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# New towns and koineization: linguistic and social correlates\*

PAUL KERSWILL and ANN WILLIAMS

## *Abstract*

*The establishment of new towns in the twentieth century in many parts of the world is a test bed of koineization, the type of language change that takes place when speakers of different, but mutually intelligible language varieties come together, and which may lead to new dialect or koine formation. This article presents the case of Milton Keynes, an English new town designated in 1967. Our study investigated the speech of a sample of 48 working-class children divided into three age groups: four, eight, and twelve years of age, along with one caregiver for each. We hypothesize that the formation of a new dialect is in the gift of older children. We also hypothesize that dialect levelling, which is part of koineization, will be more rapid in a new town than in an old-established town. Detailed quantitative results for four vowels strongly support these hypotheses. At the same time, we investigate the social network types contracted by new town residents. We found many to be socially isolated locally, but that they maintained contacts with their place of origin. We show that migrants violate what the Milroys argue to be the normal inverse relationship between socioeconomic class and social network density: migrants have uniplex networks, while still having a low socioeconomic status. The consequences for dialect change are considered.*

## **1. Introduction: linguistic and sociolinguistic approaches to the study of new town koines**

This issue of *Linguistics* deals with language, migration and the city. In this article, we focus on all three by referring to the case of “koineization” — the process of dialect contact leading to what Trudgill has called “new dialect formation” (Trudgill et al. 2000). New dialect formation is the emergence of distinctive, new language varieties following

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the migration of people speaking mutually intelligible dialects to linguistically near-“virgin” territory (or at least territory where there is relatively little contact with any prior languages spoken). We will approach new dialect formation from two angles. The first involves employing a “dialect levelling” model (Milroy 2002). Dialect levelling is the “process whereby differences between regional varieties are reduced, features which make varieties distinctive disappear, and new features develop and are adopted by speakers over a wide geographical area” (Williams and Kerswill 1999: 149). By a more linguistic definition, dialect levelling can be viewed as the reduction of variation in exponents of phonological and morphological categories.

Of course, an understanding of this essentially linguistic process is closely tied to sociolinguistic factors. Our second angle is therefore sociolinguistic or, better, sociological, focusing very much on the social integration of migrants in a city. In sociolinguistic studies, migrants are often treated as a “special case”: they are no longer part of their old communities, nor yet are they fully insiders in their adopted ones. For this reason, they have tended to be excluded from working definitions of the “speech community,” such as that of Labov (1966) (see Patrick 2002). The few language variation studies which have singled out migrants have demonstrated the uniquely fluid and changing network characteristics of such individuals (Bortoni-Ricardo 1985), their complex and highly variable linguistic and social relationships with a “host” community (Kerswill 1994), and their contribution to the overall sociolinguistic structure of a city (Horvath 1985). This article deals, however, with a city — Milton Keynes in the south of England — that is composed almost entirely of migrants and their offspring. This means that the processes of integration will be of a different nature, as the new inhabitants and their children feel their way in a linguistic no-man’s-land. We hope to show that, after a generation or two, they eventually succeed in forming a “new town koine.”

## 2. The Milton Keynes and dialect levelling projects: some premises

Between them, the *Milton Keynes* and *dialect levelling* projects<sup>1</sup> investigated new dialect formation as it was actually happening, while at the same time placing this process within its wider geographical context. The Milton Keynes project was designed around the following two premises:

- 1) The formation of a new dialect in a new town is in the gift of children, not adults, because:

- 1       – adults' speech is relatively fixed for both psycholinguistic (critical
- 2       period effects) and sociolinguistic reasons (relative fixedness
- 3       of social identity);
- 4       – change in children's speech is initially not limited by either of
- 5       these considerations, but is increasingly influenced by them as
- 6       the children reach their early- to mid-teens.
- 7    2) The shape of the new dialect will be discernible in older children's
- 8       speech, not that of younger children. This is because:
- 9       – preschool children will be acquiring their parents' dialect;
- 10      – as children grow older, they will increasingly align themselves
- 11       linguistically with the speech of their peers. In a new town,
- 12       there will be no available focused model in the form of adult
- 13       speech. For the first cohort of young people growing up, there
- 14       will also be no older teenage model to form a (potential) target.
- 15       This is the group who will lay the basis for the new dialect.

16   The project used an apparent-time variationist methodology (Bailey  
17   2002), with the difference that, in addition to adults, three child age  
18   groups were chosen — 4, 8, and 12 years — to allow us to investigate  
19   the second premise. Appendix 1 shows the structure of the project.

20   The dialect levelling project extended the scope of its predecessor by  
21   taking in two other towns/cities. One, Reading (to be discussed in this ar-  
22   ticle), was chosen to enable a comparison to be made between a new town  
23   with high mobility (Milton Keynes) and a long-established town situated  
24   in the same region but without this level of mobility. At the same time,  
25   the presence of "regional dialect levelling"<sup>2</sup> (in addition to new town  
26   koine formation) could be assessed.<sup>3</sup> The premises for the dialect levelling  
27   project were the following:

- 29   1) In areas of high population movement, there may be rapid changes
- 30       in dialect and accent features, especially those involving levelling.
- 31       Social networks are loose-knit. The speech community is *diffuse*
- 32       (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985).
- 33   2) Membership of a stable social network with strong local ties leads
- 34       to linguistic conformity. This inhibits change, including that mani-  
35       festing as levelling. The speech community is *focused* (Le Page and  
36       Tabouret-Keller 1985).
- 37   3) A new town will prefigure any levelling tendencies within its own
- 38       region.

39   Thus, two variables were systematically varied: high vs. low mobility  
40   (Milton Keynes vs. Reading), and high vs. low distance from London  
41   (Hull vs. Reading). Here, we will only deal with the first of these: mobility.  
42

The extent to which regional levelling is anticipated in a new town can be gauged by a comparison of Milton Keynes and Reading. The structure of the dialect levelling project is given in Appendix 2.

In Kerswill and Williams (2000a), we discussed the process of new dialect formation from the point of view of eight “principles of koineization,” covering the loss of geographically and socially marked forms, simplification, and the time scale of the process. Kerswill and Trudgill (forthcoming) cover the time scale in greater detail, drawing additionally on New Zealand and Norwegian data. Williams and Kerswill (1999) and Kerswill (2003) deal with regional dialect levelling in England. The present article focuses very specifically on the role of children in the process, drawing on new analyses of two variables (Section 3). It deals with cross-generational continuity and speed of change in new and old towns (Section 4). It also tackles the issue of the type of individuals who are prone to migrate, and the linguistic consequences of their particular social network characteristics (Sections 5 and 6).

### 3. Dialect contact and the contribution of children to new dialect formation in Milton Keynes

For the Milton Keynes project, three hypotheses were developed out of the premises already established. These are as follows:

- Hypothesis 1: In a new town, children’s speech will, in general, be much more homogeneous than adults’ speech. If this hypothesis is supported, it can be inferred that children are creating a new dialect. Homogeneity will, however, be tempered by the emergence of structured variation, of the kind characteristic of focused speech communities;
- Hypothesis 2: Older children will be linguistically more homogeneous than younger children;
- Hypothesis 3: Older children diverge more from adult speech than do younger children.

