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2 LANGUAGE VARIATION 1

Social Factors: Class and Ethnicity

Paul Kerswill

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we explore two of the main social factors which influence the way we speak: social class and ethnicity. The third major social factor is sex, or gender – a topic which is discussed separately in Chapter 1, but which is connected both to class and ethnicity in ways we will touch on. A fourth factor, age, is equally important, though people pass naturally from one age group to another in a way that is not true of any of the other factors. Class and ethnicity (and of course gender and age) are large-scale factors serving to both differentiate and unite human beings. To take class first: somebody might have a particular income and have a particular type of job. These are just two of the factors which will feed into a sociologist's analysis of that person's social rank or class. At the same time, a British person might be, for instance, of English, Welsh, Pakistani or Caribbean origin. This category is often loosely referred to as that person's ethnicity. Unlike the case with class, there is no implicit hierarchy or ranking between ethnicities. As we will see, class and ethnicity are more complex and controversial than their portrayal in everyday discourse – that is, the way in which they are talked about in the media and the ways people generally think about them.

We'll be looking at how class and ethnicity shape the way we speak. You will learn about some of the major research from the past 50 years that has looked into these effects, starting with one of the founders of **sociolinguistics** (the study of language and society), William Labov. We will come to realise that what I referred to as 'effects' are, in fact, not just people's passive, automatic responses to their 'objective' social class position and ethnicity, but rather the result of their active engagement with their own social identities. In other words, we may feel a certain pride in our own backgrounds, whatever they are. One of the most important ways in which we signal our social identities is through language.

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Although our backgrounds might differ widely in terms of social advantage and disadvantage, we still try to project these identities. It is in our teenage years, particularly, that we do this, not only through things like dress and music, but also the way we speak – slang and pronunciation being the areas where young people are especially creative, and also susceptible to influence. It is not coincidental, therefore, that so much sociolinguistic research is on youth language – and this will be reflected in this chapter.

2. What is the link between class, ethnicity and language?

In the Preface to the play *Pygmalion* (1912), George Bernard Shaw wrote:

> It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him.

What did Shaw mean by this? This oft-cited quote sums up a situation 100 or more years ago in which **accent** and **dialect** were tremendously important for the way people assessed each other socially: your accent betrayed not just your regional origin, but also your social class. Victorian and early twentieth-century Britain was a society dominated by the effects of the Industrial Revolution of 100 years earlier, during which new industrial towns and cities had emerged and, with them, local urban dialects had developed out of the melting pot of people who had moved into the new urban areas to find work. These dialects were spoken by people who became the backbone of the industrial working class, while the language of the factory owners, teachers, clergymen and others with access to literacy was much closer to **Standard English**.

Language became, then, strongly associated with social standing. We can catch a glimpse of middle-class Victorian and early twentieth-century attitudes to the kind of language which was associated with the working class in the two *Punch* cartoons shown in Figures 1 and 2, from 1855 and 1915, respectively. Figure 1 plays upon the social stigma which was heaped on people who 'dropped their

Figure 1. 'I beg your Pardon, Ma'am, but I think you dropped this?'.
***Punch*, October 1855 © The British Library**

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Figure 2. The Airship Menace. ***Punch*****, 1915 © The British Library**

aitches' (who probably constituted the majority of the population!), while Figure 2 associates the use of ***ain't*** with people living in modest houses, contrasted with the splendour of the British Museum.

In the next section, we will ask whether the sorts of attitudes to social-class based dialects which are implicit in these cartoons persist in the present day. We will also introduce some of the studies which first showed that the way we actually use language is correlated with our social backgrounds.

Speech differences based on ethnicity also exist, but in rather more subtle ways: people of any ethnicity can and do speak with a British regional accent, or indeed **Received Pronunciation**, in a way that reflects their social class. Yet there have always been ethnically-based ways of speaking. If, as many people do, we count the different UK nations as constituting ethnicities, then regional accents and dialects are in a sense also 'ethnic': Welsh, English, Scottish and Northern Irish accents can be a badge of national identity. However, for its entire human history the island of Great Britain has seen immigrants arrive from many places, bringing with them a vast array of languages. Generally, the children and grandchildren of immigrants learn the local accent or dialect of the language of the majority – English, in our case. Often, though, these children also acquire a distinctive,

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ethnically-based way of speaking, and this is likely to be used alongside the local accent.

In terms of ethnicity-based speech differences, it is largely only those relating to the United Kingdom nations which appear in the early *Punch* cartoons. Figure 3, from 1868, plays on a well-known stereotype, using a representation of a Scottish dialect for the dialogue.

