1 development as well as in bilingual L2 speakers, if the cue for change is contained in the speech to which they are exposed (Meisel 2010: 19).

Why, though, would the monolingual children choose to use a quotative expression that they hear only rarely? One reason, we suggest, lies in the

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Table 15.5 *Content of the quote for different age groups in north London*

	4–5 years	8–9 years	12–13 years	16–19 years
direct speech	95.5	74.5	94.3	94.5
non-lexicalized 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

Table 15.6 *Quotative and non-quotative uses of this is + speaker (from Cheshire et al. in press)*

<i>this is + speaker</i>	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)

discourse function of *this is + speaker* in the speech of the group that uses it most frequently, the 8–9-year-olds. Although the other age groups use *this is + speaker* almost exclusively to introduce reported direct speech, the 8–9-year-olds use it with roughly equal frequency to introduce both direct speech and non-lexicalized sound and gesture, as in (9) and (10), (with rates of 48.1 per cent and 51.9 per cent, respectively).

- (9) Lydia: then. then THIS IS ME ‘xxxxxxx <making noises>xx’  
46.00
- (10) Uzay: this is me.<does an action that makes Arfaan laugh>  
34:15:00

This age group quotes non-lexicalized sound and gesture far more frequently than the other age groups, as Table 15.5 shows: it accounts for almost a quarter of their reported discourse, whereas it is negligible for the other groups. The 8–9-year-olds’ preferred form for introducing non-lexicalized sound and gesture is GO (66 per cent of this type of quote is introduced with GO), but they use *this is + speaker* with almost the same rates as BE LIKE for this function (with rates of 12.2 per cent and 15.7 per cent, respectively).

Furthermore, the 8–9-year-olds also use the form with non-quotative functions, to refer to the actions or feelings of a protagonist in a narrative:

- (11) he doesn’t he. this is him there’s year six THIS IS HIM he’s  
near the goal uhm I’m saying to I’m there (Uzay\_Dumaka 6.35\_
- (12) he’s sitting/on a chair. THIS IS HIM like he’s drunk or  
something (Louise\_Lydia 4.35)

These non-quotative uses account for more than half the *this is + speaker* tokens in this age group, as Table 15.6 shows. The form is also used with



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non-quotative functions by the 12–13-year-olds, but much less frequently, and these functions are rare in the 16–19-year-old age group.

It looks, then, as though *this is + speaker* is adopted by the younger children with the general function of introducing mimesis: to perform reported actions, gestures, sounds or speech in a way that appears to mimic the way that they actually occurred. This seems to be a particular characteristic of the narrative style of the 8–9-year-olds. Güldemann (in press) points out that through mimesis speakers create speaker–hearer involvement, and that the pragmatic force associated with quotative forms that introduce mimesis makes them subject to linguistic innovation. The narrative style of the 8–9-year-olds, then, may account for their choice of *this is + speaker* to introduce mimesis generally. Perhaps the form was introduced by this age group, with older children and adolescents then refining their use of the form until for them it introduces only direct reported speech (though as Fox (in press) shows, adolescents use *this is + speaker* as a way of creating speaker–hearer involvement at moments of high drama in a performed narrative). Alternatively, the form may have been introduced by the adolescent age group, with younger children then expanding its functions beyond that of a quotative expression.

It is relevant that many of the bilingual 8–9-year-olds in our sample are not yet fully proficient in the use of English, as mentioned earlier. Unlike SAY, GO and BE LIKE, the semi-fixed construction *this is + speaker* does not need morphosyntactic agreement, so it is a useful form for learners who want to keep the floor and keep up with the pace of speech in the interactions of the friendship groups. Of course, using a form that creates speaker-involvement is also a useful ploy for these purposes.

Finally, we can note that in many of the world's languages quotative verbs and quotative particles have evolved diachronically from grammaticalized 'speaker-predicating quotative indices' of this kind (again, see Güldemann in press). Güldemann argues that it is common to recruit as a quotative marker an identificational or presentational structure that focuses on a nominal referring to the source of the quoted text. The form of the expression could thus be seen as a quasi-natural way of introducing quoted speech when speakers wish to foreground the source or the content of the quote. Furthermore similar structures that focus on the speaker in the same way that *this is + speaker* does are found in present-day Belfast English, where *here's + speaker* introduces a quote (Fox in press) as well as in colloquial Portuguese and in Croatian (again, see Güldemann in press). Perhaps, then, there are similar forms to *this is + speaker* in some of the other languages spoken by the children.

Thus for the new quotative expression there are several possible factors that can explain its emergence. It already existed in London English, albeit in embryonic form; similar constructions may exist in some of the languages spoken by the bilingual speakers; deictics are in any case often used to



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highlight the source or the form of the quote; the narrative style of 8-year-old speakers involves a frequent use of mimesis and this in turn is a likely environment for linguistic innovation; and, finally, the flexibility of language norms in group second-language acquisition makes creativity and innovation especially likely not only for bilingual children but also for their monolingual peers.

### 15.5 Conclusion

This chapter raises two main questions in relation to the roles of children and adolescents in contact-induced change: what kinds of features do different age groups acquire? What is the importance of the contact scenario itself? We turn first to the notion of complexity. Does complexification occur when children are involved? The use of two patterns for past forms of BE in inner London and the addition of an additional quotative to the quotative system could perhaps be seen in this way. A more convincing example would be the new pronoun *man*, which we saw earlier in example (1), but in our data this occurs only sporadically. A further example of complexity, perhaps, is that of the relativizer form *who*, which seems to have been harnessed by the 16–19-year-olds in Hackney as a topic marker, used when the referent of the antecedent noun phrase is intended to be a topic of the forthcoming discourse (Cheshire, Fox and Adger n.d.). As yet, though, we have no evidence that this usage occurs in the north London data.

In terms of the vowel data, it is completely clear that the young children have a fully fledged English phonology, regardless of the language backgrounds of their caregivers. In most cases, the vowel inventory is both greater and, in terms of a feature such as tense/lax, more complex than the input languages. Exceptions to this prove the rule: when it was found that a British-born participant was using a vowel system close to that of Ghanaian English, it transpired that he had spent many of his formative years at school in Ghana.

The particular contact scenario was crucial for the outcomes across the speech communities as wholes, while life histories were crucial to the understanding of how an individual responded. Because of the high number of languages spoken by the first-generation immigrants and a general lack of residential segregation, we would expect majority features, such as more or less monophthongal FACE and GOAT, to win out – and this seems to have been borne out. In general, the situation is one of unguided group second-language acquisition, and we have argued that this can lead to some of the discourse strategies resorted to, for instance in the case of quotative expressions. A good deal is shared across speakers, to the extent that we can talk of a pool of features which, together, form a rather variable repertoire which we have labelled ‘Multicultural London English’. Arguably, it has become vernacularized, that is to say, it is a new variety of

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English alongside other ‘lects’ such as regional dialects. But individuals have different levels of competence in English depending on the time spent in London and on their social and family networks. The linguistic reflexes of their learning strategies are, likewise, part of the mix.

Of course, not all innovations will persist and become used beyond the peer group. The existence of these forms, however, bears witness to the creativity that is possible when language contact occurs, and the analyses that we have presented here show that interaction between young children and adolescents is crucial to the outcomes of contact-driven change.

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