We consider data for two variables: the fronting of the offset of the diphthong /əʊ/ as in GOAT and the fronting of /u:/ as in GOOSE.<sup>4</sup> The former has been sporadically noted as a minor tendency in British Received Pronunciation, though the fronting of the whole diphthong appears to be involved (Gimson 1970: 134; Wells 1982: 294). Fronting of the vowel nucleus (the onset) is found in Southern varieties of American English (Labov 1994: 59, 202, 208). /u:/-fronting has been noted in many parts of the English-speaking world (Bauer 1985; Clarke et al. 1995; Torgersen

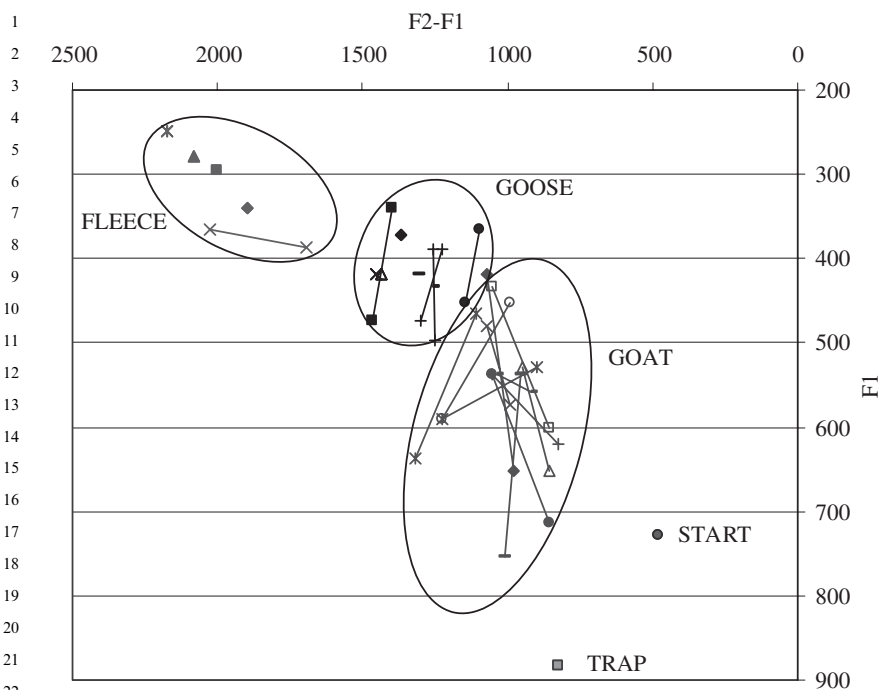


Figure 1. *Mr. S, b. 1915 (Reading): formant plots for FLEECE, GOOSE, GOAT, TRAP, and START*

1997; Torgersen and Kerswill 2004). Because both changes involve the fronting of central vowel, it may be instructive to compare their sociolinguistic behavior; co-variation between them has been noted in, for example, Philadelphia and other southern U.S. varieties (Labov 1994: 202).

Figures 1 and 2 provide visualizations of these changes. They show F1–F2–F1 plots for several tokens of both GOAT and GOOSE (the different symbols representing different lexical items) and three reference vowels, FLEECE, START, and TRAP, with formant frequencies established using SIL's Speech Analyzer software. The data is taken from an elderly and a young speaker from Reading, where a similar change is taking place. For GOAT, the different trajectory taken by the diphthong in the two speakers' productions is clearly visible. Each GOAT token is represented by a straight line showing its movement from an onset with a high F1 (an open vowel quality) to an offset with a low F1 (a closed vowel quality). In the case of the elderly speaker, this is not accompanied by any appreciable forward movement. The young speaker's diphthong starts at the same position as for the older man, but moves rapidly forwards as well as upwards.

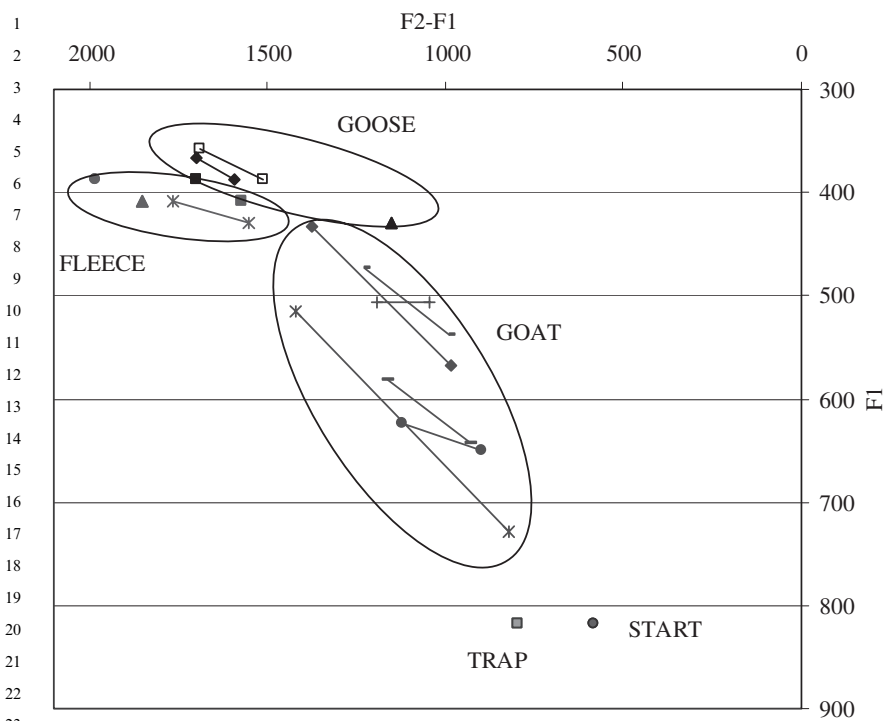


Figure 2. Paul, b. 1981 (Reading): formant plots for FLEECE, GOOSE, GOAT, TRAP, and START

For GOOSE, which has both monophthongal and diphthongal variants, we find that the younger speaker's pronunciations are much more fronted than the older speaker's, overlapping with FLEECE to some extent. These patterns were repeated for four elderly men and four boys analyzed in Reading and Ashford (Kent).

Table 1 below shows the way in which the phonetic continuum for /əʊ/-fronting was divided into four variants, and scores assigned. For each speaker, an index score from 0 to 3 was calculated.

