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**Book Section:**

Kerswill, Paul orcid.org/0000-0002-6540-9312 (2014) The objectification of 'Jafaican' : the discorsal embedding of Multicultural London English in the British media. In: Androutsopoulos, Jannis, (ed.) *The Media and Sociolinguistic Change*. De Gruyter , Berlin , 428–455.

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Paul Kerswill, ~~York~~

# The objectification of ‘Jafaican’. The discursive embedding of Multicultural London English in the British media<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction: Mediatization of new urban youth varieties

Since the 1980s, both lay commentators and academic experts have shown an intense interest in apparently new linguistic practices among young people living in multiethnic neighbourhoods in the major cities of northern Europe. Both kinds of observer note that the version of the national language used by these young people is a departure from what is ‘normal’ in that language. Kotsinas’s work (1988a, b) is an early instantiation of academic research on the phenomenon. Having noted a number of characteristic syntactic and lexical features in the Swedish of adolescents living in a particular high-density multiethnic district of Stockholm, Kotsinas considers whether these features are a consequence of creolization or second-language learning, or whether they are part of a new dialect. The young speakers Kotsinas interviewed were highly aware that they spoke Swedish in a distinctive way, and, moreover, that this way of speaking was not to be used with adults. She states that ‘[t]hey [the young people] even have names for the variety, *Rinkebysvenska* ‘Rinkeby-Swedish’ (Kotsinas 1988b: 135–136), named after the district she studied. At the same time as this research, newspapers began to carry reports about ‘*rinkebysvenska*’ (Bijvoet and Fraurud 2006: 6), dealing with some of its grammatical and lexical features. Today, the term is sufficiently established that the media generally do not offer an explanation or even a gloss: the term, and its content, are assumed to be shared knowledge among the readership, and it is almost always printed without quotation marks. It is a variety that can be set up in contrast to Standard Swedish (e.g. *Dagens Nyheter* 24 August 2006) or as a variety to be heavily stigmatized: according to a blog by a notorious anti-immigration politician, anyone heard speaking *rinkebysvenska* should be shot by the police (*Dagens Nyheter* 21 November 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Jannis Androutsopoulos and Heike Wiese for their comments on a draft of this chapter.

This chapter explores in greater detail than the brief sketch above the way in which a similar phenomenon in London has been appropriated by the British print media over a period that began as recently as 2006. This is the multi-ethnic youth speech style which has come to be labelled ‘Jafaican’ by the media. The academic equivalent is ‘Multicultural London English’ (MLE), a term coined by linguists around 2006 (Cheshire et al. 2011). This begs the question of whether a media construction and a linguist’s label are ever likely to have the same referent. As we will see shortly, there is a tension between the two. Media labels and the discourse around them evoke social stereotypes, and emphasize a handful of linguistic features – often inaccurately. Linguists are reluctant to label varieties, and the labelling they engage in is hedged and seeks to avoid essentialization. A corpus-driven analysis of the emergence of both *Jafaican* and *Multicultural London English* as *media* terms allows us to trace the development and transformation of a number of discourses surrounding them. (discourses, put simply, are ‘ways of talking about something’, following Foucault (Irwin 2011: 104).) Some of these discourses are already apparent in the sketch of *rinkebysvenska*: the reification of the variety (as opposed to its being referred to as, say, teenage slang), its non-standardness, its representation as a threat to national cohesion, and its (purported) foreignness. The sketch hints, too, at the interplay of academic and journalistic discourses: the contrast between the two will become clear in what follows.

The chapter is, then, a case study of the mediatization of a language variety in real time. I follow Jaffe’s definition here: mediatization ‘includes all the representational choices involved in the production and editing of text, image, and talk in the creation of media products’ (Jaffe 2009: 572, cited in Androutsopoulos 2011: 106). Androutsopoulos (2011: 106) expands on this as follows:

Die Mediatisierung eines Medienbeitrags beruht auf Transformationen vorhandener semiotischer Ressourcen, die von Journalisten neu kombiniert und rekontextualisiert werden

(The mediatization of a media story relies on transformations of available semiotic resources which are recontextualized and combined in new ways by journalists [my translation])

The media, in other words, have the capacity to shape their reading or listening public’s perception of phenomena which are ‘out there’, but not as yet conceptualized or pigeon-holed. By the same token, the media can actually create new concepts which may or may not have been perceived by the public at all. If it is a media concept, a language variety can have a discursive life of its own with only a loose relationship with a linguist’s descriptive account.

The analysis will be largely restricted to print media. Although explicit mentions of ‘Jafaican’ are largely restricted to news and cultural reports, they often

refer to other media, in particular the use of ‘Jafaican’-like varieties in television dramas or soaps. Print references sometimes coincide with a radio or television interview which either immediately preceded or immediately follows it – the two media seem parasitic on one another. A YouTube search for ‘Jafaican’ yields a small number of videos of Jamaican or British origin, in which the notion of ‘fake Jamaican’ is treated, while the use of the term in the meaning ‘multicultural youth language’ is restricted to uploads of a British children’s TV series, *Teen London*, in which characters are described as speaking ‘indecipherable Jafaican patois’. However, I will discuss one piece of television coverage, one web article published by a political party and one (foreign) online magazine. The reason for including these is that they throw into relief some important, topical discourses surrounding ‘Jafaican’.

On the other hand, I will not discuss readers’ online comments or other online fora. These throw up a distinct set of problems and possibilities, as pointed out by O’Halloran (2010: 210):

Many of these engagements [through online discussions] consist of commentary on a particular text and can thus be regarded as supplements to these texts ... The larger purpose of this article is to flag the utility value of this electronic supplementarity for critical reading by highlighting how it can reveal particular meanings that the text being responded to can reasonably be said to marginalize and/or repress.

This area of research promises to enrich understandings of media language, by dealing with its reception by readers and with the discourses they often explicitly reveal – discourses which may be only peripherally related to the original text or are in opposition to it. The focus here, then, will be on what can be found in the articles themselves through a close textual analysis.

In terms of language change, the media’s construction of a language variety belongs to the history of that variety, as Androutsopoulos points out. In a paper on media representation of ethnolects in Germany, Androutsopoulos (2010: 183) sees his contribution as being to both ‘language ideology research’ and ‘current ethnolect research’ by extending ‘the agenda to language-ideological issues and examin[ing] how media discourse articulates and shapes the social meaning of ethnolects in Germany’. Research on ethnolectal speech (and on ‘multiethnolects’ – see below) shows that naming, both within and outside the media, forms an important part of this process: giving a variety a label serves at once to reify it as a ‘real’ entity and to categorize that entity as one that can be compared with others at the same level, a process often leading to derogation (as we saw in the opening paragraph; also see Androutsopoulos 2007; Jaspers 2008; Quist 2008; Wiese 2012; Kerswill *fc*). Interestingly for our later discussion, neither of the terms for the London ‘multiethnolect’ is a vernacular label and both are largely

unknown to its speakers. We can speculate whether, in the future, either of them will be appropriated by speakers (as ‘Rinkebysvenska’ seems to have been – though others are increasingly used) and, if so, whether this will have an effect on grassroots speakers’ perceptions of themselves and their social position, and indeed on language change.

