

This is a repository copy of *Identity, ethnicity and place:the construction of youth language in London*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/75329/>

Version: Submitted Version

---

## **Book Section:**

Kerswill, Paul [orcid.org/0000-0002-6540-9312](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6540-9312) (2013) Identity, ethnicity and place:the construction of youth language in London. In: Auer, Peter, Hilpert, Martin, Stukenbrock, Anja and Szmrecsanyi, Benedikt, (eds.) Space in language and linguistics. *linguae and litterae* . De Gruyter , pp. 128-164.

---

## **Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

## **Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

## Identity, ethnicity and place: the construction of youth language in London

Paul Kerswill (University of York)<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction: youth language, indexicality and place

“Youth language” is labile, contingent and transient, subject to fashion, serving as a badge of nonconformity, but above all constructing for its speakers a set of complex identities for deployment as markers of different stances in relation to varying interlocutors and shifting conversational contexts. The term “youth language” is best placed in inverted commas because “languagehood” is contested by both researchers and users. A major strand of youth language research concentrates on these new urban ways of speaking as markers of identity: they are seen primarily as registers, or styles, reflecting young people’s particular communicative choices. Irvine (2001: 23) refers to linguists’ “broad conception of style” as a ‘social semiosis of distinctiveness’. A style, for Irvine (p. 22), becomes possible because linguistic characteristics (or “indexes”) of a particular social group become interpreted as carrying social meaning, and this in turn informs people’s interpretations of their own social world and their position within it. For the argument to be developed in this chapter, the implication of this interpretation of *style* is that it does not entail a cohesive, distinct language system – a “language” by some definitions – but rather a collection of features belonging to any linguistic component which co-occur more or less strongly.

Clearly, any co-occurring features have the capacity to become stylised in this sense. At one extreme, the young person who occasionally uses the address term “bruv” and the pragmatic marker “man” with his friends is indexing a stance towards those friends at that moment, while the speaker who code-switches between two available languages in her community may be doing so to reach a particular conversational outcome, achieving this through her knowledge of the indexicality of those languages in her community. Few linguists would want to call the behaviour of the youth in the first case the alternation of two “codes”, while in the second any criteria one might set for the alternation of “languages” are much easier to fulfil. The crunch comes when linguists’ and speakers’ views are compared: to what extent does a linguist’s ways of conceptualising language varieties match those of the community? What are the community members’ concepts, and how do they correspond to analytical “realities” arrived at by structural linguists or discourse analysts? How strongly is *place* implicated in all of these perspectives, lay and “expert”?

This chapter deals with language and identity among young people in a large multiethnic and multilingual metropolis, from the point of view of place and distance. It does so while also dealing with cross-cutting concepts of race, ethnicity, age, culture and class: it turns out, as we shall see, that these are not simply overlaid as additional factors, but that they *interact* in a quasi-statistical sense in that they do not “mean” the same thing for people in different places. Naming also becomes a critical issue for this study (cf. Bijvoet and Fraurud

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the continued input and support of my co-researchers on the London projects: Jenny Cheshire, Sue Fox, Arfaan Khan and Eivind Torgersen. Without them, the projects would never have got off the ground, let alone achieved the undoubted impact which they have.

2011): how are the social groups which are identified by the analyst labelled by group members themselves and by other groups with whom they have dealings? How are their language varieties labelled, if at all? What folklinguistic knowledge do people demonstrate about their own and others' varieties when the issue is raised with them in conversation? What are these language varieties like? And finally, what is the correspondence between these language varieties and folklinguistic knowledge? In our consideration of place, the question arises: what does this tell us about a large city, with its geographical and social divisions, as a "speech community"?

## 2. Describing "youth language(s)": varieties, styles or repertoires?

As Svendsen and Røyneland (2008) and Quist (2008) point out, at least in Europe urban youth languages have initially been seen as varieties, or lects, distinguishable from other varieties or lects by applying descriptive linguistic techniques. The new way of speaking may be seen as a new dialect, as Svendsen and Røyneland (2008: 80) claim: "multiethnolectal [i.e. collective, cross-ethnic – PK] speech style contributes to a further increase of dialect diversity in Norway", while cautioning: "It is often taken as a manifestation of lack of competence rather than as a new Norwegian dialect". If one takes this "variety" approach to urban youth language, one often ends up resorting to tabulated lists of highly disparate features, which may be syntactic, morphological, phonological/phonetic, suprasegmental, lexical or discourse-pragmatic. This is true of both North European and Sub-Saharan African urban youth languages (I mention these two regions if only because the vast bulk of the research has been done here). For example, we find quite detailed lists of this kind for Dutch (Nortier and Dorleijn 2008), Danish (Quist 2008), Swedish (Kotsinas 1994) and German (Wiese 2009), as well as the labelled urban youth languages Nouchi (Ivory Coast), Camfranglais (Cameroon), Sheng (Kenya), and several others (Kiessling and Mous 2004). Lists such as these are never exhaustive. Moreover, quantifying the features following a variationist methodology and rationale is highly problematic. This is because the features are often contingent on the immediate communicative act, taking on direct pragmatic and discourse functions in a way that is only exceptionally the case for variables in (more) stable vernacular varieties. Variationist quantification assumes a concept of "variety" in which variation is inherent to the system (typically, the phonology); as a consequence of this the "variants" have no *direct* semantic or pragmatic function. This does not stop the variants from acquiring powerful indexical meanings (Johnstone and Kiesling 2008), but the variationist approach usually assumes that the frequency *per se* is of interest; indeed, in recent variationist work, token frequency is taken as a component of a cognitive explanation of change (e.g. Clark and Trousdale 2009). Variationists are also interested in language internal factors, conceptualised as linguistic constraints.

This approach is clearly not appropriate to the study of most manifestations of urban youth language. In fact most authors have problematised it (e.g. Jaspers 2008 from a language-ideology viewpoint) or discussed the "varieties" as practices or styles (Hurst 2009). Cheshire et al. (2011) see London's youth language as a repertoire drawn from a "variety pool". This does not, however, absolve us from investigating "varietyhood" from whatever

point of view, since linguists, the media and users all willingly engage in a process of naming, each capturing a different aspect of linguistic or social reality. When speakers and, sometimes, the media, name a language variety, this is part of the *enregisterment* of that language variety: this is the association of linguistic forms with specific social characteristics and specific ideologies, such as social class or correctness (see Johnstone 2011: 34–5). Place is part of the process, in that features of a local dialect become “imbued ... with meaning” as local speakers come to notice particular attitudes and reactions “in contexts such as moving into jobs where speaking “correctly” was required” (Johnston 2011: 34).

### 3. The research site: London

London’s population is currently (2011) around 7.7 million (london.gov.uk). It is distributed across 33 boroughs (Figure 1). Data for this chapter is drawn from two large-scale sociolinguistic projects (see Section 4), with speakers drawn from four boroughs:

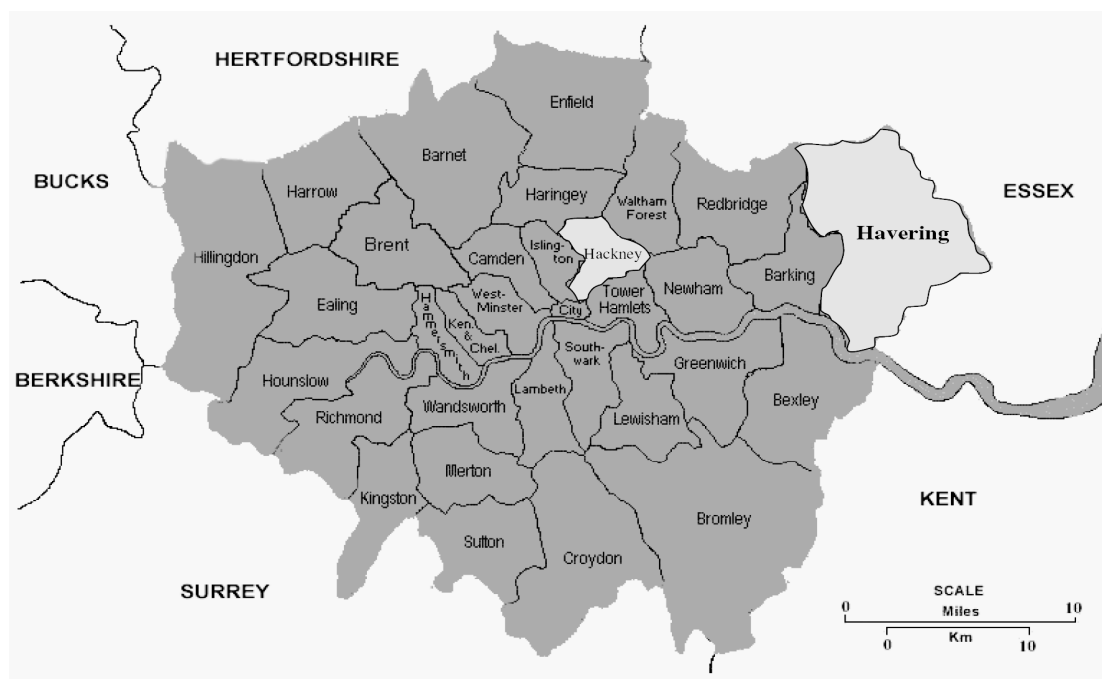


Figure 1. Map of London, with the boroughs of Hackney and Havering highlighted (from [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/maps/london\\_map.htm](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/maps/london_map.htm)). Haringey and Islington are, respectively, to the North and West of Hackney.

Hackney, Haringey and Islington are all located in the inner city, while Havering, on the eastern outskirts, was formerly part of the county of Essex. All have populations of around 225,000. Hackney and Havering have been highlighted on the map because the bulk of the speakers came from these two boroughs.