Table 1. Key to (ou): the fronting of the offset of /əʊ/, as in GOAT

Variant	Score	Comment
[o:], [ou]	0	northern and Scottish realizations
[əʊ], [əʊ]	1	older Buckinghamshire and London
[əʊ]	2	fronting
[əɪ]	3	fronting and unrounding

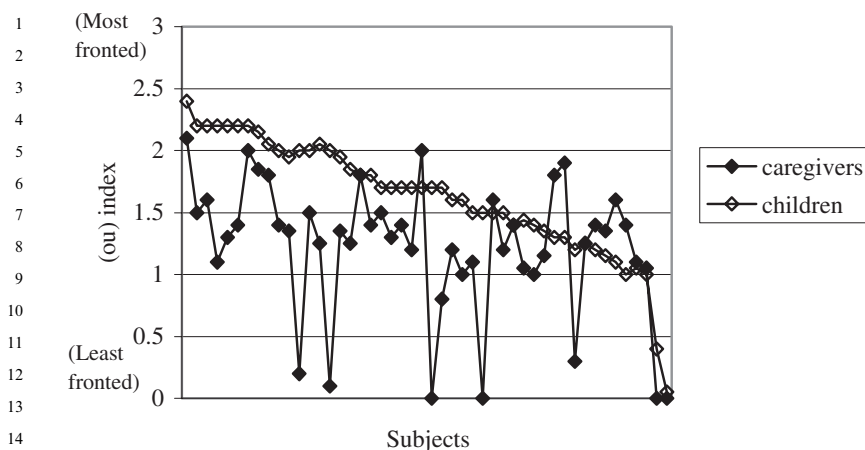


Figure 3. Association of Milton Keynes children's (ou) index scores with those of their caregivers (from Kerswill and Williams 2000a: 102)

Figure 3 examines the association between caregivers and children. The children have been ranked according to their index score, and the caregiver plotted against the child. There is a significant but weak correlation ( $r^2 = .177$ ;  $p < .01$ ).<sup>5</sup> This is discernible from the figure, there being some obvious associations towards the right-hand end of the graph. While there is some association between adults and children (which we discuss below), in almost every case the child has a higher score than the caregiver. Only 11 of 48 caregivers have a more front offset. The children would seem to be moving towards a new norm.

The second premise of the Milton Keynes project suggests that we should look for new dialect formation among older, not younger, children. We would therefore expect a significant correlation between caregivers and four-year-old children, on the grounds that at this age the children are still strongly influenced by parental dialect/accent features. Figure 4 shows the correlation of the four-year-olds' index scores with those of their caregivers. Taking the caregivers' scores first, we note that they cover a very wide range. Four of the sixteen have scores close to 0, indicating high-back rounded pronunciations characteristic of the north of England and Scotland. The remaining twelve are all from the south of England, and show varying degrees of fronting. Like the adults, the children fall into two groups: those using high-back northern variants, and those favoring southern diphthongs.

However, all the children are Milton Keynes-born, so we have here a case of some young children acquiring their parents' non-southeastern



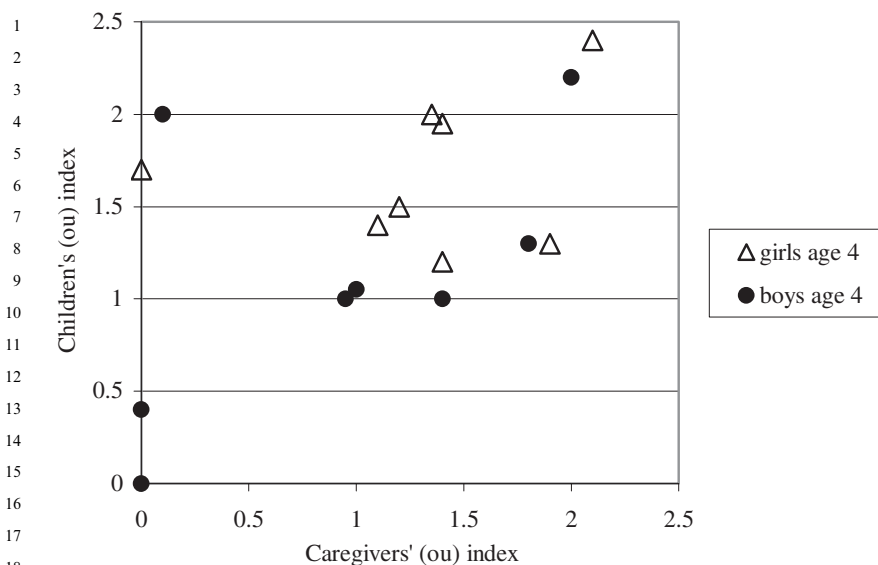


Figure 4. Correlation of (ou) indices for four-year-old children and caregivers

phonology, while others have either not acquired it or have already accommodated to southeastern speech before the time of the interview. In fact, we have direct evidence of this type of accent mobility in this age group: one of the two boys at bottom left of the figure, the child of Scottish parents, was using a mainstream southeastern accent by the time he was recorded for a second time eighteen months later.

For these four-year-olds, the choice between a high back variant and a central or fronted diphthong is a binary one. Some follow their parents, others turn away from them. However, there is a further, more subtle pattern in the data. Among the twelve children who have southeastern parents (represented by the large cluster in the center and top-right of the figure), and who therefore do not have a gross binary choice to make, there is a strong positive correlation with the degree of fronting of their caregivers, with an  $r^2$  of .3551 ( $p < .05$ ). A paired t-test on just these subjects<sup>6</sup> supports this result, since there is no significant difference between caregivers and children. This suggests, of course, that these children match their (female) caregivers' quality for this vowel very closely.

Figure 4 shows that there is a great deal of diversity among the four-year-old preschoolers, resulting (we argue) from the fact that many of the children reflect the dialectal background of their principal caregiver. However, in any speech community, we expect older children to show

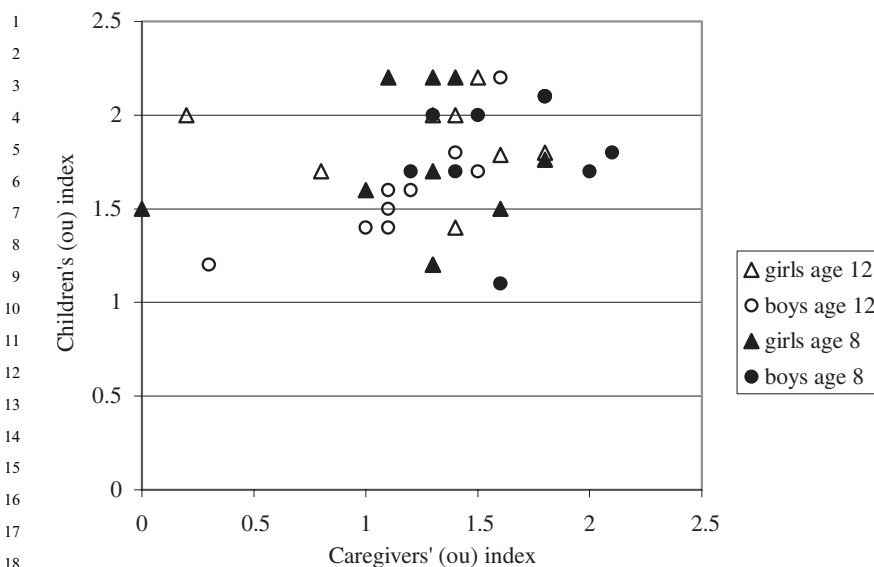


Figure 5. Correlation of (ou) indices for eight- and twelve-year-old children and caregivers