We go on now to a consideration of academic treatments of ethnolects and (by extension) multiethnolects, and their consequences for public discourse. In his 2010 paper, Androutsopoulos suggests that media presentations and representations of the language of young people in Germany generate discourses of othering: this ‘language’ is foreign, deficient and incorrect, while its speakers by association are un-German, uneducated and a threat. Some of this effect is achieved through explicit naming by journalists using pejorative labels (*‘Kanak Sprak’*). The representation of the language through exemplification has a similar effect, by referring explicitly to phonetic, syntactic and lexical features. Androutsopoulos argues that the effect becomes entrenched through repetition – for example the use of the orthographic sequence <isch> to represent the non-standard pronunciation [ʃ] of the German palatal /ç/ – regardless of the fact that this non-standard pronunciation is found in a number of ‘native’ dialects of German.

The background to the naming of new, informal language varieties turns out to be varied. *‘Kanak Sprak’* is, as we have seen, derogatory, though its origins lie in Feridun Zaimoğlu’s 1995 book *Kanak Sprak – 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*, in which the author reproduces heavily edited recreations of interviews with young people of Turkish origin (Pfaff 2005). Zaimoğlu’s intention was to present these people in a positive light, while he characterizes both their German and their Turkish as imperfect and hybrid. Berlin’s *Kiezdeutsch*, on the other hand, represents the adoption by an academic – Heike Wiese – of a grassroots concept: on being asked how they would term their way of speaking, some young Berliners told her that they spoke ‘as we do in the *Kiez*’, or ‘neighbourhood’, using a Berlin dialect term. This has won acceptance in the academic world (Wiese 2012: 15). Stockholm’s *rinkebysvenska* seems similarly to be a grassroots coinage adopted by an academic, though the process is not fully explained. In each case, it would be interesting to trace the subsequent fate of these terms across speaker groups – both putative speakers and non-speakers – as well as media and discourses: does the fact that a term is, or is not, a user-derived label influence later use of the term and attitudes to its use? We return briefly to this question at the end of the chapter.

The evolution of terms such as *Kanak Sprak* and *Kiezdeutsch* is one of *enregisterment*, the process by which a language variety becomes an index of a social group and, later, of a set of social characteristics (we return to this concept in more detail in Section 6.4, below).

We look now at the interaction between academics' and speakers' ideologies with regard to labelling.

Cornips, Jaspers and de Rooij (ms) look specifically at academics' naming practices in relation to that of the youth themselves. Their example, from the Netherlands, is *straattaal*, or 'street language', a term advocated by a Dutch linguist in 1999 to replace derogatory labels such as *smurfentaal* 'Smurf language'. *Straattaal* quickly became a cover term for highly derogated forms of youth language and its speakers: '*straattaal* has become available as a name for disrespectful, deviant or aggressive verbal behaviour, or seems to function as a proxy for dangerous young males and small petty-crime street gangs'. However, the authors report problems with trying to find an acceptable 'technical' label. Jaspers had suggested to some young Antwerp residents of Moroccan ancestry whose language he had been studying that he should use the term 'Moroccan Dutch'; this was not accepted because it gave the impression that the language was imperfect and 'less than normal Dutch'.

As a link back to the media practices studied by Androutsopoulos, and as a springboard for the present study, we can note that Cornips et al. (ms: 9) implicitly criticize linguists for using questionnaires and translation exercises to investigate the grammar and phonology of youth languages: 'The act of translation naturally maximizes the distance between Dutch and *straattaal*, as it also helps to reduce youthful language use to a stock of foreign or deviant words, with no attention for youths' phonological, morpho-syntactic or pragmatic exploitation of linguistic resources, and with no consideration for actual linguistic practices'. Similar accusations could also be directed against the setting up of lists contrasting (multi-) ethnolects and standard language for the purposes of education. Wiese (2012: 270–275) contains a 'Kiezdeutsch test' with solutions; however, couched as it is within a book with an explicit sociolinguistic and critical framework, the use of such a technique seems less problematic. However, such lists are very much characteristic of media treatments of these language 'styles' in Germany and Sweden (and elsewhere), as well as Great Britain, as we shall see. In this case, generally lacking any critical focus and often contained within a discourse of othering, the use of lists can serve to create the distance Cornips et al. are wary of.

## 2 The London multiethnolect: what it is and what people think about it

The term *multiethnolect* was first used by Clyne (2000) to refer to mixed varieties of the host language shared by immigrants of different language backgrounds. In north-west Europe, it has been widely applied to the speech of young people

(teenagers and young adults) living in multicultural and multilingual districts of large cities: here, we find what are apparently distinctive varieties of Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch and German spoken by people of various ethnicities and differing minimally between them. Researchers tend to agree that the essentialising terms ‘variety’ and ‘dialect’ are problematic in relation to multiethnolects, because these are very clearly youth styles used in various forms of identity projection, and because it is not clear whether they qualify in every case as Labovian ‘vernaculars’, or baseline varieties, in the way a ‘dialect’ is most often conceptualized.<sup>2</sup>

The London multiethnolect, Multicultural London English (MLE), has been studied in two ESRC projects run by Jenny Cheshire and Paul Kerswill, with research associates Sue Fox, Eivind Torgersen and Arfaan Khan.<sup>3, 4</sup> The projects’ approach was largely variationist, in that they recorded a sample stratified by age, gender, ethnicity and borough. Linguistic features on the phonetic, morpho-syntactic and discourse levels were quantified. The results showed a great deal of variation, with the multiethnic inner-city boroughs being quite distinct from the outer city. Particularly in the inner city, features on all levels tended to be shared across ethnicities, though minority ethnic speakers used more characteristically multiethnolectal variants than did their Anglo counterparts. The ethnic divides were, however, relatively fluid, with a speaker’s social network being a significant predictor of the use of these features. We consider that MLE is best seen as the variable output of a ‘feature pool’ (Mufwene (2001: 4–6) derived from the range of language varieties in the inner city, including second-language English, African, Caribbean and Asian Englishes, local dialect (‘Cockney’), London Jamaican Creole (Sebba 1993), Standard English – and also languages other than English.

In the corpus analysis to follow, I will consider which features, if any, the media have picked up upon. Here, as a reference, are the main linguistic findings of the MLE projects. Only those changes which are not also characteristic of regional southeastern changes are given here:

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<sup>2</sup> Quist (2008), Jaspers (2008), Svendsen and Røyneland (2008) and Wiese (2009) are representative of this research strand, as well of the stance described.

<sup>3</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>4</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).

1. Changes in the long vowel system, notably narrow diphthongs or monophthongs for vowels of the lexical sets of FACE and GOAT (Wells 1982), replacing the broad diphthongs of Cockney. Schematically, the changes are: [æi] → [ei] and [ʌʊ] → [oʊ], respectively. Importantly, the raising and backing of GOAT in MLE competes with the fronting of this vowel in levelled varieties in the South East to [əʏ].
2. Backing of /k/ before low back vowels to [q]
3. Full reinstatement of /h/ in lexical words and stressed pronouns, to an extent greater than non-MLE southeastern varieties (the region, including London, is traditionally h-dropping)
4. More syllable-timed (staccato) rhythm (Torgersen and Szakay 2012)
5. Use of a distinct levelling pattern for the past tense of BE: MLE speakers tend to level the forms to *was* and *wasn't* throughout the paradigm, instead of the widespread levelling to *was* and *weren't*.
6. Use of a new quotative: *this is* + SPEAKER, as in 'This is me: let's go now'
7. Widespread use of slang, including *blood* (friend), *cuss* (defame), *ends* (place of residence), *mandem* (Creole plural), *rude*, *safe*, *tief* (steal), *man* (as address term), *man* (as indefinite pronoun – see Cheshire in prep.). Many of these are of Jamaican origin.