Three sociodemographic factors are likely to impact upon language use and identity formation in the inner city of London: *immigration*, *multilingualism*, and *relative social deprivation*. Estimates of the numbers of people born outside the UK are, for Hackney, 35–37 percent, and, for Havering, 6–7 percent (2001 Census; Spence 2008). However, a better measure of the size of the minority ethnic and non-English language heritage population may be the fact that, in Hackney, 54% of primary school and 44% of secondary school children have English as an additional language (Inspire 2011), meaning that English is not the main home language. In Havering, the figures are undoubtedly much lower – figures are not available, but out of a sample of 98 pre-school children 14 percent spoke English as an additional language (Havering Council 2011). The number of languages spoken by children in each borough's schools varies much less, at around 100 for each borough (figures taken from borough websites and McPake 2006). Deprivation curtails people's ability to participate in social and economic activities, and to have a wide base of social contacts. In terms of a range of indicators of deprivation, Hackney, Islington and Haringey are ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, respectively, out of a total of 355 boroughs in England (2001 Census). Havering is among the less deprived London boroughs with a ranking of 196. We can, therefore, expect considerable differences in language use and social attitudes between the two locations: inner and outer city. This will be a primary focus of the chapter.

#### 4. The studies

The *Linguistic Innovators* project<sup>2</sup> (2004–2007) recorded 49 adolescents aged 16–19 in the highly multicultural borough of Hackney. We compared the English of the Hackney adolescents with that of 8 older speakers in the borough as well as with 51 adolescents and 8 older speakers in Havering. The latter borough, as we have seen, 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. We grouped our speakers by ethnicity, with a major division between Anglo (white, British origin) and non-Anglo (the remainder, mostly the London-born children or grandchildren of immigrants from developing countries). The main results are reported in Kerswill et al. (2008), Cheshire and Fox (2009) and Gabrielatos et al. (2010). The second project, *Multicultural London English*<sup>3</sup> (2007–2010), focused on a wider range of age groups: 4–5, 8–9, 12–13, 16–19, about 25 and about 40. Its rationale and results are reported in Cheshire et al (2011) and Kerswill et al. (2012 *fc.*); because the current chapter concerns adolescent language practices, I shall be dealing only with the data for the 16–19 year olds.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Linguistic innovators: the English of adolescents in London* 2004–7, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, Principal Investigator Paul Kerswill, Co-investigator Jenny Cheshire, Research Associates Susan Fox and Eivind Torgersen (ref. RES 000-23-0680). See Kerswill, Torgersen and Fox (2008) and Cheshire and Fox (2009).

<sup>3</sup> *Multicultural London English: the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety* 2007–10, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, Principal Investigator Paul Kerswill, Co-investigator Jenny Cheshire, Research Associates Susan Fox, Arfaan Khan and Eivind Torgersen (ref. RES-062-23-0814).

## 5. Research questions: linguistic production and social construction

This chapter concerns the relationship between actual recorded speech in two highly contrasting boroughs of the same city and the speakers' own perceptions and constructions of speech produced there. There is, therefore, a three-way comparison: (1) speech production in the inner vs. the outer city, (2) inner-city constructions of speech varieties in both the inner and the outer city, and (3) outer-city constructions of the same. As I pointed out earlier, these are overlaid by a number of sociodemographic factors which can be shown to be variably salient for these particular speakers: race or ethnicity, social class, gender, age and place.

## 6. Language production in the inner and outer city: vowels defining a “variety”

The speech repertoire of inner-city London can be seen as being composed of a “variety pool” – as already mentioned (Cheshire et al. 2011). The reason for this analysis is the way in which English is being acquired and passed on: a significant proportion of children and adolescents are acquiring the language in an environment where many people are second-language speakers, and this proportion is high enough for the ‘standard’ intergenerational transmission of the local variety to be interrupted (cf. Labov 2007); we have already seen that second-language speakers in Hackney account for around 50% of the total. The point here is that the acquisition of the local speech repertoire takes place under similar conditions for both those who have English as their home language and those who do not, and from this observation alone we can infer that “Anglo” speakers (whose heritage is English/British) do not straightforwardly acquire the localised, “Cockney” vernacular, even if their parents might be speakers (see Cheshire et al. 2011, Kerswill et al. 2012 *fc*). Immediately we can see that this calls into question the everyday notion of a “local” vernacular, perceived as such by local residents: what “local” might mean in the face of high immigration and multilingualism is a crucial question for notions of place and community.

The inner-city London feature pool (cf. Siegel 1997; Mufwene 2001; Winford 2003) contains, at the very least, elements from learners' varieties of English, Englishes from the Indian subcontinent and Africa, Caribbean creoles and Englishes along with their indigenised London versions (Sebba 1993), local London and south-eastern vernacular varieties of English, local and international youth slang, as well as more levelled and standard-like varieties from various sources. Despite the heterogeneity of these sources, it is possible to make generalisations about what is shared across the young working-class speakers, and what differentiates them along the parameters of gender, ethnicity and borough.

The most striking single innovation is the radical transformation of the vowel space: while the inventory remains the same, realisations are very different. Figures 2–4 illustrate the changes in the inner city. Figure 2 is a partial vowel system for an elderly white working-class Londoner, showing typical long trajectories for the FACE, PRICE and GOAT<sup>4</sup> vowels. Figure 3 shows a relatively extreme version of the transformed vowel space, that of a male

---

<sup>4</sup> I follow the mnemonic system for English vowels introduced by Wells (1982).

adolescent of Afro-Caribbean origin: here, we note the raised and peripheral onsets of FACE and GOAT, the lowered, shorter trajectory for PRICE, and a low MOUTH. Figure 4 displays plots for all groups, though only the onsets of the diphthongs are shown. It is clear that while there are differences involving both gender and ethnicity, particularly involving the raised male non-Anglo FACE and GOAT, the most striking contrast by far is with the elderly speaker.

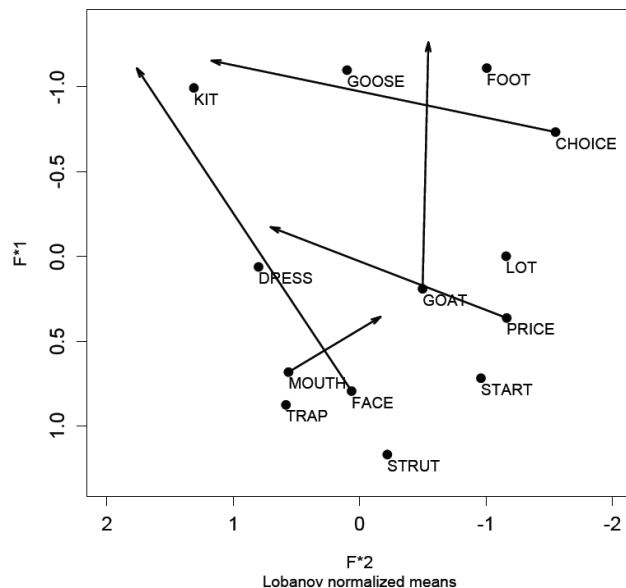


Figure 2. Diphthong system of elderly male speaker from Hackney born 1918 (from Cheshire et al. 2011: 159).

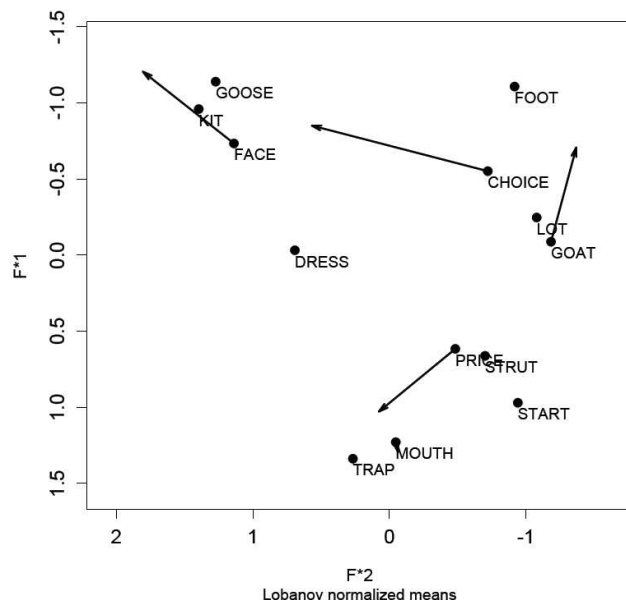


Figure 3. Diphthong system of young male from Hackney, Afro-Caribbean origin, born 1989 (from Cheshire et al. 2011: 160).

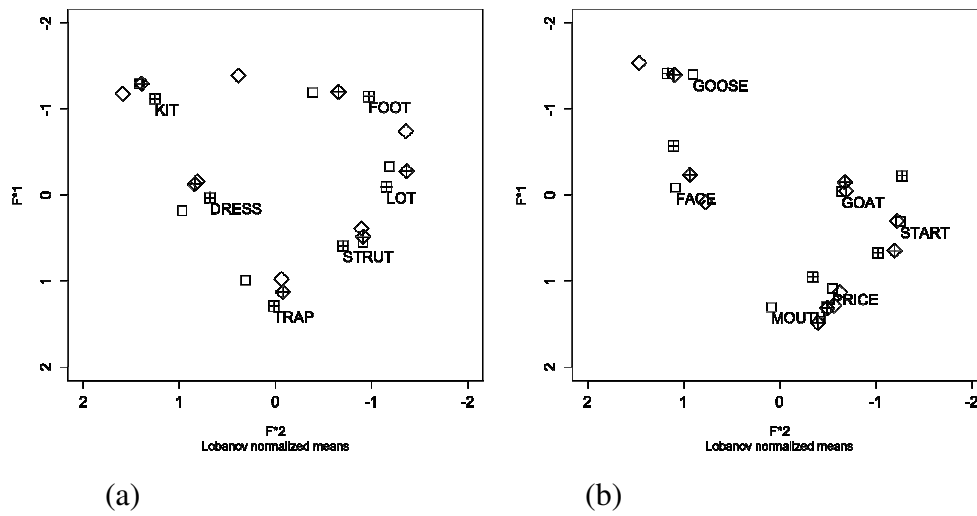


Figure 4. London inner city vowels: Multicultural London English project adolescent speakers (aged 16–19). (a) Short monophthongs, (b) diphthongs plus GOOSE and START. (For diphthongs, only onsets are shown; from Cheshire et al. 2011: 163).