Figure 3. Thrift.
Peebles Body (to Townsman who was supposed to be in London on a visit). 'E-eh, Mac, ye're surehame again.' Mac: 'E-eh. it's just a ruinous place, that! Mun a had na' been the'erre abune twa hoours when – bang – went saxpence!!!'
***Punch*, 5th December 1868 © The British Library**

The language of immigrants and their descendants is hardly, if ever, depicted, and the media are generally hesitant about talking about this at all – with two significant exceptions, the language of Jews in the nineteenth century and **Multicultural London English** in the present day (though, as we shall see, the latter is not exclusive to ethnic minorities). This lack of media portrayal is surprising, given the public awareness of immigration. That said, a good deal of research has been conducted on 'ethnic' varieties, particularly British Asian English, London Jamaican – and Multicultural London English. We will return to these in Section 5.2.

3. The origins of research on language, class and ethnicity – with a side glance at gender

3.1 Class

The first large-scale survey of language and social class was conducted in New York City by William Labov in the early 1960s (Labov 1966). Labov was interested in pronunciation features, not grammar or vocabulary, because he believed that pronunciation is a more fine-grained indicator of social differences. Partly this is due to the fact that individual vowels

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and consonants occur far more frequently in the flow of speech than do particular grammatical constructions or words (indeed, we can't say anything at all without them). Labov argued that it was important to obtain a representative sample of speakers from the town or city under investigation, in order to be sure of revealing any systematic relationships between the use of language and social factors, particularly class, gender and ethnicity. He also devised the **sociolinguistic interview**, incorporating sections where the interviewee will be as relaxed as possible and others where they are asked to read sentences and word lists, forcing them to pay attention to their speech as much as possible. He termed these **styles**.

We will not say more about Labov's study here, but instead focus on his immediate successor in the UK, Peter Trudgill. Trudgill adopted Labov's methodology in a study of his home city of Norwich in a survey he conducted in 1968 (see Trudgill 1974). Ethnically Norwich was a largely homogeneous place at that time, with relatively few incomers generally. He constructed a sample of speakers stratified by age, gender and social class – using, for the last of these, a composite index covering occupational status, father's occupation, education, income, housing type and district. One of the features Trudgill examined was the use of different pronunciations of the verbal suffix ***-ing***, as in ***going*** or ***running***, which alternates between the standard velar consonant [ŋ] (spelt 'ng') and the nonstandard alveolar [n]. This alternation is in fact found in almost the entire English-speaking world, and has been in existence for some centuries. It is often referred to, somewhat inaccurately, as 'dropping your g's'. Here, of course, it is only the 'g' in the spelling that is being dropped, since the pronunciation substitutes one distinct sound for another. Figure 4, below, shows how the feature is pronounced in Norwich by people of different classes and in different styles.

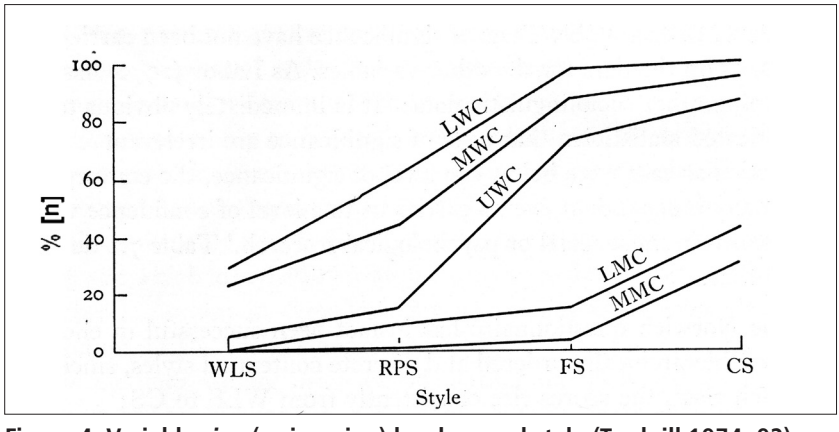

Figure 4. Variable *-ing* (as in go*ing*) by class and style (Trudgill 1974: 92).

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Trudgill divides his sample into 'lower', 'middle' and 'upper' working classes and 'lower' and 'middle' middle classes. His styles are: 'word list', 'reading passage', 'formal' and 'casual'. The figure shows that, as expected, the social classes are differentiated by this feature, and that there are the familiar style differences, with an increase in the nonstandard [n] in informal styles. Trudgill makes the point that the large gap between all the working-class and middle-class groups, especially in the two free-speech styles FS (formal style) and CS (casual style), may well reflect a polarised class structure in Britain.