To anticipate: the only features which are referred to are slang terms, most of which are believed by the writers to be of Jamaican origin. Where whole utterances are represented, they are in Standard English with a heavy use of slang. Pronunciation seems never to be commented upon.

In another paper (Kerswill [fc](#)), I used a corpus linguistic methodology to get at young speakers' own opinions and conceptualizations around identity and language. Using concordances and keyword analyses of our transcribed London youth language corpora totalling just under 1.4 million words, I examined the discourse surrounding the term 'Cockney', which was a topic introduced by the interviewer. ('Cockney' is the traditional designation for working-class Londoners from the 'East End', and their dialect.) The results showed that the speakers tended not to associate themselves with the term Cockney, either as an identity marker or, particularly, a language variety. This was stronger for the non-Anglo (minority ethnic) speakers. In the multiethnic inner city, there was little talk of race as a dividing factor, while this was more frequently a topic in the (mainly Anglo, or 'White British') outer city. In terms of their language, most people had no specific label. The majority referred to it as 'slang', and it was clear that what was being referred to was a general youth style with a large proportion of slang terms of Jamaican origin. During the interviews, the term 'Jafaican' was not discussed or even mentioned, because there was no evidence that the term was



being used in any of the relevant ways – in fact, in the early phases of the research (2004–5), we were completely unaware of it, even in an earlier but still current sense of ‘person pretending to be Jamaican by affecting Jamaican speech, clothing and appearance’.

Londoners in general, however, seem conscious of a style of speaking which is often labelled ‘talking black’, and this term was used on occasion in our interviews. They report that it is often difficult to tell the ethnicity of a speaker from language alone, and that there is a tendency to hear more people as ‘black’ than actually are.

This type of multiethnolectal speech is increasingly condemned by a wide range of authority figures, particularly in education, among members of Parliament, and some sections of the print and televisual media. The point often made is that young people, especially black males, are seen as unable to shift from an MLE-type variety, laden with slang, to a more standard one in situations where this is required (Robson 2011, quoting the Guyanan writer Gus John; we will return to this article later in the chapter). In 2008, a secondary school in Manchester banned the use of slang anywhere on the school premises. This was reported across the media, largely winning approval from commentators and (as witnessed by online readers’ comments) sections of the public, too (‘School bans youth slang and sees exam results soar’<sup>5</sup>). It is clear that the language that is objected to is contemporary British youth slang, which is not necessarily part of a multiethnolect. Some of the words are Jamaican in origin, to judge from the list given at the end of the article which includes *blood* and *cuss*.

A seminal event in the history of multiethnolectal speech came in August 2011, when major, spontaneous riots took place in London and other cities. In London, the perpetrators could be heard speaking in this multiethnolect, and many could be seen to be black. Media coverage was intense, and many commentators voiced their opinions. One such commentator was David Starkey, a medieval historian and successful television history presenter. He took part in a live discussion on BBC TV’s *Newsnight*, during which he made an explicit link between this type of language, violence and black culture, and stated that white people had bought into it, becoming ‘black’ in the process. We will look in more detail at what Starkey said later in the chapter.

In what follows, I shall be using an online corpus of British newspapers to explore media awareness of this style of speech and the discourses which the

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5 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2435923/School-bans-youth-slang-and-sees-exam-results-soar.html>

newspapers develop. First, we will examine the development of the multiethnolect.

### 3 London's multiethnolect: A short history

The first published report of a precursor to today's multiethnolect is Hewitt's *White Talk Black Talk* (1986). In this study, he is concerned with the speech repertoires of young black and white Londoners. Writing about young Afro-Caribbeans' repertoire, he says that on the one hand there is:

[...] strongly pronounced Caribbean Creole ... and, on the other, an everyday, vernacular language form which incorporates words from Creole ... Turkish or Punjabi into a basically English stock. ... [This is] 'Black Cockney' ... [the] primary medium of communication in the adolescent peer group in multi-ethnic areas. (Hewitt 1991/2003: 193)

Turning to the speech of both white and minority young people, he writes:

[This is] the language of white as well as minority youth and it is the language which is switched from and back into when its users choose to move into Creole or Punjabi ... (Hewitt 1991/2003: 193)

In the 1980s, there was, it appears, a distinct, multicultural variety which young people could switch into, and out of, from their own vernaculars. Its distinguishing feature was the use of slang, mostly from Jamaican Creole. Hewitt (1986: 134) mentions only one pronunciation feature, a back and raised variant of the vowel /ʌ/ as in *come*. This is characteristic of Jamaican Creole, but *not* of today's MLE. Sebba (1993) claims that there are no obvious pronunciation differences between young black and white Londoners (his data is from 1983–1984), stating (p. 64): 'Black Londoners sound for the most part *very* London'. Yet both authors cite evidence that the ethnicity of most young Londoners *could* be identified from recordings alone. From contemporary reports, there is, then, evidence both of a nascent multiethnolect used as an in-group variety, as well as some features occasionally marking a young London speaker as black. The vernacular for most young people was a variety phonologically close to descriptions of traditional Cockney. This is corroborated by a new analysis of Sebba's 1983–1984 tapes of teenage London African Caribbean speakers: Kerswill and Sebba (2011) found that these speakers' vowel systems corresponded closely to those of white Londoners from the same period, with the phonetic changes noted above as characteristic of MLE only sporadically or incipiently present. A number of the same speakers had also been recorded using a Creole variety, with vowel formants matching those

found to be characteristic of Jamaican Creole (Thomas 2001: 163) – suggesting that code-switching was a common practice.

We argue that, today, the vernacular for most working-class, inner-city young speakers has moved away from a traditional Cockney-derived variety to one that contains, in varying degrees, the features listed in Section 2, above. This is the variety that is the focus of this chapter.

## 4 Entries referring to the multiethnolect in the *Urban Dictionary*

In deciding on a search term for London's multiethnolect, I focused on the one that (as already noted) appears to be most widespread in the media, *Jafaican* and its spelling variant *Jafaikan*. To get an initial idea of the range of dictionary meanings, and possibly discourses, which might exist, I consulted the wiki, *Urban Dictionary*. There are seven entries, as follows (slightly abridged and reformatted, but keeping the original spelling and spaces, and showing the date of posting):

### 1. Jafaikan (7 May 2008)

Jafaikan is the language of British people who talk in a fake jamaican accent and use words like 'bizzle' 'blad' 'shizzle' 'innit' etc etc etc

They arent always white either, theres a lot of asian and black Jafaikan speakers out there. "chill out blad, look at them beanies cutchin over there innit tho"

"You what mate? oh right youre a fuckin Jafaikan yeah?"

### 1. Jafaican (20 April 2006)

Jafaican is a dialect of English becoming more common in London's West End, within the tradition boundaries of the Cockney dialect: within the sound of the Bow bells and is slowly replacing Cockney. Jafaican is a mixture of English, Jamaican, West Indian and Indian language elements.

Some Jafaican, for you reading pleasure:

Safe, man. You lookin buff in dem low batties. Dey's sick, man. Me? I'm just jammin wid me bruds. Dis my yard, innit? Is nang, you get me? No? What ends you from then?

Jafaican is the British ebomics.

### 2. Jafaican (13 June 2003)

A person that acts like they Jamaican ie;try talk like they jamaican, try act like they jamaican but they're not!