Key:

- ◇ = Anglo females (N=5)
- = Anglo males (N=3)
- ◇ = non-Anglo females (N=10)
- = non-Anglo males (N=8)

Figure 5 shows the partial vowel system a young male speaker from the outer-city, relatively monolingual and monoethnic borough of Havering.



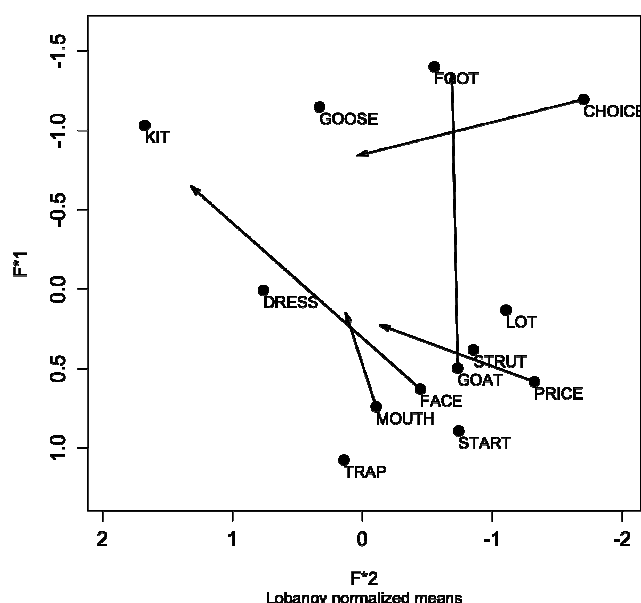


Figure 5. Male aged 17, Anglo, Havering (adapted from Kerswill et al. 2008: 479).

This speaker's diphthongs are very similar to those of the elderly Londoner in Figure 2; however, the vowels of TRAP and STRUT are considerably retracted, and in this respect they match both the Anglos and the non-Anglos of Hackney. He is quite representative of young people with his background. Havering, then, is relatively conservative in its diphthongs, but follows what we have called the Southeast anti-clockwise short-vowel shift (Torgersen and Kerswill 2004).

We now have a picture of the range of contemporary London working-class vowels, with big differences between age groups and between inner and outer city, and smaller differences between Anglos and non-Anglos, at least in the inner city. Do these systematic differences form part of young Londoners' knowledge about variation in their city? Part of the social construction of language varieties is their perception by community members. "Perception" in this sense is mediated by the way in which a community attaches certain social values either to particular linguistic features, or indeed to whole language varieties. The key notions here are *salience* and *indexicality*. Kerswill and Williams (2002) argue that a feature's becoming salient is essentially a change in its social evaluation – provided a particular level of psycholinguistically defined noticeability is reached. Social evaluation arises from the indexicality which a feature or variety has acquired (Johnstone 2010). With this in mind, a series of short speech samples was compiled from interviews in both London and Birmingham.<sup>5</sup> These included young inner- and outer-city Londoners of a range of ethnicities, as well as Afro-Caribbean and Anglo Birmingham speakers. These extracts varied systematically in terms of their vowel qualities. The recordings were presented to young inner-city Londoners, who were asked to judge the voices in terms of their owners' ethnicity and which city or region they came from. Most strikingly, the voices judged to belong to

<sup>5</sup> This experiment is described more fully in Torgersen (forthcoming).

Black or Asian people (out of choices which also included White and “other”) were more likely to be located in London rather than Essex, Birmingham or Manchester (the other choices given). This was true even of the Birmingham voices. Furthermore, voices which were those of Hackney Anglos were more likely to be judged to belong to Black people if the speaker had a multiethnic personal social network.

London’s inner city is, then, more strongly associated with non-Anglo speakers than with Anglos, and this is true even when a voice is heard as “Black” but contains phonetic cues which are from another city altogether. Conversely, voices heard as “White” are likely to be placed in the suburbs – in Essex. It can be argued that this outcome is simply the result of listeners’ real-world knowledge: the inner city clearly has proportionally more ethnic minority inhabitants than elsewhere. However, there are clear linguistic correlates to these associations. Listeners seem able to pick up on phonetic features, including – we must assume – particular vowel qualities, and make a positive, and often correct, identification of the speaker’s ethnicity at least when operating with the Anglo/non-Anglo dichotomy.

Do listeners first identify ethnicity and then make the association with place, or is it the other way round? It seems that ethnicity comes first: this is suggested by the fact that Black Birmingham speakers are mainly correctly identified, and placed in London. This apparently stronger ethnic association is not borne out by the phonetic facts: there are fewer differences between Anglo and non-Anglo speakers in Hackney than there are between either of these groups and Anglo speakers in Havering. Apart from having followed the Southeastern short vowel shift, young Havering speakers’ vowel systems are very conservative in that they continue to have the broad, shifted diphthongs of elderly Londoners.

In the following section, we will examine whether lexical variation also patterns along ethnic and place lines. As with the vowels, we ask whether ethnicity or place has priority in production. Finally, using discourse analytic techniques, we will see whether speakers construct their conceptions of locally-relevant language varieties in a way which mirrors the results of the listening test, with the priority apparently given to ethnicity.

## 7. Lexical variation: dialect, discourse and style

Inner-city phonological innovation is matched by changes in morphosyntax and quotative expressions (Cheshire et al. 2011). Less has been said, however, about the lexis of young Londoners’ speech: are there also differences in vocabulary, including general lexis, slang and pragmatic markers? Torgersen et al. (2011) have indeed found differences in the use of pragmatic markers between inner and outer city, and between ethnicities. The differences in frequency are small for established pragmatic markers like the tag *innit*, but the functionally related “you get me” has a much higher frequency among non-Anglos in both Hackney and Havering, and an overall higher frequency in Hackney than Havering. Major differences exist, then, in pragmatic markers. We will go on to look at lexical variation in other domains: slang and less stylistically marked vocabulary choice. Before we turn to this question, I will consider what kind of information can be obtained through the study of lexical variation.

Performing valid studies of lexical variation between sociolinguistically defined groups has, until recently, been considered very difficult because of the problem of representativeness. Innovative elicitation techniques are currently being adopted, for example the Sense Relation Network (Llamas 2007), which has been successfully used to discover regional patterns of lexis across the United Kingdom (BBC Voices Project). Methods where words are directly elicited can tell us about whether a particular group of speakers recognises or uses an item, but not about its actual use in context or about its overall frequency of use. Looking at lexical variation using corpora is a well-known technique in discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (see the examples given in Baker 2006), the advantage being that high frequencies of particular words, together with an investigation of the words they co-occur with (collocation), helps in the analysis of *discourse prosody*, which refers to ways in which the co-occurrence of particular words may reveal certain patterns of evaluation or, more broadly, discourses (see Baker 2006: 87).

What would it mean, though, to compare lexis between two or more sociodemographically differentiated corpora of spontaneous speech? Macaulay (1991) attempts this in his study of working-class and middle-class speakers in Ayr. He does not find any difference in the type-token ratios (lexical diversity) between the classes, but does find substantial differences in syllable number (middle class speakers use more polysyllabic words) (Macaulay 1991:114; 116). This appears to correlate with the use of more abstract words by some middle-class speakers. Much more richly differentiated, however, are Macaulay's results when he focuses on *discourse styles*, which he investigates by using frequency counts for particular lexical items (Macaulay 2005: 156–187). His findings for adolescent styles, this time in Glasgow, are obviously relevant to us: he finds that adolescent speakers use taboo words, particularly *fuck* and *shite*, but that these are scarcely used by middle-class adolescents. There is a good deal of teasing and verbal challenging, with girls talking about people (particularly other girls) and the working-class boys using address terms or pragmatic markers like *mate* and *man*. There are frequent references to violence, working-class boys being in the lead in this. Adult female vs. male styles are also dealt with, but more important for us are Macaulay's findings for class. Middle-class speakers use evaluative adjectives, as well as the intensifiers *quite* and *very* and the hedge *sort of*, more often than working-class speakers. Middle-class use of evaluative adverbs and adjectives reflects, according to Macaulay, a *habitus* in which they are confident in expressing their opinions and talking about their feelings, even when these are negative. (Macaulay 2005: 184; 186).

We have now moved a long way from the idea of a “dialect”, defined in structural terms, or even as a social practice. However, in view of our interest in language production and its relationship with the perception and naming of social groups and language varieties, a discourse analytic approach to vocabulary use would seem to have benefits. The approach taken in this chapter is two-pronged. The first is a quantitative study of word frequency and “keyness”, using the three adolescent corpora and, for comparison, the spoken portions of the British National Corpus Sampler Corpus (Section 8). The second is a concordance analysis of some of the words which turn out to be “key” in the quantitative studies (the notion of

“keyness” is explained below), in order to find points in the interviews where there is talk and evaluation of language, ethnicity, place and social groups (Section 9).

## 8. Lexical variation among inner and outer-London teenagers

The three corpora we will be examining are shown in Table 1, along with the BNC Sampler Corpus, which will be used as a reference.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1. Corpora

Name of corpus	Size (words)	Age of participants	No. of participants (excluding interviewer )	Genre	No. of files (interviews and recordings)	Location	Date of recording
<i>Hackney</i>	600,137	16–19	49	Sociolinguistic interview (in pairs)	49	Inner London (Hackney)	2005–6
<i>Havering</i>	530,536	16–19	51		45	Outer London (Havering )	2005–6
<i>MLE (Multicultural London English)</i>	257,178	16–19	25		24	Inner London (mainly Hackney)	2007–8
<i>BNC Sampler Corpus</i> (spoken texts)	988,819	Teenage to elderly	c. 660	Range of spoken text types	148	Great Britain	Late 1980s/early 1990s

When examining the lexis in a corpus, it is important to determine what is distinctive about the words it contains when compared to other corpora. One way of achieving this is to compare the corpus with a reference corpus, which “acts as a good benchmark of what is “normal” in language” (Baker 2006: 43). The software I have used is WordSmith Tools 5.0, which allows the user to carry out a series of analyses, including word frequency, collocations and concordances. Another of these is *keyness*, which is explained by Baker thus:

---

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Paul Baker for suggesting the use of this reference corpus.