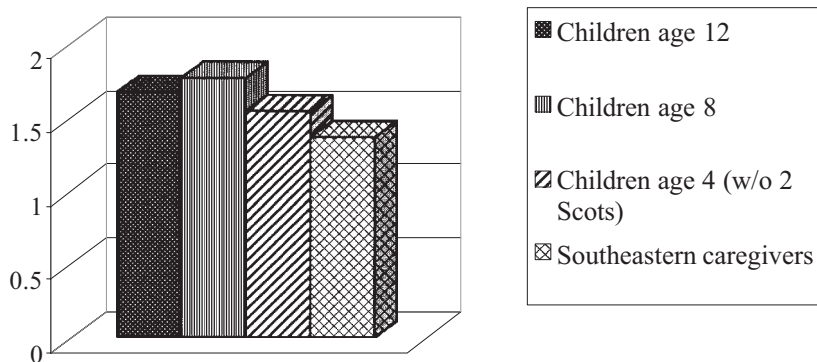
greater homogeneity (as they turn away from parental models) and to reflect a norm that is different from that of the caregivers (in many cases advancing existing changes). These are essentially the arguments put forward by Eckert (2000: 4) and Labov (2001: 427). In a new town, these observations increase in importance because of the absence of stable adult norms to act as a brake on change. In the next section, we will consider the relative speed of change in old and new towns in relation to the vowels of PRICE and MOUTH. For now, we must consider the older children's scores, for which we would expect greater homogeneity and a nonsignificant correlation with caregivers' scores. Figure 5 displays the association between caregivers and eight- and twelve-year-old children. Once the three children from northern families have been removed, there is an almost complete absence of correlation ( $r^2 = .0532$ ). Paired t-tests for both the eight-year-olds and twelve-year-olds and their caregivers show highly significant differences ( $p < .001$  in each case), and correlations are not significant. By the age of eight, the children are apparently no longer influenced by their caregivers' pronunciation — at least with respect to this vowel.

Not only is there greater homogeneity, but there is also focusing on a different norm even from that of the southeastern caregivers. Table 2 shows the mean scores for the southeastern caregivers and their children,

Table 2. *Index scores for (ou): children and caregivers from the southeast of England*

Child age group	(ou) index: southeastern caregivers	(ou) index: children with southeastern caregivers	Standard deviation (children)	Significance (paired t-test)	r <sup>2</sup>
4-year-olds	1.47	1.52	0.4887	p > .05	.355 (p < .01)
8-year-olds	1.44	1.80	0.3545	p < .01	.045 (p > .05)
12-year-olds	1.31	1.70	0.3124	p < .001	.23 (p > .05)

Range of index: 0–3



NB 1. Score for 4-year-olds excludes two boys with Scots phonology

2. Score for 8- and 12-year-olds includes those with non-southeastern caregivers

Figure 6. *(ou) index for all age groups*

with paired t-test results, standard deviations, and a calculation of  $r^2$ . For the eight- and twelve-year-old groups, the children's (ou) index is significantly higher than that of their caregiver.

Figure 6 shows the data differently displayed. All the children have, on average, a higher fronting score than the caregivers, a difference which is greater for the two older groups. The fact that the older children have higher scores strongly suggests that, in their lifetimes, they have fronted their pronunciation of this vowel. We also need evidence that the fronted vowel is a norm. Table 2 shows that there is a reduction in the standard deviation as the age group rises, the biggest reduction being between the four- and eight-year-olds. This is visible in the tighter distribution of scores on the y-axis in Figure 5 than in Figure 4. This suggests that there is an increase in homogeneity with age. Hence, we infer that the children

Table 3. *Key to (u:): the fronting of /u:/ as in GOOSE*

Variant	Score
u	0
y	1
ɥ	2

Table 4. *Index scores for (u:): major subgroups*

	Index
Caregivers	.60
Girls	.55
Boys	.37

are converging on a new, fronted norm with respect to this vowel. For the moment, all three hypotheses given above have been supported.<sup>7</sup>

For (ou), there are no significant gender differences within age groups. However, this is not the case for (u:) (the fronting of the vowel of GOOSE), to which we turn now. We will also find that our hypotheses are not so unequivocally supported. (u:) was quantified by calculating an index based on the scoring system shown in Table 3.

By contrast with (ou), there are no significant correlations between caregivers and children either for the dataset as a whole ( $r^2 = .0424$ ) or for any subgroup. Surprisingly, paired t-tests on subgroups did not reveal any significant differences between caregivers and children — though taking the dataset as a whole came close to yielding a significant difference ( $p = .06$ ). However, this near-significance relates to a HIGHER score on the part of the caregivers, the opposite of what we might have expected. Table 4 shows the mean scores for caregivers, girls, and boys.

All this suggests (1) that there is no particular parental influence with this vowel, and (2) that there is no ongoing change which would give rise to a generational difference. We suggest that /u:/-fronting may have been completed earlier than /əʊ/-fronting: the women already have fronted vowels, and the absence of correlations with caregivers or differences from caregivers means that there is no new norm (which would be observable in late-adolescent or young adult groups) for children to accommodate to as they grow older. Certainly, for received pronunciation (RP), Bauer (1985) finds marked fronting among speakers born in the 1940s. Our instrumental data shows the same degree of fronting for elderly speakers in Reading (b. 1911–1915) as for Bauer's RP speakers born 20–25 years later. This suggests that /u:/-fronting was more advanced in

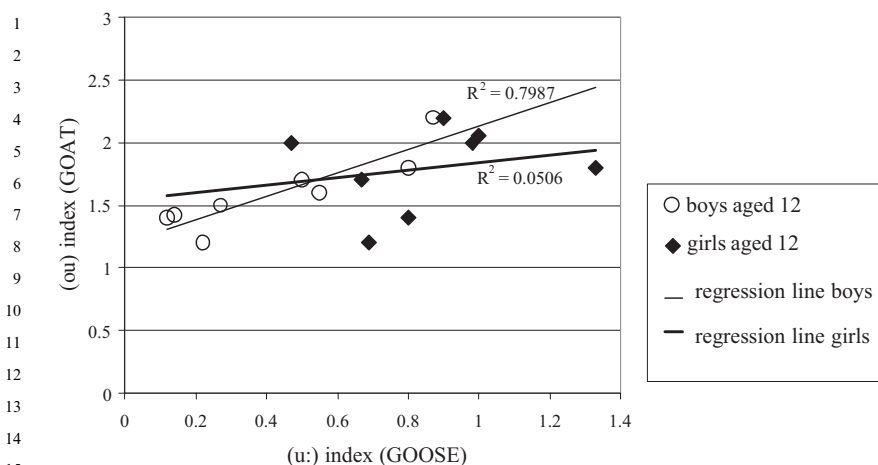


Figure 7. Correlation of (ou) and (u:), twelve-year-olds

nonstandard accents, such as those of our speakers, and was already under way in the 1930s.