### 3. Jafaican (20 October 2009)

a person who pretends to be jamaican.

a middle class suburban white kid using patoi.

“me nah know botty ridah fa rotty bidah!”  
 .’wow.that kids a jafaican.”

4. Jafaican (11 March 2009)

When some one is trying act getto or gangsta but with a jamaican bent.  
 “Tom has had his hair in dreads for months now”. “Yea, he is Jafaican”.

5. Jafaican (13 July 2003)

somebody, usually black whos mind leads them to believe they are jamaican but in reality they aint no jamaican  
 anne-marie is such a jafaican

6. Jafaican (23 November 2007)

Singer or actor who claims to be from Jamaica, trying to sound cool with fake accent.  
 Those two Sean guys, one a Jamaican, the other’s a jafaican.  
 uh uh uh oh ooh.

7. Jafaican (13 September 2009)

Anyone with an obsession with Jamaican music, hairstyles (dreadlocks), and clothing. They tend to listen to Bob Marley and other types reggae. And occasionally they will throw on a fake accent. If you see a Jafaican don’t ask them for weed. Because for some strange reason they usually don’t smoke.

1. Anyone with bad dreads is jafaican.
2. Someone blasting reggae out of their car is jafaican.
3. Anyone with more than two Bob Marley pictures in their house is jafaican.
4. Someone that wishes they can be like Bob Marley might be jafaican.
5. Non-smoking Jamaicans are jafaican.

There are just two meanings here. The first two entries, 1. Jafaican and 1. Jafaican, refer explicitly to London (or at least British) speech which is Jamaican-influenced in terms of vocabulary. While 1. Jafaican refers to it as ‘fake’ Jamaican, 1. Jafaican sees it as a ‘dialect of English’, thereby according it a ‘serious’ status. The remainder all focus on ‘fake Jamaican’ style, appearance and musical tastes. 7. Jafaican is more concerned with Jamaican stereotypes than with wannabes. It is not obvious where the contributors come from (whether the UK, the US or the Caribbean), but it is clear that the targets of the opprobrium are mainly white, though some are black. In drawing attention to fakeness, all but the second of the definitions (1. Jafaican) are concerned with a violation of authenticity. Fakeness appears to be the only relevant discourse which can be identified here. Dates of posting are, however of interest: the two earliest, from 2003, refer to fake Jamaican style, while the sense ‘London/British youth language’ dates only from April 2006 – suggesting this sense had become more widely known at that time.

Since the date of the original search (July 2012), the term ‘Multicultural London English’ made its first appearance:

1. Multicultural London English (MLE) (6 September 2012)

Multicultural London English is the cultural change in the English language due to influences from various cultures such as Jamaican. Originated in London (due to be such a multicultural area) and quickly spreading to other areas of the UK through use and also through grime music. It is the first time English Language in the UK has been changed nationally by the teen age group. Usually areas had their own slang words but MLE is quickly becoming the standard slang through out the UK.

*Multicultural London English (MLE) example slang words: Manz, Hype, Ting, Fam, Blud (Blad), Cus, Bredrin, Nang, Dench, My Size, Famalam and various other words*

This entry reads like an expanded version of 1. Jafaican, though with a stronger focus on slang, and suggests that the writer was aware of the print media discussions which had appeared by then.

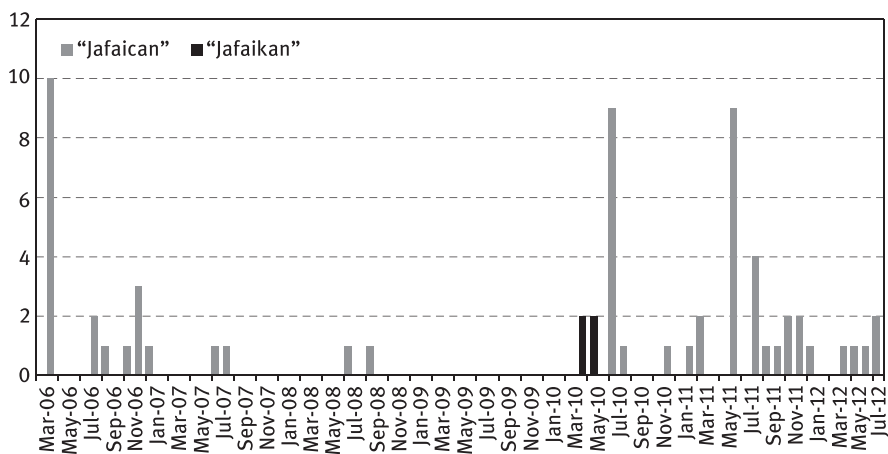
## 5 The multiethnolect in the newspapers: A quantitative analysis of mentions

Nexis UK is a commercial online database of English-language newspapers and other publications, going back to the early 1980s. Selecting the option ‘All English Language News’ I searched for occurrences of *Jafaican* and *Jafaikan*, supplementing these with a search for our own coinage, *Multicultural London English*.<sup>6</sup> A total of 58 different articles contained at least one occurrence of *Jafaican*, and a further 4 contained the variant, *Jafaikan*. A total of 29 contained *Multicultural London English*, of which 20 also contained *Jafaican* (and none *Jafaikan*). The next stage was to register the dates on which these articles were published. There are two reasons for doing so: first, to investigate the first mentions, and secondly to see if there are clusters which might correspond to a particular event. Figure 1 shows occurrences of *Jafaican* and *Jafaikan* in the database, including US articles.

Figure 1 excludes the single occurrence of this term before 2006: this is in fact the only non-British occurrence. It is from 2002, and refers to people dressing in a ‘fake Jamaican’ manner at a music festival in New York. The remainder refer to youth language in London, and date from 10 April 2006 onwards. This fact

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<sup>6</sup> The search was performed in early July 2012. In the period mid-July 2012 to mid-January 2013, a further 12 articles carried the term *Jafaican/Jafaikan*, and two more mentioned *Multicultural London English*.



**Figure 1:** Occurrences of *Jafaican* and *Jafaikan* in English-language newspapers, showing monthly total of articles (Nexis UK database) and excluding a single occurrence from 2002 (see text)

suggests that the author of the first *Urban Dictionary* entry, from 20 April, was directly influenced by the media coverage in the preceding week.

What can we say about the discourses surrounding ‘Jafaican’? We can begin with a quantitative methodology, using corpus linguistic methods to look for collocates of *Jafaican*. Using WordSmith Tools 5.0, we can find out which words tend to occur with *Jafaican* a specified number of places to the left (preceding the target word) and to the right (following it). (See Baker 2006 for details of this technique.) Table 1 shows the result of this analysis for 4 places to the left and right. All function words have been removed, as have words with a frequency of less than 3.