Using WordSmith, it is possible to compare the frequencies in one wordlist against another in order to determine which words occur statistically more often in wordlist A when compared with wordlist B and vice versa. Then all of the words that occur more often than expected in one file when compared to another are compiled together into another list, called a keyword list. And it is this keyword list which is likely to be more useful in suggesting lexical items that could warrant further examination. A keyword list therefore gives a measure of *saliency*, whereas a simple word list only provides *frequency*. (Baker 2006: 125)

The important term here is *saliency*, which suggests that a word is unusually frequent rather than simply “frequent”. This means that a keyword may be infrequent in absolute terms, but because its relative frequency is high when compared to a reference corpus it is nonetheless, in some sense, salient. For the most part, lexical words turn up as key, rather than function words.

The first analysis was to find keywords in the three London teenager corpora combined when compared to the reference corpus, the BNC. WordSmith found over 1,500 keywords, but automatically limits the list to 500. Very early in the list come a number of personal names, plus three items characteristic of informal conversation: *like*, *yeah* and *just*, as well as the non-standard forms *innit* and *ain’t*. Putting aside these, we next focus on those content words which have the potential to be one or more of the following: an address term, a (component of a) pragmatic marker, slang, taboo, dialectal, an intensifier, an evaluative term, or a word used to label people, places or language varieties. Often, terms are brought up by the interviewer, so in cases where the *only* use of a word is metalinguistic I have not included it. The first 500 include the following (listed alphabetically): *aks* (metathesised form of *ask*), *arse*, *bare*, *black*, *blad* (transcribed form of *blood* when used as a pragmatic marker), *brother*, *bruv* (clipped form of *brother*, used as an address term or pragmatic marker), *chav*, *Cockney*, *cool*, *crack*, *cunt*, *ends* (district), *friend*, *fuck*, *fucked*, *fucking*, *gay*, *geezer*, *ghetto*, *girl*, *guy*, *hood* (of a jacket), *language*, *mad*, *mate*, *nang*, *olders*, *posh*, *rude*, *safe*, *shit*, *sister*, *slang*, *stoned*, *weed*, *white*, *youse* (plural of *you*). Some words in this list are unsurprising: taboo words figure prominently in the speech of these working-class teenagers (compare Macaulay’s similar finding), as do the kinship terms *brother* and *sister*, very much expected given that these are sociolinguistic interviews. *Youse* probably has its origins in Irish English, is common in Northern British cities, and is now often used in London. But there are items which belong to informal language. These may be general (*cool*, *guy*, *stoned*, *weed*, *bruv*, *olders*), specific to London (*geezer* – a traditional Cockney term, and *ends* – probably a recent coinage referring to “area where you live”, used by inner-city young people), or else associated with a US or Caribbean-influenced youth culture (*aks*, *ghetto*, *rude*, *safe*). Two keywords are highly suggestive of subject matter: *black* and *white*, which in almost all cases refer to race. Race is a salient topic, as we shall see later.

Taken as a whole, these young Londoners’ language is firmly embedded in a range of overlapping repertoires. This suggests that the speakers are using different styles, even within

the same interviews. Alternatively, or additionally, it is possible that the different styles are characteristic of particular groups of speakers. To investigate this, we can do a keyword analysis of one corpus against another. There are 243 keywords in an analysis of Hackney versus Havering, and vice versa. Tables 2 and 3 split the analysis into two, showing keywords in the two boroughs separately. Words have been selected from the total of 243 keywords in the same way as in the London–BNC comparison.

Table 2. Keywords in Hackney. Frequency per million words (raw frequencies are given in brackets)

rank	word	frequency in Hackney	frequency in Havering
58	<i>Hackney</i>	656 (394)	163 (87)
60	<i>guy</i>	413 (248)	62 (33)
62	<i>Bengali</i>	157 (94)	0 (0)
68	<i>man</i>	1286 (772)	761 (404)
70	<i>blad</i>	88 (53)	0 (0)
76	<i>guys</i>	168 (101)	30 (16)
79	<i>okay</i>	100 (60)	6 (3)
80	<i>bruv</i>	150 (90)	24 (13)
84	<i>brothers</i>	416 (250)	192 (102)
86	<i>god</i>	481 (289)	240 (127)
87	<i>Bangladesh</i>	60 (36)	0 (0)
91	<i>blood</i>	167 (100)	43 (23)
92	<i>olders</i>	67 (40)	2 (1)

Table 3. Keywords in Havering Frequency per million words (raw frequencies are given in brackets)

rank	word	frequency in Havering	frequency in Hackney
21	<i>mates</i>	528 (280)	190 (114)
36	<i>mate's</i>	96 (51)	8 (5)
51	<i>chav</i>	111 (59)	23 (14)
64	<i>accents</i>	58 (31)	5 (3)

66	<i>chavs</i>	60 (32)	67 (4)
71	<i>mate</i>	492 (261)	299 (179)

There are striking differences between the two boroughs. Leaving aside *Hackney*, *Bengali* and *Bangladesh*, several words stand out. In roughly one quarter of all cases, the word *man* is preceded by a determiner positioned one or (to allow for an attributive adjective) two places to the left, especially *the*, *a*, *that* or *her*. Most of the remainder, then, are pragmatic markers (or sometimes address terms), as in (1) and (2):

- (1) Rufus: It's cos my brain is dead innit . done too much things **man** huh<sup>7</sup> (Havering)
- (2) Raymond: When you took off your hat blad I saw your scalp right there **man** (Hackney)

The word *blood* and its spelling variant *blad* (used by the transcriber when it functions as a pragmatic marker) vary greatly in frequency between the two corpora. *Blad* does not occur at all in Havering, and all the uses of *blood* in Havering are either metalinguistic or referring to the bodily fluid. Out of the 100 occurrences of *blood* in Hackney, however, 42 turn out to be pragmatic markers.<sup>8</sup> The examples below show these usages:

*blood/blad* as pragmatic marker:

- (3) Dean: Apparently my nan had taken me toilet that's how pissed I was **blood** I couldn't even find my way to the toilet (Hackney)
- (4) Chris: I gotta get something to eat in my stomach **blad** I got . I ain't ate nothing all day (Hackney)

*blad* used metalinguistically:

- (5) Int.: What about the sound of the you know . black and white people speaking?

Grant: They talk they talk quite funny they're like "**blad** oh **blad** come here yeah yeah" (Hackney)

---

<sup>7</sup> Transcription conventions are given at the end of the text.

<sup>8</sup> This reflects an inconsistency in the transcription, though it does not affect the result or the argument.

*blood* meaning “bodily fluid”:

- (6) Leon: When he put on his shirt you could see the **blood** coming out and everything (Hackney)

*Bruv* is likewise almost exclusive to Hackney, and has a similar function to *blad* and *man*. Given that most users are Afro-Caribbean, the form of this word is unexpected: it seems that the Caribbean cognate “brada” has been replaced by an existing Cockney form:

- (7) Chris: This is what she wants us to sit and do **bruv** . sit and chat (Hackney)

- (8) Alex: I can’t believe yeah my auntie’s boyfriend opened a window **bruv** I thought I was gonna get sucked out it was like a hoover **bruv** (Hackney)

Finally for Hackney, we turn to *olders*, which is used by these speakers to mean ‘senior member of gang or hip-hop crew’ (though these are not exclusive meanings in youth language more generally):

- (9) Alex: then he come down to our boys and joined up with our boys and now I told my **olders** "I don’t like this boy". none of my youngers liked him or nothing it was just the **olders** said "yeah we wanna recruit him into the crew"

Keywords in Havering are far fewer in number: *mate* and *chav* are the only two referring to people, as address term or pragmatic marker (*mate*) or as a designation for a white working-class person with a stereotyped lifestyle and way of dressing (*chav*). (10) and (11) show the functions of *mate*, meaning “friend” and as a pragmatic marker, respectively:

- (10) Dale: then I said I was gonna meet my **mate** at seven (Havering)

- (11) Derek: yeah no it’s fucked **mate** it’s totally fucked cos it’s had two front end smacks (Havering)

With the word *chav*, we move for the first time to an expression of identity which the speakers either embrace or else reject as belonging to other people. Although the interviewer occasionally brings this term up for discussion, it normally comes up in the course of conversation. A dictionary definition of the word is:

*British , informal derogatory*



a young lower-class person typified by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of (real or imitation) designer clothes.

Origin:

1990s: probably from Romany *chavo* “boy, youth” or *chavvy* “baby, child”: sometimes said to have originated in Chatham, Kent, and to be a shortening of that name. (*Oxford Online Dictionary*)

Examples from Havering include the following:

- (12) Int.: mm is that what everyone's wearing? Burberry?  
Mandy: That's a **chav's** clothing  
Lewis: mm . I have got Burberry but  
Mandy: I'll admit . our lot are just **chavs** ain't we? Cos we all wear the track ...  
Int.: What do you mean by **chavs**?  
  
Mandy: A **chav** is like . wears tracksuit bottoms always got the Burberry on the jewellery on
- (13) Mandy: they get it off Dagenham market . that's a proper **chav** place is Dagenham.
- (14) Martin: I mean you do get some come in the pub that are alright they get looks cos of the way they dress [Int.: mm] cos people think oh it's a **chav** but yeah they're alright some of them

Clearly Mandy and Lewis self-identify as chavs. Martin does not, while admitting that he finds some of them “all right”.