We suggested earlier that /u:/- and /əʊ/-fronting might be linked. However, the correlation is insignificant, with a very low  $r^2$  of .0001. As before, we surmise that the reason for the lack of correlation lies in the absence of age-related differences in the data for (u:), unlike that for (ou). But there is one subgroup of speakers whose behavior is very different: this is the twelve-year-old girls. Figure 7 shows the correlation of the two variables for twelve-year-old girls and boys.

Overall for the age group, the correlation is significant, though it turns out that this effect is contributed almost entirely by the boys ( $r^2 = .7987$ ,  $p = .002$ ). However, the focus must still be on the twelve-year-old girls, since this is the only group with a significantly higher score than any other — t-tests showed that this group scores significantly more highly than both twelve-year-old boys ( $p = .004$ ) and eight-year-old girls ( $p = .02$ ). Table 5 shows the index scores.

Table 5. Index scores for (u:): child subgroups

	Girls	Boys
4-year-olds	.31	.42
8-year-olds	.48	.27
12-year-olds	<b>.86</b>	.43

Range of index: 0–2

1 In Kerswill and Williams (2000a: 93–94), we noted that the children  
 2 who scored the highest on (ou) were four twelve-year-old girls, all of  
 3 whom scored 2.0 or higher. We see from Figure 7 that three of the same  
 4 girls score highly on (u:) as well, though one does not (with a score of  
 5 .47). And we note that one of the high-scoring boys for (ou) also scores  
 6 highly on (u:), with an index of .87.

7 A qualitative analysis revealed (continued) /əʊ/-fronting to be led  
 8 by female children who are very well integrated into a (mainly school-  
 9 centered) peer group (Kerswill and Williams 2000a: 94). These children  
 10 were sociable and apparently well-liked. Interestingly, the boy who scored  
 11 highly on the index had mainly cited girls as his friends, and was in  
 12 turn cited by them; as noted, he too has a high /u:/-fronting score. It  
 13 appears that the interpretation adduced for /əʊ/-fronting largely holds  
 14 for /u:/-fronting, which has been noted elsewhere as a female-led change  
 15 (e.g. Torgersen 1997: 60).

16 In the context of a new town, we must consider whether these two  
 17 changes (one current, the other largely completed) are generated from  
 18 within the community (as an endogenous change) or whether they are  
 19 borrowed from outside (exogenous change: see Trudgill 1999 for a discus-  
 20 sion of this distinction in Norwich). It is quite clear that all the changes  
 21 we have observed in Milton Keynes are exogenous in character — by  
 22 contrast with the established city of Norwich. This is not surprising: Mil-  
 23 ton Keynes inhabitants maintain contacts with their original communities  
 24 (on this, see Section 5), and the town has extremely good transport links  
 25 with other places, particularly London. Indeed, we have hypothesized  
 26 that, in Milton Keynes, these regional changes are accelerated. We turn  
 27 now to this question.

#### 30 **4. Cross-generational discontinuity and speed of change in a new speech** 31 **community**

32  
 33 Two vowels in particular are converging on an RP-like pronunciation in  
 34 the working-class speech of the southeast of England. These are /aʊ/, as  
 35 in MOUTH, which is converging on an RP-like [aʊ], moving away from  
 36 localized pronunciations both urban and rural, including [ɛ:] and [æʊ]  
 37 (London) and [ɛɪ] and [ɛʊ] (the southeast north and west of London).  
 38 Tables 6 and 7 show developments in this vowel over about four genera-  
 39 tions in Milton Keynes and Reading: in both towns, the youngsters  
 40 almost exclusively favor [aʊ]. We conclude that this vowel shows both  
 41 regional levelling (towards a supra-local form) and social levelling (the  
 42 difference between working-class and middle-class speakers is reduced, in

Table 6. *Percentage use of variants of (au) (MOUTH), Milton Keynes working class, interview style*

	[ɛʊ]	[ɛɪ]	[ɛ:]	[a:ʔ]	[æʊ]	[aʊ]
Survey of English Dialects (SED) informants, 1950–1960s (Orton et al. 1968)	✓					
Elderly (2f, 2m)	63.2	25.6	9.8	0	1.2	0
Women age 25–40 (n = 48)	0	0	11.7	17.2	38.6	31.5
Girls age 14/15 (n = 8) <sup>8</sup>	0	0	0	5.9	4.7	88.8
Boys age 14/15 (n = 8)	0	0	0	12.3	3.8	83.1

Table 7. *Percentage use of variants of (au) (MOUTH), Reading working class, interview style*

	[ɛʊ]	[ɛɪ]	[ɛ:]	[a:ʔ]	[æʊ]	[aʊ]
SED informants	✓					
Elderly (2f, 2m)	53.5	38.1	3.3	0	4.1	0.7
Girls age 14/15 (n = 8)	0	2.3	0	8.0	0	90.4
Boys age 14/15 (n = 8)	3.8	3.2	0	5.7	0	87.1

favor of middle-class forms). However, there are differences between Milton Keynes and Reading. In Milton Keynes, there appear to be three stages in the development of this vowel (Table 6): first, a period of stability in which [ɛʊ] and [ɛɪ] predominated, followed at the height of the Milton Keynes settlement in the 1970s by a period of greater heterogeneity in which [æʊ], the form favored by the majority of the in-migrants, was dominant. A “re-focusing” finally began with the second-generation migrants (the 1990s children), who are settling on [aʊ]. The discontinuity between the scores of each generation in Table 6 reflects the lack of social continuity in this town, where most children have grandparents originating elsewhere. We do not have data for the younger adult generation in Reading; however, Table 7 indicates that young working-class speakers, like their Milton Keynes counterparts, are rejecting the regionally marked forms in favor of [aʊ]. Significantly, some young speakers (perhaps twenty percent) occasionally use the old forms of their grandparents in a way that is indicative of the strong social continuity in the part of the town in which they live (as shown in Table 10, below).

The difference between Milton Keynes and Reading is more striking for /aɪ/, as in PRICE. In Milton Keynes, [ɔɪ] or [ʌɪ] can only be heard among the very oldest, pre-new town speakers, while in Reading they are still to a considerable extent maintained by children. In both towns, the new target appears to be [aɪ], which can be construed as intermediate

between RP [aɪ] and broad London [ɑ:]. This variant is geographically widespread in southeastern urban varieties. However, in Reading, the generational change is much slower, reflecting (we argue) the greater social continuity there than in Milton Keynes.