The table shows that there are 94 occurrences of *Jafaican*. To take an example, the word *English* occurs 10 times in the vicinity of *Jafaican*, up to 4 places on either side. What can we learn from this analysis? The first is that it is strongly associated with *English*, *Jamaican*, *new*, *multicultural* and *London*. A concordance analysis reveals that most of the tokens of *English*, *multicultural* and *London* in fact occur in the phrase ‘Multicultural London English’, which suggests that writers are aware of the equivalence of this and *Jafaican*. Likewise, *Jamaican* tends to go with *patois*. The further we go down the list of collocates, the more possible discourses reveal themselves. *Jafaican* is seen as a dialect or an accent, not a style or youth language. However, *dubbed*, four of whose seven occurrences are to the immediate left of *Jafaican*, suggests that the term ‘Jafaican’ is not quite academically acceptable – the frequently mentioned *Multicultural London English* fills

Word rank	Word	Total	Total Left	Total Right	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4
1	JAJAICAN	94	0	0	0	0	0	0	94	0	0	0	0
10	ENGLISH	10	6	4	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	4	0
12	JAMAICAN	9	3	6	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	4
13	NEW	9	8	1	3	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
14	MULTI-CULTURAL	9	5	4	3	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	1
15	LONDON	8	7	1	3	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
17	DIALECT	8	7	1	1	1	4	1	0	1	0	0	0
18	DUBBED	7	7	0	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
19	PATOIS	7	2	5	0	1	0	1	0	4	0	1	0
21	ACCENT	6	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0
22	SPEAK	6	5	1	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0
24	KNOWN	6	5	1	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	0
26	CALLED	6	6	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0
27	SLANG	6	5	1	0	4	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
31	FAKE	5	2	3	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	0
34	TIKKINY	4	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1
36	COCKNEY	4	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
37	CARIBBEAN	4	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
40	STREET	4	3	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
41	MIXTURE	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0
44	SPEECH	3	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
45	NAME	3	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
46	TERMS	3	3	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
52	CREPS	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
53	PHENO-MENON	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
56	LANGUAGE	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
57	ALI	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

**Table 1:** Collocations of *Jafaican* in Nexis UK newspaper corpus analysis (up to four places to the left and right)

this role. The relatively high frequency of *fake* reflects the inauthenticity we noted above in the *Urban Dictionary* entries. The internal morphology of ‘Jafaican’, suggesting both ‘Jamaican’ and ‘fake’, may well contribute to this. The fact that the Continental European terms do not have this structure may well be reflected in the lack of an association with inauthenticity, though **they** are regarded as both imperfect and hybrid.

So far, there is little suggestion of strongly negative or positive attitudes to Jafaican: the furthest we get is the hints of inauthenticity. An examination of the newspaper texts themselves is much more revealing, and we turn to these now.

## 6 The multiethnolect in the newspapers: evolving discourses and metaphors

So that we can discern the development of discourses through time, I will present the texts roughly in chronological order. It turns out, as we will see, that this development is very rapid, sometimes over a few days, while there are less active periods where the existing discourses are recycled, for the most part without reference to or (perhaps) even knowledge of previous discussions of the topic. What follows is subdivided into a number of themes which in many cases subsume particular discourses and metaphors.

### 6.1 Jafaican as agent: The cuckoo in the nest, pushing out the natives

By the time of the earliest print media attestations, ‘Jafaican’ is already a labelled language variety, set alongside others, particularly ‘Cockney’. Probably the most frequently occurring theme is the notion that Jafaican is ‘pushing’ Cockney out of its East End heartland. Here is the very first article, from *The Evening Standard* on 10 April 2006. I cite it in full (minus the continuation of the list of slang terms) since it contains features which were to recur in later articles:

THE Cockney accent is being pushed out of its heartland by a new kind of speech.

Playgrounds and housing estates of London are alive with the sound of an accent that sounds Jamaican with flavours from West Africa and India.

The Standard can reveal that this new English variety is replacing Cockney in inner London, as more white children adopt the speech patterns and vocabulary of their black neighbours and classmates.

Teachers have dubbed the phenomenon Jafaican and TV’s Ali G would understand it perfectly.

Linguistics experts from London University’s Queen Mary College and Lancaster University are conducting field studies to assess the new variety of English and how widely it is spoken. Queen Mary researcher Sue Fox said: “The adolescents who use this accent are those of second- or third-generation immigrant background, followed by whites of London origin.” Based on their preliminary findings, the academics are calling it “Multicultural London English”.

An oldies’ guide to today’s yoof speak

creps: trainers

yard: home

yoot: child/children

blud/bredren/bruv: mate



ends: area/estate/neighbourhood (as in “what ends you from?”)

low batties: trousers that hang low on the waist

As if aware that this is the first mention of ‘Jafaican’ in the print media, the journalist proclaims: ‘The Standard can reveal that this new English variety is replacing Cockney ...’, and goes on to introduce both ‘Jafaican’ and its scholarly alternative ‘Multicultural London English’. The notion that ‘[t]eachers have dubbed the phenomenon Jafaican’ is impossible to verify; the source of this notion is not clear.

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, the naming of a style or mode of speech reifies it, and allows it to be set up against other speech varieties. Descriptive linguists may well argue for this view, too, but journalists are able to deploy metaphors which presuppose the existence of entities – language varieties – which, through anthropomorphism, can be seen as having both agency and an identity. The first metaphor in the extract above is of invasion. The second is the notion that a language variety, like a people or an ethnicity, have a ‘home-land’. Here, the invader is ousting Cockney from the place in which it matured and thrived and where its authenticity is guaranteed. But these metaphors are not developed: instead, Jafaican is seen as an object to be investigated. Apart from the opening, there is an air of objectivity to this article, with our research cited as a source for the information.

The article finishes with a glossary, as if this were a foreign, even exotic language. ‘Foreignness’ is, so far, not a major theme, however. It would very much become so in the next five years. As we shall see, glossaries containing slang are a stock-in-trade of print media treatments. Slang items also serve as defining criteria for young Londoners’ constructions of their own language, as we saw earlier, with no mention of pronunciation, grammar or discourse features.

## 6.2 Jafaican as a problem (1): Inappropriate in formal contexts

On the same day, a similar, but longer article appeared in the same paper. This article finishes with the following:

But Gary Philips, head of Lilian Baylis in Kennington, said it is not allowed in his classrooms.

“You can speak how you want to friends in the playground – but in the classroom standard English is important because that is what they are being marked for in exams.”

Here, we find the beginnings of concern with Jafaican as a ‘problem’ to be solved, a possible threat to educational standards. This theme, as we will see, recurs and intensifies.

### 6.3 Jafaican as natural linguistic development

The following day, 11 April, *The Independent*, *The Mail* and *The Sun* followed up with similar pieces, to a large extent parasitic on *The Evening Standard's*. *The Independent* also had a word list, but found a different external commentator:

David Roberts of the Queen's English Society said the move was part of the general development of language and should not be regarded as inferior to other codes so long as it was readily understandable to others. "The only purpose of language is to convey thoughts from inside one person's head to another as accurately and comprehensively as possible. Language must be able to adapt. If it hadn't we would all be addressing each other as thou and thee. You cannot put constraints on the development of language."

The Queen's English Society promotes 'correctness' in writing and speech. Its reaction here comes as something of a surprise: the discourse concerns language as a living and adaptable thing, and the idea that different language varieties are in some sense equal. And exactly this attitude is expressed by another Queen's English Society member in response to a further article published two days later by the Associated Press:

And while Jafaican and other dialects may be "rather ugly on the ear," they deserve recognition as legitimate forms of proper speech, said Michael Plumbe, chairman of the Queen's English Society, a London-based institute pledged to preserve proper British English grammar, usage and pronunciation.

"It's a natural progression to change language in any society," Plumbe said. "As long as its clearly enunciated, it's fine."

This rather accommodating line of reasoning turns out to be the exception, however.