So far, we have found large differences in vocabulary use in the inner and outer city boroughs. Although I have not investigated it systematically, most use of the keywords is by male speakers. A second important social variable is ethnicity. As a first approach to this, we do a keyword analysis of the two inner-city corpora, *MLE* and *Hackney*. Keywords for *MLE*, selected in the same way as before, include: *bare*, *bredren*, *bruv*, *fuck*, *sex*, *skeen* (“OK, understood”), *yardie* and *youths*. Taking one word as an example, *bredren*, we find it used in the sense “close friend of either sex”, with a singular meaning (15):

- (15) Angela: They will kidnap you proper keep you for ages my my **bredren** got kidnapped  
  
Int.: What happened to her? (*MLE*)

It turns out that all 23 tokens of *bredren* in *MLE* are produced by six non-Anglos. These are of a wide range of origins, not just limited to Afro-Caribbeans: in addition to this ethnicity, they are of Portuguese, West African, Mauritian/Jamaican, Turkish-Cypriot and Anglo/Afro-Caribbean descent. This leads to the question of whether the list of keywords in *MLE* in relation to Hackney is related to differences in the distribution of Anglo and non-Anglo ethnicities between the two corpora. Of the 25 speakers in *MLE*, 20 are non-Anglo (80%), while in Hackney the figure is 28 of 49 (57%). Moving on to Havering, we find that the number of non-Anglos drops to 14 out of 51 speakers (27%). However, a closer inspection of the usage of individual words (not all key) by people of different ethnicities reveals a sharp ethnic divide. Significantly, this divide does not appear to be related to the proportions of Anglos vs. non-Anglos in the three corpora, and by extension in the boroughs:

- *Ends* in Havering, in the meaning “district”: This word occurs 55 times, 50 being produced by 6 of the non-Anglos.
- *Mandem*, *boysdem*, *girlsem* (“men/boys”, “boys”, “girls”)<sup>9</sup>: Of 15 tokens in *Hackney* and *MLE*, 14 are uttered by three different non-Anglos – two Afro-Caribbean, the third Anglo/Afro-Caribbean. The one Anglo speaker, Zack, who produced a token was in conversation with Alex, who contributed 11 tokens. Zack is otherwise a high user of Multicultural London English features, and has a mainly non-Anglo friendship network. There are no examples in Havering.
- *Blad/blud/blood* as pragmatic marker: of 58 tokens in Hackney, 55 are produced by non-Anglos. Of these, 26 are produced by two Afro-Caribbeans.
- *Mate*: this word occurs 592 times in *Havering*, and 312 times in Hackney. In *MLE*, it occurs 119 times. In *MLE*, almost all tokens are uttered by five of the small number of Anglos.

Clearly, there are at least four almost ethnicity-exclusive words in our dataset, three non-Anglo (mainly Afro-Caribbean) and one Anglo. This sharp divide is not reflected in either the phonetic data (vowels) or the morphosyntactic features and quotatives (see Cheshire et al. 2011). Where does this result leave the notion of a “multiethnolect” in London, relatively non-ethnic in nature but with stronger place-based and perhaps class associations instead? This ethnicity-exclusive use of slang does not reflect the patterning of vowel qualities: in Hackney, there was significant, but slight variation in the vowels between the two major ethnic categories, with Anglos aligning themselves more with local non-Anglos than with the outer-city Anglos.

We are now in a position to examine what the young speakers actually say about their own linguistic and social identities.

---

<sup>9</sup> *-dem* is a Creole plural morpheme, used productively in London with the items *man*, *boy* and *girl*. Double plural marking is often found, giving *boysdem* (as here).

## 9. The discursive construction of social and linguistic identities among London working-class young people

### 9.1 Minority youth speech “reallocated” to a local dialect – but from whose perspective?

A recurring theme in recent studies of multiethnic youth language in north European cities is that there is a shift from its perception as indexing “immigrant” or “minority” status to something more local, associated with a city, or one or more districts in a city. We are beginning to discern how this “reallocation” applies in London. Before we consider this, we will look at three other European cities. The process of reallocation does not proceed in identical ways. In Oslo, there seems to be a relatively high awareness of a distinctive youth language; linguists describe it as containing vocabulary from immigrant languages, a distinctive rhythm and certain grammatical changes (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008). Aarsæther (2010: 118–9) shows how speakers from the multiethnic “East End” of Oslo associate their language with the place, while youngsters from the affluent West End perceive divisions in terms of ethnicity, not place.

Research in Stockholm presents a somewhat different picture (Bijvoet and Fraurud 2010; 2011). In listening tests, young Stockholmers associated multiethnolectal traits with Rinkeby, a multiethnic working-class district whose name has become part of public discourse in the compound *rinkebysvenska*, or “Rinkeby Swedish” referring to the multiethnolect. Mirroring Aarsæther’s study, listeners from multiethnic areas did not make an association between language and ethnicity, while speakers of mainstream Swedish did so: instead the multiethnolectal speakers associated the variety with place, while for all listeners the multiethnolect evokes a tough, working-class identity

Finally, we consider a case of an originally “ethnic” way of speaking being transformed, over three or more generations, into a multiethnic youth language apparently strongly associated with a particular city. This is the variety of Dutch which is labelled *Citétaal* as spoken in the city of Genk in the Belgian province of Limburg. Ceuleers and Marzo (forthcoming) argue that a specific variety of Dutch, originally spoken by immigrant Italian coalminers and their families, has now been “re-linked” to a youth identity associated with the city itself. Although the authors do not provide a linguistic analysis, this is a clear example of an ethnolect being re-indexicalised as something authentically representing a place.

To sum up: indexicalities associated with ethnolectal and multiethnolectal varieties or styles can be reallocated to a city or a part of a city. Reallocation is not identical for all groups: those who use these varieties are less likely to detect ethnicity as a significant parameter than are people who do not have an ethnic minority background. In all three cases, reallocation is towards working-class, not middle-class identities: as a result, the varieties take over the association with incorrectness and toughness which attaches to working-class varieties generally. In London, there are clearly new working-class identities emerging (Rampton 2010), but we have conflicting evidence as to whether a new, *local* identity is

materialising there. We now approach this question through an analysis of discourses present in the interviews themselves.

## 9.2 The construction of language and social groups in Hackney: some discourses

*Who are the Cockneys?* The interviews contained a component in which language and identity were discussed. The vehicle for this discussion was, in most cases, the concept of “Cockney”, which traditionally refers to people born within a limited area in the East End of London. It also refers more generally to the working-class dialect of London, and was the object of disapproval in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. In Hackney, we find a wide range of responses. (16) shows two speakers, Ryan (Anglo) and Will (Afro-Caribbean) demonstrating considerable awareness of the term:

- (16)
- Int.: what about **Cockneys**? do you think [Ryan: uhu] you’re **Cockneys**?
- Will: no .
- Ryan: I hate them .
- Will: in that Essex sides . or not Hackney not really Hackney in **Cockney** x Hackney .
- Int.: okay so [Will: it’s really like] you hate **Cockneys** what . what how would you describe a **Cockney** then? ...
- Ryan: white . [Int.: yeah] . er . xxx see this is **chav** . that’s one word . I hate them ...
- Int.: are there any in this area?
- Ryan: ah there’s loads . innit? .. loads . /xxx/
- Will: there’s black **Cockney** people as well .
- Ryan: ah? .
- Will: there’s black **Cockney** people as well though ..
- Int.: where do the **Cockney** people come from?
- Ryan: Eastenders
- Will: I thought it was Essex
- Ryan: Bethnal Green [Will: xx oh yeah] Bow and places like that
- Will: yeah
- Ryan: come from the East End .
- Int.: mm . always white do you think?
- Ryan: mainly
- Will: yeah
- Ryan: not all the time . [Int.: mhm] depends what upbringing you have
- Will: it’s really like East Ham and those that area East Ham . Stratford
- Ryan: see East Ham is dominated by Asians

Several themes arise in this extract: (i) Do I regard myself as a Cockney? (ii) Where is Cockney spoken? (possible answers: here; more traditional Cockney districts; or Essex) (iii) Are they necessarily white? (iv) Do we like them? (v) Are they chavs? In this extract, we probably detect some mutual convergence on the part of both speakers who accept that Cockneys may be either white or black.

In (17), Will is this time being interviewed with his friend Raymond, who like him is of Afro-Caribbean origin.

(17)

Int.: mm .mm. what about the way people erm speak in London  
. would you say you were **Cockneys**?

Raymond: no

Int.: no . why not?

Raymond: cos we use too much **slang** . there's **slang** for  
everything

Int.: yeh . what would you say . erm I mean what does a  
**Cockney** mean to you?

Will: I don't even know you know

Raymond: to me **Cockney** like is like "later" <with glottal  
replacement> . I say "later" [Will: yeh] that would be  
like [Will: later <alveolar t>] say same . seen as  
**slang** but later <alveolar t> I would say is **Cockney**  
cos you're dragging the word like later <glottal  
replacement>

Further questions arise: (vi) If we speak 'slang', then does that mean we don't speak Cockney? (vii) What are the phonetic characteristics of Cockney? In answer to (vii), Raymond figures that Cockney contains intervocalic glottal stops. This statement causes confusion later on, because 'slang' also contains glottal stops. In fact, *slang* is one of the few words used to refer to inner-London multiethnic youth language; others are *street* and *ghetto* – though all the terms, especially the latter two, are rare in the corpora.

In (18), the same people make specific statements about who speaks slang and who speaks Cockney:

(18)

Int.: mm . what about the programme EastEnders

Raymond: it's a bunch of bull to me [Will: mm] . it's boring

Int.: do . do the people round here speak like that do you  
think?

Raymond: some people . but that's what I say they try and  
pirate it and try and be like EastEnders

Int.: who talks like the people on EastEnders round here?

Raymond: the people that wanna be Cockney

Int.: what's that mainly older people or younger people

Raymond: more older . like in between teens and adulthood  
would do it . teens more than . nowadays wanna talk  
slang . or Standard English . more than Cockney . when  
you're getting older you wanna . you look back and you  
think oh I don't wanna talk slang so they try and be  
Cockney . that's yeah

The interviewer here brings in the iconic TV soap EastEnders, set in East London: the boys' opinion is that EastEnders does represent Cockney. Cockney, in turn, is spoken by older

people (“between teens and adulthood”); interestingly, Raymond is of the opinion that slang is something you put behind you as you grow older. The questions then arise: (viii) Are Cockneys older than us? (ix) Will we stop talking slang when we are adults, and will we shift to Cockney or perhaps Standard English (though it is difficult to impute a particular meaning to the latter term as it is used in the extract)?