A disadvantage of lumping together all the data from different speakers like this is that any variation within a social-class group is hidden from view. Can it really be the case that all speakers sound the same? Everyday experience tells us this isn't the case. One way of looking at this, while still combining data from different speakers, is to look at the crucial variable of gender. Trudgill breaks down his data on ***-ing*** by gender as shown in Table 1.

	Male	**Female**
Middle middle class	4	0
Lower middle class	27	3
Upper working class	81	68
Middle working class	91	81
Lower working class	100	97

Table 1. The suffix *-ing* in Norwich: percent use of nonstandard [n], formal style (from Trudgill 1974: 94)

In each class, women lead the men in their use of the standard form [ŋ] by an amount which varies from 3 to 24 percentage points. This pattern is one of the most robust findings of sociolinguistic studies of this kind: where there is an obviously standard form set against a nonstandard one, women use the standard more often than the men. A number of explanations have been suggested for this. One is the notion that women are more oriented towards high-prestige and supposedly 'correct' linguistic forms – another instance is the use of /h/ in words spelt with 'h', as we saw in Figure 1. However, this is not an explanation, but a mere observation.

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Trudgill himself suggests that working-class speech is tied in with a male-oriented working-class culture, whereas others have pointed to differences in upbringing and in gender roles in both the family and in the workplace. There are complex reasons for the so-called sociolinguistic gender pattern, including the likelihood that men and women might respond differently to the same interviewer. We will not pursue these here: you are recommended to read Chapter 1 for further discussion of this important area.

3.2 Ethnicity

In Britain, the investigation of language and ethnicity has tended to focus on working-class young people living in the inner city, and to take much greater care in creating more natural contexts for the recordings. The first large-scale study was that by Viv Edwards (1986), who recorded young people of Jamaican descent in Dudley in the West Midlands. At that time, a form of Jamaican creole, locally known as Patois, was used by many of the Afro-Caribbean population, including those born in Britain. Edwards expanded Labov's and Trudgill's interview design by having people speak in a group rather than on their own, and by varying the interviewer by age (young or older) and ethnicity (black or white). There were five situations, three of which are as follows (Swann & Sinka 2007: 232):

1. Formal interview with white researcher	Group interviewed about education by older white researcher, smartly dressed and referred to as 'Mr Sutcliffe' by other researchers.
4. Discussion by black peer group	Group left alone to talk about questionnaire they will be asked to complete later. Questions cover attitudes to mainstream white society; treatment of young black people by police etc.
5. Informal conversation with black fieldworker	Group with black fieldworker in conversation over biscuits and drinks towards the end of the session.

The boundary between English and Patois is not always easy to determine, since the languages share much of their vocabulary and a good deal of their pronunciation and grammar – unlike, say Russian and English. To determine the extent to which someone was speaking Patois or English, Edwards examined the use of eleven features which differentiate them. Here are five (Swann & Sinka 2007: 233, based on Edwards 1986: 80):

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1. **Dentals**
   English variants: /θ/, /ð/ as in /θɪk/ (***thick***), /ðɛn/ (***then***)
   Patois variants: /t/, /d/ as in /tɪk/ (***thick***), /dɛn/ (***then***)

2. **Vowels**
   English variants: /ʌ/ (Received Pronunciation), /ʊ/ (Midlands and north of England) as in /rʌn/, /rʊn/ (***run***)
   Patois variant: /o/ as in /ron/ (***run***)

3. **Third person singular present tense verbs**
   English variant: John ***swims*** fast; Kevin ***eats*** a lot
   Patois variant: John ***swim*** fast; Kevin ***eat*** a lot

4. **Plurals**
   English variant: six ***cars***; all the ***books***
   Patois variant: six ***car***; all di ***book***

7. **First person singular pronoun**
   English variant: ***I*** feel happy
   Patois variant: ***me*** feel happy

For each portion of the recording sessions, Edwards calculated what she called a 'Patois index', which was an aggregate of the use of Patois vs. English forms by all participants. Here are the indexes for the three situations above:

Situation	1	4	5
Average score	5.57	43.29	30.11

Table 2. Average scores for Patois/English variants in Dudley (adapted from Edwards 1986: 81)
Note: Scores are expressed as a percentage, where a score of 100 means use of only Patois forms and a score of 0 means use of only English forms. I have reversed these scores from Edwards's original, so that they represent the use of Patois rather than English.