### 6.4 The enregisterment of Jafaican by the media: Are you 'in the know'?

A different form of recognition for Jafaican comes in yet another article from *The Evening Standard* on 12 April 2006, on the rise of the 'Gruppy' ('retired groupie' – *Urban Dictionary*). The journalist invites the reader to consider the following varieties of language (which might be used by a gruppy):

Which of these sentences/dialects are you most likely to utilize:

- a) "Raaass man, me gwan me yard see me babymother/babyfather" (Jafaican for "I'm off home to my better half").
- b) "Issa paw show orroun', yarsk muy" (Estuary for "What a disappointment, on every count, in my opinion").

- c) “Orright geeeezaaaah/treacle, owzit gan, ‘en?” (Mockney for “How do you do?”).
- d) “Air hellair, hi yu? Beck f’m Yurp? (Home Counties for “Good morning. Have you just returned from your continental holiday?”).

Here, ‘Jafaican’ is for the first time embedded within a national culture where language varieties can legitimately be made fun of. Jafaican is set alongside other stereotyped language varieties: Estuary English (a levelled south-eastern variety), mock, or affected Cockney, and a version of Received Pronunciation. Jafaican has gained recognition and can now be stereotyped, not (only) presented as new and exotic. Readers are supposed to recognize the four language varieties through a combination of common-sense knowledge and a close awareness of recent media stories; here, I would suggest, the recognition of the ‘Jafaican’ extract – both the name and the linguistic form – is heavily reliant on media interdiscursivity, since of the four varieties it is the most recent to enter public discourse – only two days before in the case of the print media!

Whereas the articles we have already mentioned deal with ‘Jafaican’ as a threatening agent or a problem, we are dealing here with a stage in the full enregisterment of Jafaican. *Enregisterment* refers to the social perception of a language variety as a register, or style, where both of these terms refer to the recognition of a relationship between the linguistic forms and social characteristics or social situations. Johnstone (2010: 34), summarising Agha (2003), states: ‘A register emerges when a number of indexical relationships begin to be seen as related; a particular linguistic form (or non-linguistic sign) is ‘enregistered’ when it becomes included in a register’. She cites the example of ‘Pittsburghese’, a working-class accent which only became noticed by local people in the 1960s when ‘the right historical, geographical and ideological conditions were in place’ (2010: 34). ‘Pittsburghese’ became associated with a small set of linguistic forms and also local identities, and hence ‘enregistered’. In the Jafaican case, enregisterment appears to be rapid (perhaps over as little as a few days), but so far much less firmly entrenched and, unlike Pittsburghese, existing only in media discourse and readers’ online comments (almost always negative): arguably the appearance of Jafaican terms in advertising, printed *en masse* on t-shirts, etc., has the potential to give offence and to incite hatred, given the low, even marginal, social status of many of its speakers. This is despite the fact that young people explicitly claim the variety (‘slang’) as their own (Kerswill **fc**), and despite the strong presence of a multiethnolect in locally-targeted advertising in other cities, such as the Belgian city of Genk (Marzo and Ceuleers 2011).

The enregisterment of ‘Jafaican’ is essential to the following extract from a much later *Daily Mail* article on sources of supposed waste of public money (30 July 2012):

Thank you for calling the Equality Hotline. Please hold. All our operators are busy squabbling among themselves.

Hello.

Our services are available in 207 different languages. Please choose from the following menu. For Urdu, press 1. For Jafaican, press 2. For Scribble, press 3...

The (real) Equality Commission hotline, which reportedly had only received 73 calls, is lampooned for its multiculturalism, in line with the newspaper's anti-political correctness agenda. However, as so often, we are none the wiser as to the precise referent of 'Jafaican'.

### 6.5 Jafaican as 'foreign', but not (yet) a threat

The version of Jafaican depicted in the 2006 *Evening Standard* extract above is clearly not Standard or dialectal English, nor even MLE as outlined earlier: the subject form 'me', /gwan/ for 'going' and 'yard' for 'home' are Jamaican, while *babymother* and *babyfather* are originally Jamaican words for 'unmarried mother/father' now found as British slang terms. Earlier, I referred to the idea of Jafaican as 'foreign'; here, we see it represented by an utterance that is Jamaican in grammar, lexis and phonology. Importantly, Sebba (1993) showed that the version of Jamaican Creole spoken by young Afro-Caribbean Londoners emerged in London, and was also used by young black people who did not have Jamaican ancestry. Whether the representation above betokens 'foreignness' is therefore open to dispute, yet (as we shall see) the later emphasis on the 'Jamaicanness' of Jafaican/MLE suggests a shift in this direction. 'Foreignness' is taken up a couple of years later by right-wing organizations, as we shall see.

### 6.6 Jafaican as a problem (2): A cultural threat to gender equality

Already on 14 April we see Jafaican portrayed for the first time as representing an undesirable culture. The left-of-centre *Independent* ran a feature entitled 'Conservative to the core: To celebrate today's street slang as fun and trendy is to ignore its deep-rooted misogyny':

There is a new language on the streets of London and other British cities, according to academic research: "Jafaican", supposedly derived from Jamaican and African slang, is now way more prevalent than Cockney. Despite the name, there is in reality no racial demarcation and a good deal more Ali G posturing here than genuine Jamaican roots, and the chief uniting feature of Jafaican speakers is age (very young).

But when you read the newspaper reports, you can smell the benign neutrality wafting off the page. “Listen here, chaps. When youngsters today say ‘jamming’, they mean hanging around! ‘Nang’ might not sound like a word to you and me, but it means good. ‘Sket’ is a loose woman, and ‘bitch’ continues to mean girlfriend – but sket seems to have replaced ‘ho’, which is now woefully out of date and used only by the rap community because it rhymes with so many things. ‘Babymamma’ has come and gone, to be overtaken by the old-fashioned sounding ‘wifey’.”

What all these words in fact have in common is that they define women by sexual function – denigrating them if they show any interest in sex themselves, ranging them according to their physical attributes and dismissing them once their physical peak has passed.

After an objective-sounding introductory paragraph, though with disdain contained in the words ‘supposedly’ and ‘posturing’, the writer goes on to condemn the Jafaican word lists which had been published that week on the grounds of their misogyny. The language variety may be cool, but it is also deeply conservative and oppressive to women. There is an intimation here of what will come in 2011: the direct association of Jafaican with unacceptable behaviour. The fact that there is no explicit link made between Jafaican, its apparently misogynous vocabulary and the culture from which both might be considered to spring does not obscure the fact that this link is being made implicitly: perhaps to make the association with Jamaica or another non-British, developing country could be seen as too racist or at best illiberal for this newspaper.

## 6.7 Jafaican as norm: The British music industry

The London music scene was heavily influenced by Jamaican music in the 1950s to 1970s, due to the influence of such people as Smiley Culture (David Emmanuel). In a famous video, *Cockney Translation* (1984), Smiley Culture can be heard contrasting the Jamaican of the immigrants with the local Cockney of the host population. Nowadays, Jamaican Creole has merged with strongly slang-laden Jafaican to form the mainstream accent in hip-hop, at least in London, in later decades. *The Daily Telegraph* comments on this on 23 December 2006:

It’s significant that the message-board of the new Englishness is MySpace, the social networking website that somehow flattens out the traditional nuances of class differentiation. It’s there, too, in the magpie lexicon from which the lyrics are drawn, with many of them delivered in the fertile hybrid of Cockney, the Queen’s English and pretend Jamaican – what’s it called? Jafaican? – that is the lingua franca of young southern England.

The tone here is objective, approving even. Jafaican joins the mainstream as part of the ‘new Englishness’, which strives for classlessness.