In (19), the interviewer brings up the topic of whether you can tell the ethnicity (black, white or Asian) of a speaker just by listening to them.

(19)

Int.: mm . so do you think all young people are speaking the same in this area or can you tell the difference between a white and a black person [Will: you can tell] or an Asian person?

Raymond: when . when . when you see a black person and they’re not talking **slang** you think oh they’re **Cockney** cos they’re talking a lot of spoken English . cos most people talk **slang** so . not everyone talks the same but most people talk **slang** more than anything else

Int.: #1 mm . but would you be able to tell /without looking at a person/ #

Will: #2 /a white person . yeah yeah I could/ . I don’t know about Asians though cos Asian some Asian people speak different #

Raymond: I don’t know boy

Int.: you’re not sure if you could tell no

Raymond: I don’t know

Will: yeah i can

Int.: you think you could . mm . okay . alright .

This is a partial answer to question (iii): Raymond says that when a black person is not talking slang you think they’re Cockney, so it is difficult to tell. Will, however, thinks that he can tell, and thus disagrees with his friend.

Particularly revealing for the positioning of Hackney teenagers’ repertoire within a general London sociolinguistic continuum is (20). Mark is mixed heritage Anglo/Afro-Caribbean, and Tina is Anglo/Indian.

(20)

Int.: not too quickly

Mark: <reads word list>

Tina: alright then right . all of these words

Int.: as naturally as you can

Tina: do you know you actually sounded **Cockney** when you were saying the first words (name=Mark) and then you went into this deeper voice

Mark: is it?

Tina: yeh . alright ready? <starts reading in mock **Cockney** voice>

Mark: no that’s not real her normal way of speaking

Tina: <laughing> alright alright <continues in a mock RP voice>  
 Mark: neither is that . you got to say it normal  
 Tina: <continues in the mock RP voice>  
 Mark: there's no point if you're not doing it right  
 Tina: I am doing it right (name=Mark) alright <reads word list in her own voice>

Both Tina and Mark agree that their performance when reading the word list is not their own voice: they are speakers of neither Cockney nor Received Pronunciation (“posh” would be the usual term for the latter), though they are able to imitate these varieties in such a way that listeners can identify what they are doing. In distancing themselves from both Cockney and “posh”, they are partially answering question (x): Where do I situate myself in the repertoire of speakers in the wider community?

Extract (21), taken from an interview with Alex (Anglo/Afro-Caribbean) and Zack (an Afro-Caribbean oriented Anglo), thematises race explicitly, while also bringing in both dress and linguistic differences.

(21)

Int.: what do you mean it was racist then?  
 Alex: no it was like. you got sweet. which is like the white boys like with collars up like . they don't wear the clothes we wear like. we got big Airforce trainers. they got like low cut Reeboks and all them like [Zack: mm mm] but like they got Reebok  
 Zack: all the sweet mate wearing their Hackett tops /and shit  
 Alex: yeah . Hackett tops and all that  
 Int.: why do you call them sweet?  
 Alex: cos they say sweet they say.  
 Zack: cos they're sweet  
 Alex: like we'll come up and we'll say safe [Int.: right] cos we're safe we come from Hackney but they're from (name of place) [Zack: (name of place)] so they'll go 'sweet sweet bruv cool you alright' you know one of them like **Cockney** like  
 Zack: we're safe like . you get me they. yeah them **Cockney** guys  
 Alex: they're like **Cockney** poshy like  
 Zack: they go to the pub on a Friday <laughs>  
 Alex: but we're all. we're all cool with them.

Alex begins by referring to dress styles, and then Zack refers to the other people (white adolescents) as “sweet”, referring to what he perceives as a characteristic usage. Alex contrasts this word with his equivalent, “safe”. The discourse presents “Cockneys” as being the “other”: they dress and speak in a certain way, they say “you alright”, and they go to the pub. Unlike the discussion in the previous extracts, Cockneys are clearly presented as a group you need to relate to; from the description here, they are probably in fact “chavs”. However, a

little later in the interview, both boys hark back to an old Cockney East End, of the Kray twins (notorious gangsters) and words like “geezer” and “mate”. Three final questions then arise: (xi) What do Cockneys wear, and what do other groups wear? (xii) What words do Cockneys use, and what words do other people use? and (xii) What sort of social practices do they engage in, and what about other people?

In this analysis of the Hackney interviews, a number of discourses, or themes, emerge (here expressed from the point of view of the young Hackney speakers):

Othering:

- Cockneys speak differently from us, and so do posh people
- Conflict: there are other groups with whom we have to deal, whose behaviour potentially threatens us
- We are concerned to mark differences between ourselves and Cockneys by alluding to dress, language (words and pronunciations) and social practices
- Cockneys are older than us

Uncertainty and ambiguity:

- Group boundaries: in which respects might we be considered Cockneys, or chavs (or members of some other social group)?
- Cockneys (possibly) live somewhere else, but we don't all agree

In terms of language and its associations, the primary discourse is a relatively inclusive one in that race and ethnicity are rarely mentioned. Elsewhere in the interviews, it becomes clear that local area (“ends”), sometimes defined by postcode, is significant in terms of young people's associations with place, particularly when discussing territorial struggles between youth gangs: they do not usually identify with the whole district, such as “East End” or “Hackney”.

In the next section, we examine the Havering interviews, seeking out similarities and differences in the discourses in relation to those found in Hackney.

### 9.3 The construction of language and social groups in the outer city: Havering

In Hackney, we saw that place was of some relevance to the speakers, in that a number of them believed Cockneys live elsewhere – parts of Hackney are traditionally thought of as lying within the Cockney heartland. In general, however, Hackney speakers did not refer to other parts of London or its suburbs. It will be of interest, therefore, to find out how outer-city speakers position themselves spatially and linguistically in relation to the inner city which, at least as far as youth culture is concerned, is culturally dominant.



Extracts (22) and (23) are from an interview with two boys living in Havering, one Indian, the other Zimbabwean, who are among the very few non-white students in their college. Originally they come from inner London, and the difference between their speech and that of the local students is very salient to them.

(22)

Int.: mm do you find that you use different words to some of the students around here? .  
Rufus: yeah  
Talal: yeah  
Rufus: you have to in a way  
Int.: mm .  
Rufus: cos for someone who is from down these ends I have to like . try and make my English a bit . straight innit . so you /understand/  
Int.: why you think they wouldn't understand what you were saying?  
Rufus: they don't understand most of the things  
Talal: yeah  
Int.: right what sort [Rufus: xx] of things? can you think of anything?  
Talal: I dunno really . it depends innit?  
Rufus: just comes out innit <laughs> like xx  
Talal: like if I say 'safe' to someone . he thinks that 'safe' is like remember that I was telling you about?  
Rufus: "safe" oh yeah I I xx . "safe" [Talal: like you s . say if you say "safe" "safe" is] what "safe" basically means like . "see you" like "see you later" yeah "safe" ... or /"safe" as in "thanks"/  
Talal: but you know the I said to one boy yeah? he said that . he thought "safe" is a safe like you put in a house innit . and he said that "I ain't got a safe in my house"

(23)

Talal: yeah ... "innit" we all say "innit" as well /innit innit yeah innit/  
Rufus: "innit" yeah oh we kind of put like in innit and after everything in  
Talal: and the they x are "really" they they heh they use the words "really" a lot "really" . like we say "innit innit" like kind of thing ...  
Int.: so they would use "really" er where in places where you would say "innit"?  
Rufus: no .. I never say "really" that is gay  
Talal: yeah . like ehm <laughs>  
Int.: no we're <Rufus laughs> talking about the local students maybe would say "really"

The discourse here is clearly "London" versus "Essex" (most of the Havering participants consider themselves to be from this county). However, their belief that the invariant tag *innit*

is specific to the inner city is a perception on their part: it is widespread in the south of England. That said, Pichler and Torgersen (2009) have noted new functions for this tag in London, which have not yet diffused to peripheral areas of Great Britain – so the stereotype has a certain observational validity.

We turn now to another young person who has recently moved in from London. He is Sean (Anglo/Afro-Caribbean descent), who is with an Anglo friend, Freddy, also from London (Freddy doesn't speak in this extract). In extract (24), Sean talks about Cockneys and their language.

(24)

Int.: mm . so you think the way people talk is different round here then?

Sean: yeah

Int.: how do you think people round here talk? .

Sean: they try to be like our mums and dads . try to speak all Cockney and that . but they can't .

Int.: what do you mean they can't? .

Sean: like they say they're Cockney . and {unclear} Cockneys . are brought up like in London . and then they sometimes they take the mickey out of us for being London boys . then they started now they wanna speak like us and that . and when they're taking . telling us like . taking the mickey out of where we're from and that .

Int.: so do you think the people round here talk like your mum and dad? is that what you just said? .

Sean: like my dad not my mum . like "yeah mate" . like all like that .

Int.: and that's how people round here talk?

Sean: yeah .

Int.: so are you Cockney then? .

Sean: nah . I can be if you want me to

Sean explains that Havering young people want to sound like people like his dad, who are from London and are Cockneys. He cites "yeah mate" as a typical Cockney term, used round here. But he himself is a Londoner, though he doesn't speak like the Cockneys. In Havering, he gets teased for speaking differently, but also admired for it. We infer that "slang" is what he speaks, since he states this later. "Cockneys", then, typically belong to the adolescents' parents' generation, and they originally came from London. In London, the Cockney dialect has, according to the young speakers, been replaced by 'slang'

According to Sean, young Londoners' speech has a tangible influence on Havering (25):

(25)

Sean: mm . like the slang as well . round our area . you might say something . and then they'll say "why are you talking .. like that for?" and then three months later they're talking like it . round here .