Overall, the use of Patois features falls well below 50 percent, even in the contexts in which its use is most expected (Situation 4). Clearly, the use of Patois is sensitive to both the ethnicity and the age of the interviewer. Topic also plays a part.

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These results are to be expected, but we need to delve deeper to understand fully what these numbers mean. If they are comparable with the use of [n] in ***-ing***, or a glottal stop [ʔ] for /t/ in words like ***water***, then we would expect a fairly even distribution across the stream of speech, with some fluctuation according to topic, seriousness, etc. This, it turns out, is not usually what happens. Mark Sebba (1993), in his own research (also in the early 1980s) on what he calls 'London Jamaican', points out that what is happening is a form of **code-switching**, where one language (with its vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is used for one portion of a conversation, for example a speaker's turn, with another language replacing it in the next portion. Using alternating chunks of language like this is a routine, often unnoticed, matter for many bilingual speakers, particularly those who belong to minority linguistic communities. Here is a section from a conversation recorded by Sebba (1993):

Errol: 'ey, did you go out yet?

Patrick: oh let me get a drink

Wayne: yeah, dis mornin'

Daryl: get me some wa- get me ...

Patrick: **naa, me na get not'in f'you**

Lee: get me a drink Patrick

Patrick: **not ... a get not'ing f'you 'cause**

?: a ha ha ha

Wayne: this mornin'

The bold sections are Patois in pronunciation and grammar, the remainder in a London accent. Patrick seems to use Patois in a teasing mode, while also signalling in-group solidarity – both achieving a reduction in the threat posed by his refusal to provide water by keeping the tone light-hearted. Functions such as these are characteristic of code-switching. Sebba, as we can see, uses an interpretive approach to the study of language variation, achieving this through the close analysis of conversation. This complements the quantitative approach of sociolinguists such as Labov, Trudgill and (in her Dudley research) Edwards, too. They are two sides of the same coin.

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4. Addressing limitations of the standard sociolinguistic approach: exploring fluid communities, complex identities

At the end of the previous section, we saw Sebba's critique of a purely quantitative approach to the study of how language varies within a person's repertoire of ways of speaking. In particular, he shows that it is not appropriate to the study of bilingual communities, since 'social meaning' seems to be attached to the alternating use of different languages. Now we need to pose the same question in relation to a 'speech community' which is almost entirely monolingual, such as Norwich in the 1960s, where English was spoken but in different ways connected to social class and gender. Can a similar approach to Sebba's be applied to such a community? We address this in the next section. We will also explore more recent approaches to language and ethnicity in British sociolinguistics.

5. New approaches to accent/dialect, class and ethnicity

In this section, we first look at how social-class associations feed into the social meaning of a particular linguistic feature and how speakers make use of this in conversation. Second, we will look at two very different studies dealing with variation in ethnic minority speech in London.

5.1 Possessive 'me' in Teesside

A widespread feature of English, particularly in England, is the alternation of the forms ***my*** and ***me*** in expressions of possession, such as:

Where's my/me coat?

I've hurt my/me leg.

Here, the ***my*** form can be pronounced with a full diphthong, giving [maɪ], or else as the reduced form [ma]. Alternatively, the form [mi] may be used, sounding like 'me'. In what follows, I shall refer to this as **possessive 'me'**. Julia Snell, a native of Teesside, researched this feature among 9- and 10-year-old primary school children in two schools in Middlesbrough and Stockton, the first having a largely working-class catchment, the second a more middle-class one (Snell 2010). Before embarking on her recordings of informal situations using radio microphones, Snell spent seven months in the role of a classroom assistant, becoming a trusted adult who was not a teacher and who spoke in a familiar accent. Table 3 (page 33, below) is a quantitative analysis of the use of possessive 'me', as well as 'my' and other reduced forms.

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	Ironstone Primary (mainly working class)		Murrayfield Primary (mainly middle class)	
Variant	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
maɪ	99	23.4	61	24.7
ma	265	62.6	168	68.0
mi	30	7.1	3	1.2
mə	29	6.9	15	6.1
Total	**423**	**100**	**247**	**100**

Table 3. Frequency of first person possessive singular *me* pronunciation variants in Teesside (From Snell 2010: 636, Table 1)