Table 8. *Percentage use of variants (aɪ) (PRICE), Milton Keynes working class, interview style*

	[aɪ]	[qɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌɪ]	[ʌɪ]
Elderly age 70–80 (2f, 2m)	0	0	24.4	56.6	15.3	3.4
Girls age 14/15 (n = 8)	25.4	44.6	29.2	0.5	0	0
Boys age 14/15 (n = 8)	1.0	38.0	60.0	0	0	0

Table 9. *Percentage use of variants (aɪ) (PRICE), Reading working class, interview style*

	[aɪ]	[qɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌɪ]	[ʌɪ]
Elderly age 70–80 (2f, 2m)	0	12.4	47.8	21.8	1.7	15.7
Girls age 14/15 (n = 8)	2.8	21.2	45.1	21.1	4.3	5.1
Boys age 14/15 (n = 8)	0.6	19.1	63.7	13.7	2.7	0

## 5. Network types among migrants to a new town

A question we need to answer is: do in-migrants to new towns show particular levels and kinds of social integration that set them off from people in old towns? If so, what are the linguistic consequences of this? To begin to answer this, we must look at the relationship between social integration, social mobility, and social class.

One of the most important contributions to the understanding of the social embedding of language change in recent years has been the proposal by the Milroy and Milroy (1992) to combine the two fundamental concepts of social class and social network into a single model. Here, we hope to show that the relationship between class and network that they propose needs modification to take account of highly mobile, but by no means socially marginal, groups of internal migrants whose sociolinguistic patterns are not normally considered in speech community studies.<sup>9</sup> A discussion of the class–network relationship is one part of a more general consideration of the social characteristics of migrants.

The Milroys provide a critique of the Labovian variationist model, the consensus model, based on a view of society as an integrated whole in which the different parts work in harmony with one another. Linguistically this should give rise to shared norms of evaluation and cohesive



1 speech communities. The consensus view is limited, however, by its  
 2 ability to account for the dynamic nature and continued vitality of non-  
 3 standard vernaculars and therefore is unable to provide an explanation  
 4 for linguistic change. Such phenomena can be better understood, accord-  
 5 ing to the Milroys, by adopting as a framework a conflict model which  
 6 takes account of the inequalities, divisions, and opposing interests found  
 7 within society. This model shows how varieties other than standard, le-  
 8 gitimized varieties persist strongly and act as badges of identity for less  
 9 privileged groups.

10 Social network theory provides an explanation for the maintenance  
 11 of these nonstandard dialects by showing what the forces acting on  
 12 individual speakers might be. Close-knit networks act as powerful norm-  
 13 enforcement mechanisms. Strong networks both bind a local community  
 14 together and reduce the possibility of changes in behavior, including lin-  
 15 guistic behavior.

16 The interaction between social network and social class can be seen  
 17 when one considers that close-knit networks in the West are to be found  
 18 mainly at the bottom (and very top) of the socioeconomic scale. Thus, the  
 19 least powerful maintain strong social networks because of the NEED to  
 20 maintain such ties for survival. Many other speakers, however, do not  
 21 have the need for strong networks and are socially and geographically  
 22 mobile. They therefore come into contact with a wider range of people.

23 Within all groups in society, it is, according to the Milroys, individuals  
 24 who establish exceptionally large numbers of weak ties outside their  
 25 immediate communities who are able to facilitate language change. Con-  
 26 comitantly, the transmission of innovations between groups is effected  
 27 by such individuals. We would infer from this that the spread of changes  
 28 occurs rapidly in socially and geographically mobile groups, such as mi-  
 29 grants. Conversely, they will be slow in groups with a strong local base  
 30 and close-knit networks.

31 The question arises: in a new town, where we can assume that most  
 32 people of whatever social class have loose-knit nonlocal networks, can  
 33 we expect dialect change to be accelerated? In order to address this ques-  
 34 tion, we begin by considering some of the social characteristics of the  
 35 families we interviewed in both projects.

36  
 37 – What kind of people move to a new town? A factor which seemed  
 38 to militate against the formation of close relationships was the prac-  
 39 tice of “estate hopping.” Most families in the Milton Keynes proj-  
 40 ect had moved at least once within Milton Keynes while three  
 41 families had moved six, seven, and nine times, respectively. Several  
 42 families had moved frequently before moving to Milton Keynes.

1 When attempts were made to locate the families a year after the  
 2 original recordings, only 39 of the original 48 children could be  
 3 traced, an attrition rate of 18.7%. However, a striking feature of  
 4 the families we interviewed was the fact that many people moved  
 5 as part of an extended family of three generations or adult siblings.  
 6 43% of our twelve-year-olds had their grandparents living in the  
 7 town, while this was true of as many as 75% of the four-year-olds.  
 8 This is in contrast to what we may suppose is the largely INDIVID-  
 9 UAL migration undertaken by middle-class families, who migrate  
 10 to seek better employment. The project families had mainly moved  
 11 with the promise of better housing (Kerswill and Williams 2000a).  
 12 – What is it like living in a new town? We can quote from a social  
 13 study carried out in Milton Keynes in the 1970s (Bishop 1986: ■■):  
 14 “43% of Heelands residents reported no friendships or even casual  
 15 acquaintances on the estate. Neath Hill,<sup>10</sup> despite a low friendliness  
 16 score, recorded a high proportion of residents with casual and  
 17 friendly relationships within the estate.” This slightly conflicting  
 18 report suggests a high level of isolation among a large segment of  
 19 the population, while others are not at all isolated, or prefer to  
 20 keep to casual acquaintanceships.

21 We now look at some of our own data. The following statements are  
 22 taken from the interviews with the working class women in the Milton  
 23 Keynes project (Williams and Kerswill 1997).  
 24

25 It took me about two years to even speak to someone. After the first year I  
 26 was cracking up. I just wanted to go back. I hated it. Nobody had been born in  
 27 Milton Keynes. Everybody had come from somewhere else. You had them from  
 28 everywhere — London, Scotland, Ireland. And if you didn’t come down with  
 29 them ... they stuck to their own groups

30 They [the neighbors] only spoke to me once and that was to complain

31 You’ve got to keep yourself to yourself. You’ve always got the feeling “Are they  
 32 going to be talking behind my back?” I say hello and that’s about it  
 33

34 I never hardly see her [the neighbor]. The only time I see her is when the video van  
 35 pulls up. (Williams and Kerswill 1997: 48–49)

36 **But:**

37 I love it here. It’s the best thing I’ve ever done. I’m not one for popping in for  
 38 cups of tea here and there. After all the years I’ve been on this estate, I’ve only  
 39 got two friends  
 40

41 The only people I talk to are the people opposite and the old couple next door,  
 42 but that’s the way I prefer it. (Williams and Kerswill 1997: 48–49)

Table 10. *Birthplace of Reading teenagers and their parents*

	Working class			Middle class		
	Teenagers	Mothers	Fathers	Teenagers	Mothers	Fathers
% born in Reading	93.7	81.2	81.2	62.5	26.7	11.8

Table 11. *Birthplace of Milton Keynes teenagers and their parents*

	Working class			Middle class		
	Teenagers	Mothers	Fathers	Teenagers	Mothers	Fathers
% born in MK	50.0	12.5	13.3	26.7	0	6.7

We have a picture, then, of independent, sometimes isolated individuals, many with their main family and even routine social contacts elsewhere in the country. Their networks are often uniplex, though (as we have seen) some have migrated with their extended families. Many of them in fact seem to seek out an isolated lifestyle. As a rough measure of people's "rootedness" in their town of residence, we can find out whether or not they and their parents were born there. Quantifying this data will give us an estimate of the degree to which the communities as a whole are composed of close-knit networks. Table 10 shows, as predicted, that there is a great difference between the working- and middle-class samples in Reading. The figures back up information gained through our interviews: it was clear that the majority of the working-class children had extended families on the same estate, while this was not true of the middle-class group.