Int.: mm .

He gives the specific example of *phat* (“cool”, “tempting”), which he claims to have introduced to some Havering friends. Although this is unlikely to be true, since by the time of the recording the word had been in use for a long time, the ideology here is clear: the inner city is innovative, fashionable and cool, while the outer city is behind the times.

What of the “native” Havering/Essex young people? Michelle and Rebecca, both Anglo, have been asked whether people “out here” talk differently from people in London. Michelle asks Rebecca if she considers that people in London still speak Cockney (26):

(26)

Michelle: they do still talk like in Cockney like? .  
Rebecca: some of them yeah  
Michelle: they say “watch and and chain”<sup>10</sup> and .  
Rebecca: not really that many [Michelle: “apple and pears”<sup>11</sup>  
and] cos there’s not like really many English  
people up there in that market .. so  
Michelle: what part of London is it?  
Rebecca: just Holloway .  
Michelle: Holloway  
Rebecca: yeah . it’s not that many  
Michelle: there ain’t {unclear} a lot of white people down  
London no more is it

Ethnicity (“English”, “white people”), is now foregrounded, as are highly traditional elements of Cockney, too (“watch and chain” meaning “brain”, “apples and pears” meaning ‘stairs’ – both examples of rhyming slang). The girls jointly set up a strong contrast between the old and the new. London is changing, because “there ain’t a lot of white people down London no more”.

Later, Michelle talks explicitly about language and ethnicity in the inner city (27):

(27)

Michelle: for the . but . up London you’ve heard them and  
like they got a complete different language ain’t they  
to down here like we do we do drop our ts and our hs  
and that but they use completely different words so  
(name=Sandra) uses some words sometimes and I’m like .  
“what?” . I don’t understand what it means or it takes  
me a minute and I think . “what does that sentence  
mean?” .. cos I’ve cos [Int.: she mixes more with  
London people?] yeah yeah yeah . and er a lot of black  
people go out with black people have got their own  
like little languages that they talk .. so instead of  
saying boyfriends {xxx} they say my hubbie or my man  
or something like that .

---

<sup>10</sup> Cockney rhyming slang for “brain”

<sup>11</sup> “stairs”

She perceives London speech as being a “completely different language”, while “we drop our ts and our hs and that”. The observation that inner city people drop their h’s much less than those in the outer city is entirely correct, as our quantitative studies show (Cheshire et al. 2008). Initially she does not discuss ethnicity in the context of the inner city, but then at the end of the extract goes on to make the point that some words are particularly used by black people.

The next extract (28), however, redresses the balance. Here, one speaker argues that inner-city speech is shared by all ethnicities. Amber and Stephanie are both Anglo.

(28)

Amber: so other thing us acting black because . it’s not . a black . dress code is it? ..like it’s the area they come from . black people round here wear different clothes to Tottenham boys or Hackney boys .. and my cousin . people say he speaks like a black boy but . he just speaks like a Tottenham boy . he’s not . speaking like he’s only . eight . he don’t speak that cos he wants to be black and he hears black people saying it . that’s just the way he’s talks ..

Int.: is that the way everybody talks?

Amber: yeah it’s the way he’s been /brought up talking with the accent/

Int.: white and black boys . mm

Amber: that’s just like having a northern accent or something cos you were brought up like it

Int.: mm

Stephanie: in London you’re meant to have like big . cockney accent and it’s all

Amber: that’s only a real cockney .

Stephanie: yeah but it’s like

Amber: in the west and east .

Stephanie: it’s not anymore it’s .. black language like talking like them cos they’re all / . around there/

Amber: see I don’t {unclear} as black language though ... so I don’t count it as that because not . just how black people talk ... /cos everyone does really down there/

Amber is expressing a very strong ideology that language (and clothing style) in London is a matter of place rather than ethnicity: black people in Havering don’t dress like black people in London. People think her young cousin, who lives in London, speaks like a black boy, but it’s simply a matter of where he is brought up. Stephanie takes a different line by saying that Londoners are supposed to speak Cockney, but they don’t any more – it’s the “black language” now.

What identities do the Havering young people express? Rather little is said, and when they do express a view, they do not do so unequivocally (29):

(29)

Int.: do you think of yourselves as Londoners or or Essex  
[Stephanie: Essex] people?

Stephanie: but [Jennifer: Essex] I know we live in London  
like outer London  
Amber: yeah London  
Stephanie: but I'd rather be  
Int.: you would say London would you?  
Amber: bro . like we're not brought up though . being born  
in London and . family live in London and that .  
Int.: mm  
Amber: and it's  
Stephanie: nah I'd ra I'd . Essex . I'd [Jennifer: yeah]  
rather be Essex girl than London girl  
Jennifer: huh . you sure? .  
Stephanie: nah nah I just saying I I dunno

Havering presents a rather different set of discourses. Discussions of language and dress centre round the contrast between Havering (or “Essex”) and “London” (referring to the inner city, including Hackney). This opposition was largely absent from the Hackney conversations. Young Hackney speakers were at pains to position themselves within the inner city – as not Cockney and as not posh. Probably because young Hackneyites rarely need to travel to the suburbs, Havering and similar districts are not part of their image of the city. For Havering people, the inner city is a place one has experienced and has views about. The inner city has prestige – at least in the eyes of the boys who had moved out from there – and the Havering young people are clearly aware of linguistic differences.

The topic of “Cockney” is not strongly picked up by the Havering speakers. Although the Havering accent has more in common with traditional Cockney than do the Hackney equivalents, the speakers do not particularly identify with Cockney. Instead, they explain that their parents might be Cockney if they had migrated out from the city, as many of them had.

For Havering, race and ethnicity appear more salient than they are in Hackney. Inner-city talk, regardless of a speaker's ethnicity, is routinely considered to “sound black”. They ascribe this to the presence of black people there. And yet, even in Havering some people focus more on place than on ethnicity – witness Amber's statements. Black people tend to be seen by the Havering residents in an undifferentiated fashion: they did not mention the different origins black people have, nor did they mention the high proportions of Londoners from elsewhere in the world. We will return to the Afro-Caribbean influence in the final section of this chapter.

## 10. Comparing constructions and discourses across the inner and outer city

The extracts in Section 9 show the range of opinions and types of social constructions found among the young people in the two boroughs as revealed in the recordings. What they do not do is give a full picture of the extent to which these can be generalised across the whole sample. To partially achieve this, a quantitative analysis is needed. Table 4 summarises the numbers of young people who identified themselves in specific ways, as well as the frequency with which certain beliefs about language and people were expressed.

Table 4. Self-identifications and beliefs about language and groups

	Hackney		Havering	
	Anglo (n=21)	Non- Anglo (n=28)	Anglo (n=37)	Non- Anglo (n=14)
Identifies own speech as “Cockney”	4	-	-	-
Positively identifies own speech as “not Cockney”	4	14	2	-
Cockney distinct from language of my area	4	8	-	-
Identifies as a Londoner	4	2	-	3
Identifies own speech as “Essex”	-	-	8	3
Identifies own speech as ‘slang’	2	5	-	1
Associates local speech with words (e.g. <i>blad</i> , <i>bredren</i> , <i>safe</i> ). (Words are mainly Jamaican in origin.)	3	3	-	-
Cockney associated with words (e.g. <i>geezer</i> , <i>all right</i> , <i>mate</i> , <i>sweet</i> , rhyming slang) (Words include Cockney stereotypes.)	5	4	1	-
Cockney associated with particular practices (pubs, fish and chips, tea, beer, being a <i>chav</i> )	2	1	1	2
Cockneys are white	1	1	-	-
Cockneys may be black	-	1	-	-
Cockneys live somewhere other than my local area	3	3	1	-
Black people talk differently from white people	-	-	5	-
Racial conflict mentioned	-	-	-	1

In terms of ascribing oneself an identity, and linking a language variety to it, we can see that non-Anglos in Hackney vociferously rejected “Cockney” as both an identity and as a label for their way of speaking. Far fewer Anglos take this line, while a small number identify as Cockney. In terms of this descriptor, there is a clear ethnic divide, and this is mirrored in the

production results for slang. Yet, if the perspective is changed, there are a number of commonalities across the Hackney speakers. Several identify as Londoners. We also see that roughly equal numbers of Anglos and non-Anglos label their speech variety as “slang” or else associate local speech with Jamaican-derived slang expressions. At the same time, a number agree that their language is distinct from Cockney, while asserting that Cockneys themselves live somewhere other than the speakers’ own locality.

By contrast, Havering young people do not claim a Cockney identity, even though their language is closer to traditional Cockney than is that of the Hackney residents. A number, both Anglo and non-Anglo, claim an Essex identity; those that claim to be Londoners are those who have migrated out. None of the Havering respondents associate their speech with ‘slang’ – in sharp contrast to Hackney. But several Havering young people claim there is a difference between black and white speech, and one mentions racial tensions; neither of these observations are made by the Hackney subjects.

## 11. Place, ethnicity and identity: Multiple variation patterns, multiple perspectives

In Section 5, I argued for a three-way comparison: production vs. perception, inner-city views of both inner and outer cities, and outer-city views of the same. We can state some conclusions as follows.

In the vowel system, the first production “gap” is between old and young. Secondly, among the young there is a large gap between inner and outer city, while there is a much smaller difference between Anglos and non-Anglo in the inner city. In terms of perception, our method did not allow for a completely valid comparison, but on phonetic grounds (including vowels) listeners were highly attuned to ethnicity, and appeared to use this as a cue to a speaker’s status as outer or inner city. In some cases, the listeners got the ethnicity “wrong” – this was the case for Anglo speakers with multiethnic networks, who were heard as “Black”. In Hackney, quite small differences mark the ethnic distinctions, and they do so unreliably; yet listeners are able to focus on these in their judgments.