## 6.8 Cockney as a museum piece

The years up to mid-2011 see ‘more of the same’ with opinions and journalistic approaches being recycled with modifications – often in apparent ignorance of previous media reports. In 2010, we find an initiative by the King’s Place arts centre in London to have Londoners record their elderly relatives for posterity, intended to form an archive. A motivation for this was the encroachment of Jafaican, reported as follows in the *Mail* on 2 July 2010:

Paul Kerswill, professor of sociolinguistics at Lancaster University, said: ‘In much of the East End of London, the Cockney dialect that we hear now spoken by older people will have disappeared within another generation.

‘People in their 40s will be the last generation to speak it and it will be gone within 30 years.’ He said East Enders had for decades been moving into Essex and Hertfordshire and their traditional accent was being ‘transplanted’ with them.

‘Cockney in the East End is transforming itself into multi-cultural London English, a new, melting-pot mixture of all those people living here who learnt English as a second language,’ he added.

Now the dwindling ranks of Cockney speakers are being asked to record their voices for posterity. The Kings Place arts centre in central London also plans to post a downloadable recording of Bow Bells on its website so that Cockneys who have moved away can still let their children be born within the sound of its chimes.

For the first time, the potential loss of Cockney (though I was careful to talk about its ‘transformation’) is now seen as a problem, to be addressed by the archival preservation of what is seen here as a disappearing dialect. In fact, this initiative came to virtually nothing: according to the organizer, only one person submitted material – suggesting that the media’s and (some) intellectuals’ concern is not shared by speakers themselves (in this case, working-class Londoners). Below, we will see a different reaction to the reported replacement of Cockney by Jafaican as revealed in the writings of some other public institutions: right-wing political parties and organizations.

## 6.9 Enregisterment – again

Increasing recognition of Jafaican as a cultural phenomenon that people ‘in the know’ should be aware of comes in an end-of-year quiz in *The Evening Standard* on 24 December 2010. Among the questions was:

How did Nang, Greezy and Butters triumph in 2010?

- a) They are the producers who work on the X Factor winner's recordings.
- b) They are the stars of a new CBeebies show.
- c) They are "street" or "Jafaican" expressions which have overtaken Cockney slang terms.
- d) They are ingredients popularised by Delia Smith in her last Waitrose promotion.

– the answer being (c). However, this is of course an act of journalistic amnesia: 'Jafaican' is being hailed as a news item in 2010, with no regard to its appearance in the 2006 quiz in the very same paper.

The predicted demise of Cockney continues to be referred to with some alarm, with some journalists claiming that it is 650 years old and will disappear in just a few years.

### 6.10 Jafaican as a problem (3):

#### Bad language, challenging dress style and bad behaviour

We now come to the first example of Jafaican being associated specifically with modes of dress and problematic behaviour, from a review of television in the *Mirror* on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011, five years after the first journalistic mention of the term. The review is of an episode of *Midsomer Murders*, set in genteel rural England:

One of the star guests is a DJ called Dave Doggy Day – complete with loud hoodie and Jafaican accent. Somebody is about to give him the message that his sort just aren't welcome round these parts.

The producers have rather self-consciously 'othered' this character – but he is not 'foreign', just not from 'these parts'. For the first time, we read a reference to Jafaican as an 'accent', by implication 'of English'. There is no mention this time of slang; as a result, any link with Jamaican Creole is not present, though (most likely) not consciously avoided.

Similar comments can be made about a review of a sitcom intended for children, which appeared in *The Independent on Sunday* on 5 June 2011:

Although it dealt with teenage sex – or the lack of it – drugs, and parental rebellion, it steered clear of any real issues, so there was no "Jafaican" spoken, no stabbings or gun crime, no teenage abortion.

There is an explicit link here between Jafaican and bad behaviour. Jafaican is an 'issue', according to this journalist.

The idea of Jafaican as ‘bad’ was made particularly forcefully by David Starkey in his BBC TV *Newsnight* appearance after the summer 2011 riots. He didn’t use the term, but he did say:

The whites have become black. A particular sort of violent, destructive, nihilistic, gangster culture has become the fashion, and black and white, boy and girl, operate in this language together, this language which is wholly false, which is this Jamaican patois that has been intruded in England, and that is why so many of us have this sense of, literally, a foreign country. (David Starkey, *Newsnight*, 13 August 2011)

This statement sparked powerful reactions in the print media as well as on air. There was controversy on all levels, ranging from issues of multiculturalism, integration, immigration and race to the role of language. Starkey talks about a foreign, black, Jamaican culture and language which young Londoners are buying into. According to Sebba and Dray (2013), Starkey’s statement ‘highlights a public preoccupation with the ownership of language varieties and accents in their ‘pure’ form’. Regardless of their political stance and their opinions about the cause of the riots, few commentators defended Starkey’s claim that this language was foreign. A telling case is that of Katharine Birbalsingh, a well-known blogger for the conservative broadsheet newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*. Like Starkey, she sees what she calls ‘gangsta culture’ as the root of the riot problem. But her linguistic analysis of London’s youth differs sharply:

Lastly, Starkey’s claim that he feels like a foreigner in his own country because Jamaican patois rules the streets is laughable. Has David Starkey ever been to Jamaica? My mother is Jamaican, and I can assure you that she sounds nothing like our out-of-control kids! For one, the accent Starkey is talking about is specific to London ... Two, that accent ... is uniquely ENGLISH. It is a kind of fusion of many cultures, including Cockney East End speech. One can also hear some Jamaican influence, general working-class London influence and so on. Does Starkey really believe that Jamaicans go around saying “innit”? “Innit” has a Cockney glottal stop in it! ... [T]his accent not only is not Jamaican, but neither is it in American gangster culture. What MTV rapper sounds like our kids?

(*Daily Telegraph* blog, 15th August 2011)

Birbalsingh does not make a link between black speech, or ‘that accent’ as she puts it, and the riots, in the way Starkey does. Unusually for journalistic treatments, her focus is on pronunciation; as we saw above, discussing ‘accent’ and not slang allows the writer to emphasize that this is a home-grown variety of English.

We should briefly look at the web pages of one of a number of avowedly anti-immigration political organizations and their treatment of the same discourse of ‘foreignness’ and ‘threat’. The following appeared on the British National Party



site in February 2011 (<http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/cockneys-have-become-first-british-group-be-ethnically-cleansed>):

### **Cockneys Have Become First British Group to be Ethnically Cleansed**

The Cockney culture and language has been ethnically cleansed from London's East End as mass Third World immigration has pushed white people into minority status and destroyed the world-famous accent.

According to an analysis of demographic figures — which are already several years out of date — white British people make up as less than 40 percent of the population in the areas of London traditionally associated with Cockneys.

Furthermore, the world famous Cockney accent and rhyming slang has already been completely replaced amongst the younger age groups in the region as they form the overwhelming majority of that population.

True Cockney, a dialect more than 500 years old, is now spoken only by the elderly in London and will, a study recently showed, be completely extinct within 30 years.

Cockney is being replaced by what is politely called “Multicultural London English” or LME for short. LME is also known as “Jafaican” which is a combination of Jamician, African and Asian.

Traditionally, people born within earshot of the bells of the church of St. Mary-le-Bow in Cheapside, London, were classified as true Cockneys.

...

‘Foreignness’ and nationalism are to the fore here and in the remainder of the article, but the writer nowhere links ‘Jafaican’ with bad behaviour. The writer takes a much stronger view of the idea of ‘heartland’ (as *The Evening Standard* put it in its 10 April 2006 article) by writing at length about the history of the area since the Middle Ages. And the notion of ‘pushing out’ is now transformed into ‘ethnic cleansing’, a euphemism from the atrocities of the Yugoslav war of the mid-90s. The metaphors, however, remain the same as *The Evening Standard*'s.