Table 11 for Milton Keynes shows that there is little to choose between the two class groups: both are nonlocal in origin, to an even greater extent than the Reading middle-class families. However, a number of the working-class families have maintained kin-supported networks by migrating in larger family groups — a factor which may promote the maintenance of the family's dialect and inhibit levelling. We return to this point below.

## 6. Class, networks, and dialect levelling in a new town and its region

The picture we have of Milton Keynes is potentially at odds with the Milroyan concept of the inverse relationship between social class and dense

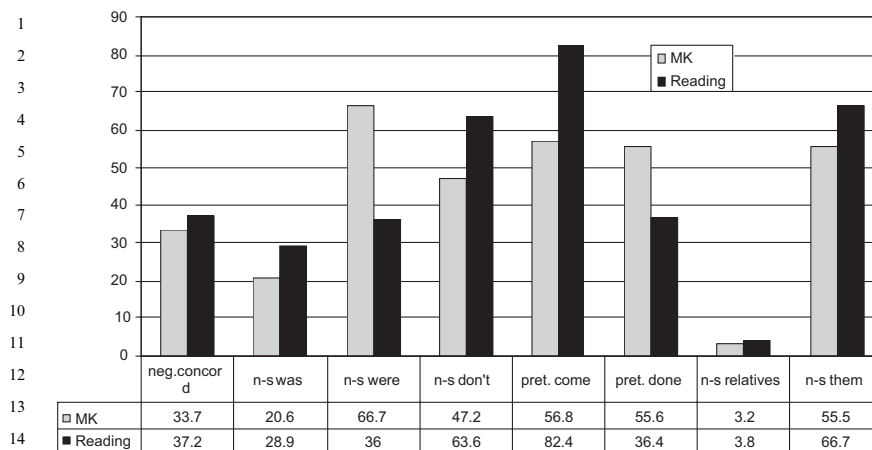


Figure 8. *Nonstandard grammatical features in Milton Keynes and Reading*

social networks. The question is: do the relatively uniplex networks of the working-class migrants lead to rapid language change? Do they match the middle-class subjects in using few nonstandard grammatical features, combined with accent features that are not easy to place geographically? Milton Keynes working-class speech is indeed much less of a LOCAL accent than is its counterpart in Reading. Elsewhere, we have shown the “compromise” nature of much of the local phonology (Kerswill and Williams 2000a: 86), resulting from the levelling out of regionally and socially marked forms. A Reading accent, by contrast, is still perceived as “country” (rural), even by its own users (Kerswill and Williams 2002a), with vowels (especially the local stereotype [ɔɪ] for PRICE) contributing strongly to this impression. Certainly, too, in terms of dialect levelling, change has taken place faster in Milton Keynes than in Reading, in a way predicted by a model which sees loose-knit networks as promoting levelling and change.

But there is quite another aspect to this. If, instead, we look at the most commonly used nonstandard grammatical features in the southeast of England, we get a different picture. Figure 8 shows the use of nonstandard features by working-class teenagers in both Milton Keynes and Reading in the interviews we conducted.

It can be seen that neither town has the advantage as far as the use of nonstandard grammar goes. In both places, the use of these features is relatively high. Moreover, their use is in striking contrast with middle-class speech in both towns, where the use of these features is so low as

1 to be negligible. Class, not network (represented by the proxy variable  
 2 ‘town’), appears to be the primary predictor in terms of grammatical  
 3 variation. A similar picture emerges if we consider the use of three low-  
 4 prestige consonantal features which are currently spreading in Britain  
 5 (Kerswill 2003): the use of [f] for /θ/, the use of [v] for noninitial /ð/  
 6 (“th-fronting”), and the use of [ʔ] for noninitial /t/ (“t-glottaling”). For  
 7 these, class remains the main predictor, taking precedence over ‘town’  
 8 and ‘gender’ (Kerswill and Williams 2002b).

9 The variables are strongly differentiated in terms of how they pattern  
 10 across social class and town/network — and we must seek explanations  
 11 for this. We can report that one of the vowels, (əʊ), is being fronted in  
 12 a way unrelated to either class or town (Cheshire et al. 1999), while (u:)  
 13 shows only marginal further fronting. Two others, (aʊ) and (aɪ), are  
 14 changing towards regionally unmarked variants, leading to the adver-  
 15 gence of working-class forms towards those of middle-class speakers;  
 16 for these, Milton Keynes is quite strongly in the lead. The three conso-  
 17 nantal variables saw nonprestige forms entrenched among working-class  
 18 speakers, with middle-class speakers making less use of them. Finally,  
 19 the same class-based pattern is found for the nonstandard grammatical  
 20 features.

21 In an earlier article (Kerswill and Williams 2000b), we argued for the  
 22 influence of different class-based cultures, resulting, particularly, from dif-  
 23 ferent degrees and types of literacy, as a partial explanation of the strong  
 24 class-related differences in the use of nonstandard grammatical features.  
 25 We suggested that, for such features, this overrode any levelling effect of  
 26 loose-knit networks. We now pursue this argument further by pointing  
 27 out that pronunciation features are thought to be more open to social  
 28 marking than are grammatical features because of their much greater fre-  
 29 quency (Cheshire 1999: 61). This openness in turn leads to the subtle, gra-  
 30 dient vocalic patterns which serve to differentiate the two towns in a way  
 31 that correlates with their characteristic network types. Yet not all pronun-  
 32 ciation features show this subtlety: the three consonantal variables are  
 33 differentiated along class lines, reflecting (we would argue) the fact that,  
 34 like the grammatical variables, their variants are binary, with one being  
 35 strongly associated with standard or “correct” speech. There is no such  
 36 association for any of the vocalic variables.

37 Even this is only part of the story, since it is clear from the earlier dis-  
 38 cussion that there are quite marked qualitative differences between the  
 39 social networks of the working-class and middle-class families in Milton  
 40 Keynes, despite the fact that they all predominantly originate elsewhere.  
 41 This lies in the tendency for the working-class groups to reproduce kin-  
 42 based social networks in the new location, through the migration of

1 extended families — in contrast to the middle-class migrants, who came  
2 mostly as single people or small family units. The effect of this on the  
3 working-class speakers who are part of such networks is likely to be con-  
4 servative. Despite this, the members of the working-class Milton Keynes  
5 sample AS A WHOLE have moved further towards a levelled southeastern  
6 variety than their Reading counterparts have.