In terms of lexical production, there turned out to be big differences in the use of Caribbean-origin slang. Non-Anglos, especially Afro-Caribbeans, used certain items almost exclusively, while there was a smaller number of items which were the preserve of Anglos. This divide seemed to be ethnicity, and not place-related. This stands in sharp contrast to vocalic variation, where the distinction was between inner and outer city.

I did not investigate the perception of lexis, but instead carried out a discourse analysis of statements about language and identity. To summarise: in Hackney, the strongest reaction is along ethnic lines: non-Anglo people emphatically reject a Cockney identity, probably because “Cockney” is a strong, stereotypable identity with white working-class origins. Yet the ethnic groups find more in common when virtually any other question is put to them. Havering, on the other hand, sees itself as distinct from London (they are “Essex”), and people there mention race as a differentiating factor, particularly dividing them from the inner city. In Hackney, the outer city is not frequently mentioned, though some people went to shopping centres there. In Havering people seem conscious of the inner city, as a place to

visit and as a place which is very different, ethnically and linguistically, from their own direct experience.

To what extent do we find the type of “reallocation” described for ethnic or multiethnolectal varieties in Oslo, Stockholm and Genk? In the last 10 years, there has been a considerable media interest in language developments among working-class youth in London. Newspapers have adopted the label *Jafaican*, and this has been discussed, in both a positive and a negative light, in a range of publications, including *the Sun*, *the Daily Mail*, *the Guardian*, *the Sunday Times* and *the Economist*. Public lectures have also been given on the subject of Multicultural London English. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011, the historian David Starkey was asked, on the TV current affairs programme *Newsnight*, to comment on the riots and looting which had occurred in English cities that week. He stated that, linguistically and culturally, “the whites have become black”, going on to talk about a “wholly false” “Jamaican patois” which has been “intruded in England”. Predictably, he was roundly criticised for his views. His linguistic comments also drew some criticism: Jamaican patois is not as prominent in London as it was in the 1980s, and what he was almost certainly referring to was Multicultural London English, or Jafaican. This is the variety of English which is often heard as “black” by people who live outside its East End heartland, in places like Havering – as we have seen from the extracts from the interviews.

Clearly, this variety is a vernacularised form of speech, and it is characteristic of parts of inner-city London as a new dialect (see also Fox 2007). However, public consciousness of it appears to be much lower than for multiethnolects in other European cities. The term “Jafaican” is beginning to come into wider use, but its frequency in the media is marginal when compared to other linguistic labels, including “Cockney” itself. Users themselves generally do not have a readily available name for it: the only relatively widely used term is ‘slang’, employed ambiguously to refer to the variety or to the slang items which form part of it. Recent events in London have drawn attention to its presence, in the form of television interviews with users of the variety, while David Starkey’s comments undoubtedly caused a heightened awareness of it, at least among *Newsnight* viewers. It is very likely that newsworthy events such as the August 2011 riots will help it along the path to enregisterment.

### Key to symbols used in conversational extracts

. short pause

... speaker tails off

xxx unclear speech (x represents a syllable)

/text/ speech between slashes overlaps with next transcription line

### References



Aarsæther, Finn. 2010. The use of multiethnic youth language in Oslo. In Pia Quist and Bente Ailin Svendsen (eds.) *Multilingual urban Scandinavia: new linguistic practices*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, pp. 111–126.

Baker, Paul. 2006. *Using corpora in discourse analysis*. London: Continuum.

BBC Voices Project <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/>, accessed 9/7/11.

Bijvoet, Ellen and Kari Fraurud. 2010. “Rinkeby Swedish” in the mind of the beholder: studying listener perceptions of language variation in multilingual Stockholm. In Pia Quist and Bente Ailin Svendsen (eds.) *Multilingual urban Scandinavia: new linguistic practices*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, pp. 170–188.

Bijvoet, Ellen and Kari Fraurud. 2011. Language variation and varieties in contemporary multilingual Stockholm: an exploratory pilot study of young peoples’ perceptions. In: R. Källström & I. Lindberg (eds.), *Young urban Swedish. Variation and change in multilingual settings*. Göteborg: University of Gothenburg. 1-34.

Ceuleers, Evy and Stefania Marzo (fc). The use of Citétaal among adolescents in Limburg. The appropriation of space as a catalyst force for the enregisterment of a multiethnolect in an urban context. *Multilingual Matters*.

Cheshire, Jenny, Susan Fox, Paul Kerswill and Eivind Torgersen. 2008. Linguistic innovators: the English of adolescents in London. Final report presented to the Economic and Social Research Council.

Cheshire, Jenny and Susan Fox. 2009. *Was/were* variation: A perspective from London. *Language Variation and Change* 21: 1–38.

Cheshire, Jenny, Kerswill, Paul, Fox, Susan & Torgersen, Eivind. 2011. Contact, the feature pool and the speech community: The emergence of Multicultural London English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15/2: 151–196.

Clark, Lynn & Trousdale, Graeme. 2009 The role of frequency in phonological change: evidence from TH-fronting in east-central Scotland. *English Language and Linguistics* 13(1): 33-55.

Fox, Susan. 2007. *The demise of Cockneys? Language change among adolescents in the “traditional” East End of London*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Colchester: University of Essex.

Gabrielatos, Costas, Eivind Torgersen, Sebastian Hoffmann and Susan Fox. 2010. A corpus-based sociolinguistic study of indefinite article forms in London English. *Journal of English Linguistics* 38: 297-334.

Havering Council. 2011. London Borough of Havering Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2011. <http://www.havering.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=25804&p=0>, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2011.

Hurst, Ellen. 2009. Tsotsitaal, global culture and local style: identity and recontextualisation in twenty-first century South African townships. *Social Dynamics* 35: 244–257.

- Inspire. 2011. The Education Business Partnership for Hackney. <http://www.inspire-ebp.org.uk/about-hackney.html>, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2011.
- Irvine, Judith T. 2001. ‘style’ as distinctiveness: the culture and ideology of linguistic differentiation. In Eckert, Penny and John R. Rickford (eds.) *Style and sociolinguistic variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21–43.
- Jaspers, Jürgen. 2008. Problematizing ethnolects: Naming linguistic practices in an Antwerp secondary school. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 12: 85–103.
- Johnston, Barbara. 2010. Locating language in identity. In Carmen Watt and Dominic Watt (eds.) *Language and identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 29–36.
- Johnstone, Barbara and Scott Kiesling. 2008. Indexicality and experience: Exploring the meanings of /aw/-monophthongization in Pittsburgh. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12/1: 5–33.
- Kerswill, Paul & Williams, Ann. 2002. ‘salience’ as an explanatory factor in language change: evidence from dialect levelling in urban England. In M. C. Jones & E. Esch (eds.) *Language change. The interplay of internal, external and extra-linguistic factors*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 81–110.
- Kerswill, Paul, Torgersen, Eivind & Fox, Susan. 2008. Reversing “drift”: Innovation and diffusion in the London diphthong system. *Language Variation and Change* 20: 451–491.
- Kerswill, Paul, Cheshire, Jenny, Fox, Susan and Torgersen, Eivind. 2012. English as a contact language: the role of children and adolescents. In Hundt, Marianne & Schreier, Daniel (eds.) *English as a contact language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kießling, Roland and Maarten Mous. 2004. Urban Youth Languages in Africa. *Anthropological Linguistics* 46,3: 303–341.
- Kotsinas, Ulla-Britt. 1994. *Ungdomsspråk* [Youth language]. Uppsala: Hallgren & Fallgren.
- Labov, William. 2007. Transmission and diffusion. *Language* 83: 344–387.
- Llamas, Carmen. 2007. Field methods. In Carmen Llamas, Louise Mullany and Peter Stockwell (eds.) *The Routledge companion to sociolinguistics*. London: Routledge, pp. 12–17.
- Macaulay, Ronald K. S. 1991. *Locating dialect in discourse: the language of honest men and bonnie lasses in Ayr*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Macaulay, Ronald K. S. 2002. Extremely interesting, very interesting, or only quite interesting? Adverbs and social class. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6(3): 398–417.
- Mufwene, Salikoko S. 2001. *The Ecology of Language Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quist, Pia. 2008. Sociolinguistic approaches to multiethnolect: language variety and stylistic practice, *International Journal of Bilingualism* 12: 43–61.
- Pichler, Heike and Torgersen, Eivind. It’s (not) diffusing, *innit*?: The origins of *innit* in British English. Paper presented at NWAV 38, University of Ottawa, October 2009.

- Rampton, Ben. 2010. Crossing into class: language, ethnicities and class sensibility in England. In Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt (eds.) *Language and identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 134–143.
- Sebba, Mark. 1993. *London Jamaican*. London: Longman.
- Siegel, Jeff. 1997. Mixing, leveling and pidgin/creole development. In A.K. Spears and D. Winford (eds.) *The Structure and Status of Pidgins and Creoles*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, pp. 111–149.
- Spence, Lorna. 2008. *A profile of Londoners by country of birth: Estimates from the 2006 Annual Population Survey*. London: Greater London Authority.
- Svendsen, Bente Ailin and Røyneland, Unn. 2008. Multiethnolectal facts and functions in Oslo, Norway. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 12: 63–83.
- Torgersen, E. Forthcoming. A perceptual study of ethnicity and geographical location in London and Birmingham. In P. Stoeckle, S. Hansen, T. Streck and C. Schwartz (eds.) *Raumkonzepte*. Freiburg: FRIAS.
- Torgersen, Eivind & Kerswill, Paul 2004. Internal and external motivation in phonetic change: dialect levelling outcomes for an English vowel shift. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8: 23–53.
- Torgersen, Eivind, Gabrielatos, Costas, Hoffmann, Sebastian and Fox, Sue. (2011) A corpus-based study of pragmatic markers in London English. *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory* 7: 93–118.
- Wells, John C. 1982. *Accents of English*, Vols. I–III. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wiese, Heike. 2009. Grammatical innovation in multiethnic urban Europe: New linguistic practices among adolescents. *Lingua* 119: 782–806.
- Winford, Donald. 2003. *An Introduction to Contact Linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.