## **6.11 Jafaican as a problem (3):**

### **Hindering educational achievement and social mobility**

As we noted earlier, there is a widespread belief that the consistent use of Jafaican/MLE in a more extreme form including a high rate of slang could be educationally harmful and socially excluding. The school in Manchester acted on this belief, at least in relation to slang. In an online article I mentioned earlier, the American sociologist Garry Robson writes:

All of this, of course, has reignited a popular British debate about the “dumbing down” of English. But this time round, in the aftermath of riots, the stakes are high. Arguments about the coarsening of language and imprisoning effects of “restricted” language codes are emer-

ging from unlikely sources. For example Lindsay Johns, a self-defined hip-hop intellectual, argues that the youths he mentors in south London are trapped – linguistically, educationally, socially – by “ghetto grammar” and cannot “code switch” their way out. He describes a key issue from a linguistic point of view: the inability of some young people to navigate between different languages, dialects or registers of speech. Lindsay’s fear is that young people who cannot do so may be psychologically trapped with a restrictive language that is more for performance than reflection.

(*YaleGlobal*, 23rd December 2011)

Robson’s position is very close to that of Bernstein (1971), echoing the latter’s vocabulary in talking about ‘restricted language’. Unlike Birbalsingh, he focuses on linguistic areas other than pronunciation: he sees grammar, language, dialect and register as the problem, or rather, the apparent inability to be flexible in these areas and to ‘code switch’. Language, and not social conditions more generally, is seen as a root cause of the problem.

## 6.12 ‘Jamaican’ (or Jamaican slang) as fashion

In March 2011, the *Guardian* blogger David Hill wrote:

“Suddenly [in the 80s] our slang was cool and it didn’t seem that alien anymore. It became the done thing to mix Cockney with Jamaican slang.

“Now [i. e. 2011] you hear even people from the best private schools and universities speaking the now universal London accent – a Solicitor in a major city law firm calling to his friends saying ‘Yo’ (instead of Oi) and its not because he has Caribbean friends. I have heard Asian, White and Polish (oh yes) refer to their house as their ‘Yard’.”

Hill does not use the term ‘Jafaican’. Instead, he refers to well-educated people using ‘the now universal London accent’. Despite his terminology, it is clear that he is referring to the adoption of a small number of slang items of supposedly Jamaican origin and not a shift to a new language variety, in this case MLE/<sup>2</sup>Jafaican’. The use of certain words from London slang is a ‘safe’ way of appearing cool: excessive use of these words, and probably the appropriation of MLE phonetic features, would cross unbridgeable boundaries of identity and class. These are examples of crossing, in Rampton’s (1995) sense.

## 7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced the surprisingly short history of the term ‘Jafaican’ in the British print media, supplemented with some online sources. There is a clear

evolution of the discourses over just 4–5 years, with occasional intense developments occurring over just a few days. The progression of the discourses can be summarized schematically like this:

‘Jafaican’ as:

as a language variety: exotic, new, interesting → but a threat to a variety which exists in the same geographical space, Cockney → a natural development arising out of social and demographic conditions → an educational problem → a well-known variety whose existence is a matter of common sense (i. e. enregistered) → a normal variety → a foreign variety → a threat to liberal values → a foreign variety threatening social cohesion → a threat to nationhood → a variety associated with bad behaviour → cool

The arrows in this schema imply transition between discourses, but in fact the transitions cut across a number of strands, or perhaps metadiscourses. The most pervasive discourse utilizes the metaphor of ‘threat’, and within this we can discern two strands. The first is the threat of displacement (of Cockney, of ‘true’ British people, of ‘British’ cultural values) and involves discourses originating in the political right. The second strand is the threat to liberal values (gender equality, but also (in hip-hop lyrics) homosexual equality).

Many of the discussions of ‘Jafaican’ insist on its foreignness, and many of these in turn see this not only as a threat (as we’ve just seen), but also as inextricably linked to bad behaviour and social unrest. But at the same time some commentators, such as those from the Queen’s English Society, take a non-committed, neutral stance, seeing it as a natural development.

The discourse of ‘Jafaican’ as fashionable or ‘cool’ is dependent on a number of others: exoticism, oppositionality through its association with subcultures, and youthfulness. It is seen by the media as being freely adopted by people of all classes. This construction of ‘Jafaican’ differs sharply from the analysis which (socio)linguists place on it. The latter see, on the one hand, young, middle-class people as buying into limited aspects of it by borrowing slang and professing a preference for certain musical styles. On the other hand, for the speakers themselves, who are young, working class and multicultural, it is their everyday way of speaking incorporating distinctive phonological, grammatical, lexical and discourse patterns.

To what extent have the media contributed to the various constructions of ‘Jafaican’ which exist? An important point to note is that the term ‘Jafaican’ remains outside the vast majority of people’s experience. This is in contrast to either *rinkebysvenska* or *Kiezdeutsch*, which by all accounts have a much stronger presence in everyday discourse – at least educated discourse – and it is claimed that these terms are derived from grassroots labels, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter. The origin of the current sense of ‘Jafaican’ remains unknown to

us. To the extent that the media mentions any features of this variety, they are, as we have seen, mainly limited to slang. It is conceivable that this is so because the London-based journalists will be familiar with the ‘crossing’ use of these slang terms from their own mainly middle-class social and professional circles.

At the time of writing (January 2013), frequency of mention has remained at around two per month for the past three years. There was no spike following the August 2011 riots, though mentions have increased slightly since then. This means that it is not possible to isolate a causal effect between external events and mentions. During 2011 and 2012, Heike Wiese, the academic who has written most about *Kiezdeutsch*, was frequently interviewed on the radio and television, as well as receiving a large amount of correspondence objecting both to the language variety and her research (Wiese, pers. comm. 2012). The authors of the London study (Cheshire et al. 2011) have been interviewed a number of times by a range of newspapers, magazines and radio stations, as well receiving contacts from other media outlets. A TEDx talk was given in London by one of the authors shortly after the riots. However, none of the authors received any mail at all of the kind Wiese received. There is no space here to speculate about the reasons for these differences: suffice it to say that a number of German newspapers and puristic organizations see the German language itself as under threat, not only from English, but also from disruptive forces within, such as immigrants and their descendents (Wiese 2012: 220–223). By contrast, British newspapers are largely unconcerned about the fate of the English language as such, but focus instead on the local dialect, Cockney, as a symbol of Englishness – apparently oblivious to the low esteem this variety is normally held in. Parts of the British press concentrate their energies on what they see as the social consequences of the use of multiethnic language varieties. This is a concern they share with German commentators, though they display much less concern for the *linguistic* consequences of this language and dialect contact.

If the media reports have contributed to the (as yet modest) familiarity of ‘Jafaican’ among the population at large, we do not have any evidence yet of its take-up among its prototypical users, working-class adolescent Londoners. This chapter, however, has shown how a new term spreads across the media, and through the media is circulated among different types of populations. Crucially, its relative popularity is firmly embedded in wider public and political discourses of the present time. When these subside, the term ‘Jafaican’ may subside regardless of whether Multicultural London English continues to exist. Alternatively, ‘Jafaican’ may stay, but it will be modified in meaning and social connotations.

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