## 7 8 9 **7. Conclusions**

10  
11 Our conclusions must necessarily be complex. Dealing first with the issues  
12 raised in the last section, we find linguistic variables behaving very dif-  
13 ferently. Quite clearly, in the new town some features are prone to rapid  
14 change by levelling. Two are vowels (MOUTH and PRICE) which previously  
15 had regionally strongly marked forms, and which are now being replaced  
16 by RP-like variants over a wide geographical area. Here, Milton Keynes  
17 is in the vanguard of change. We have not conducted quantitative studies  
18 of GOAT and GOOSE outside Milton Keynes; however, indications are that  
19 changes in these vowels are NOT more advanced there than elsewhere. If  
20 this is correct, we can point out that, unlike MOUTH and PRICE, these inno-  
21 vations do not lead either to levelling or to convergence with RP-like  
22 accents. Arguably, nonlevelling changes (that is, those which do not lead  
23 to greater homogeneity overall) are not accelerated in a new town. By  
24 contrast, in a new community, levelling changes will be promoted, since  
25 they are the result of processes emerging from dialect contact; at the indi-  
26 vidual level, these changes will be propelled by the frequent accommo-  
27 dation that takes place between speakers of different varieties. In a new  
28 community, strategies of neutrality might also play a part (cf. Scotton  
29 1976; Mæhlum 1992), and it is in this context that a standard-like (RP)  
30 realization might be favored by speakers — though it must be added  
31 that these variants are probably not perceived as “RP,” since they are not  
32 identical with variants found in more conservative forms of that variety.  
33 RP, narrowly construed, is unlikely to be a model for speakers today,  
34 since it is an accent which has all but lost its position in English public  
35 life (Kerswill 2001).

36 For the same reasons that changes in GOAT and GOOSE are not necessar-  
37 ily favored in a new town, the spread of the nonprestige consonantal fea-  
38 tures of th-fronting and t-glottaling takes place at about the same rate in  
39 Milton Keynes as elsewhere. Unlike the near-RP pronunciations [ɑɪ] and  
40 [aʊ], these are not compromise forms, and so are not part of levelling. In-  
41 stead, they are innovations which are diffusing in a geographically grad-  
42 ual manner (Kerswill 2003).

In this article, we have combined three methodologies. First, we have undertaken detailed quantitative analyses of four phonetic variables, analyzed in the light of the fact that their users are growing up in a new community. Second, we have adopted a comparative approach involving a carefully matched established town. Third, we have applied an interpretive approach in assessing the type of social networks people in new towns tend to contract. The three methodologies complement each other, in that the quantitative patterns can only be understood against the backdrop of the particular social structures of a new community.

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#### **Appendix 1. Structure of the Milton Keynes project**

- Milton Keynes: a “new town” designated in 1967; 1967 population 43,000, 1991 population 176,000. 70 kms from London, Coventry, and Cambridge. Migration mainly from southeast England, including London. London: 35%. Rest of Southeast: 41%.
- Research site: adjoining districts in the original part of the new town; largely rented accommodation in flats and terraced houses. This site was selected in the expectation of locating mainly nonstandard speakers.
- Subjects: ages 4, 8, and 12, girls and boys, eight in each cell. Total 48 children, all born in Milton Keynes or having arrived there within the first two years of life. Located through local nursery and primary schools.
- The principal caregiver of each child was recorded — in all but two cases the mother; remaining cases were an aunt and the father. All caregivers are broadly “working class” by the criteria of occupation and educational level.
- Three “styles,” each eliciting a set of target words: single word elicitation; connected speech task; reading list (not four-year-olds). Recordings conducted in 1991.
- Families studied are from London, area immediately north of London, Essex, Milton Keynes area, and Scotland. The sample reflects the balance of in-migrants to the town (MKDC 1990).
- Linguistic variables: 6 vowels and 4 consonants.
- Transcription: 10–30 tokens of each variable from each speaker were transcribed (less for some four-year-olds). The authors agreed on auditory values. AW recorded, transcribed, and coded the data, with 5–10% checked by PK.

## Appendix 2. Structure of the dialect levelling project

Three towns:

Table 12.

	High mobility (new town)?	Location
Reading	no	Southeast
Milton Keynes	yes	Southeast
Hull	no	North

In each town:

Table 13.

		N	Age
Middle class	Girls	8	14–15
	Boys	8	
Working class	Girls	8	
	Boys	8	
	Elderly women	2	70–80
	Elderly men	2	

Subjects were located through local secondary schools, selected on the basis of local knowledge of the social characteristics of their catchment areas.

- Recordings:
  - (i) Ethnographic interviews in pairs, including reading lists; group discussions on school, teenage concerns, fashion, music, and language; dialect recognition task (adolescents)
  - (ii) One-to-one interviews (elderly respondents)
- Linguistic variables: 3 vowels, 4 consonants, 12 grammatical features
- Transcription: as for Milton Keynes project (vowels and consonants); orthographically transcribed searchable corpus (grammatical variables)

## Notes

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1. A new dialect in a new city: children's and adults' speech in Milton Keynes, directed by Paul Kerswill at the University of Reading, 1990–1994, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ref. R000232376). Research fellow: Ann Williams. The role



- 1 of adolescents in dialect levelling, jointly directed by Jenny Cheshire, Paul Kerswill,
- 2 and Ann Williams, 1995–1999, funded by the ESRC (ref. R000236180). Research fel-
- 3 lows: Ann Williams and Ann Gillett.
- 4 2. Regional dialect levelling is also known as “dialect supralocalization” (cf. Milroy
- 5 et al. 1994). This is the formation of levelled, “supralocal” varieties, with few local
- 6 differences within a region, resulting from social changes, particularly increases in
- 7 mobility. Kerswill (2003) distinguishes between regional dialect levelling as primarily a
- 8 geographical phenomenon and “dialect levelling by accommodation,” which refers to
- 9 the social psychological mechanisms leading to the levelled varieties.
- 10 3. The third town was Hull on the northeast coast of England, chosen to test the effect of
- 11 geographical distance from London on dialect levelling between regions.
- 12 4. These words are used mnemonically following Wells’ (1982) system.
- 13 5. Using the Excel regression function.
- 14 6. Using the Excel paired t-test function.
- 15 7. Wells (1982: 146) notes the great social and regional variability of this vowel; this
- 16 would make it particularly available as a social marker. The subtle gradient and quan-
- 17 titative patterns reported here are doubtless symptomatic of this.
- 18 8. Data from 14/15-year-olds is from the dialect levelling project.
- 19 9. Kerswill and Williams (2000b) elaborate further on the link between class and network.
- 20 10. Heelands and Neath Hill are pseudonyms.

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