In this table, only the form [mi] counts as possessive 'me', so we need to look at the frequency of this form, comparing it with [maɪ] and its reduced form [ma], which is often found in fast speech. Differences between the schools are small and the use of [mi] occurs in between just 1.2 to 7.1 percent of the cases. So far this tells us rather little: there is a social class difference in the use of [mi], but its infrequency would lead us to dismiss it. Snell argues that we shouldn't, firstly because this is a widespread dialectal feature in much of the country, and because it is stigmatised as the use of the 'wrong' pronoun, ***me***, in the possessive. Studies of older speakers in the north of England show a much higher use of possessive 'me'. For example, in oral history interviews with elderly people in Lancashire the frequency is around 50 percent (Hollmann & Siewierska 2007: 413). Snell argues that the feature is currently being lost. She goes on to analyse the few occasions where [mi] is used by the Teesside children, to see if its use (in place of one of the other forms) can be seen as a matter of choice and, if so, what they are trying to achieve in making that choice. In one particular conversation with Snell, a child, Andrew, uses the form 'my' (pronounced [maɪ]) when talking about how his arm feels when touching a hot battery (***my arm***), but when Snell teases him by saying it is his arm that is hot, Andrew contradicts her with mock indignation, saying, ***me arm's cold!***. Snell interprets this use of 'me arm' as re-establishing a teacher-pupil relationship, its power to do this deriving from the fact that it is a non-standard feature associated with working-class speakers. She finds the children more generally using the 'me' form to signal a slightly confrontational attitude.

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This is just one way in which the quantitative approach to large-scale patterns, in this case establishing what the correlation is between a feature and social class, sheds light on the workings of minute-by-minute interaction – and vice versa.

5.2 Ethnic and multiethnic language in London

For two centuries or more, London has been a magnet for people from overseas; currently, 40 percent of all overseas-born people residing in the UK live there. 32 percent of people within Greater London were born outside the UK, compared to seven percent for the rest of the UK. In the inner London boroughs, the proportion rises to 39 percent (Annual Population Survey 2006). Since these figures do not include people born in Britain to foreign parents, this is an underestimate of the minority ethnic population as a whole. The first, large group of migrant workers to arrive in the post-Second World War period came from the Caribbean, followed by people from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There are, of course, many more immigrant groups in London, including West Africans, Greeks, Cypriots, Chinese, Turks and Somalis, as well as people from other European countries and the USA. We saw at the beginning of the chapter that the children of immigrants almost always acquire the local vernacular, while sometimes retaining, or indeed creating, linguistic features from their parents' languages. What is the evidence for this, and what are the processes by which various ethnicities assimilate or remain distinct linguistically? We will look first at a single ethnic minority group, the Indians of West London, followed by a discussion of the emerging new Multicultural London English, in which some of the ethnic divides appear to have been erased.

Devyani Sharma and Lavanya Sankaran investigated the English of three age groups of Punjabi-speaking Indians in the West London district of Southall, where people of Indian descent now constitute a majority (Sharma 2011 and Sharma & Sankaran 2011). The oldest age group were the first generation – the immigrants themselves, who arrived as adults over a long period from the 1950s onwards. The second and third groups were the children of immigrants, divided into those whose parents were among the early immigrants and those who migrated later. A straightforward Labov-style investigation, involving an interview with a single interviewer, might not be very revealing, as we saw for the Afro-Caribbeans. There are at least three reasons for this, I think. First, people who are part of communities such as these have a wide range of social contacts, including older relatives in the ancestral country, their parents, who may have been immigrants who speak English with a non-native accent, their own siblings and friends, and the local host-language community (here, the white British).

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The range of speech styles has the potential to be correspondingly wide. Secondly, in addition to being part of a complex immigrant community, they also slot into a position in the local social-class hierarchy, depending on the kinds of factors we have already seen. And thirdly, many are likely to be bilingual.

It is obvious, then, that sampling their speech in an interview is likely to be limiting. To get round this, Sharma and Sankaran arranged for their participants to make recordings of themselves talking to a wide range of different people. These should be people they were routinely in contact with. The researchers' next problem was how to define the different linguistic features. They did this by dividing them into typical Asian and typical London pronunciations. These are the main features they looked at:

Asian features

1. Retroflex /t/: [ʈ] ('retro t', a typical Indian pronunciation with the tongue pulled back further along the roof of the mouth (hard palate) than in English)
2. Monophthongal ***face*** vowel ('mono e', as in northern England or Scotland, but also in Indian English)
3. Monophthongal ***goat*** vowel ('mono o', again as in northern England or Scotland, but also in Indian English)
4. Light /l/: [l] (a clear 'l' at the end of a syllable, as in ***full*** or ***milk***, rather than the London vocalised version).

British features

5. Alveolar /t/: [t] ('alveo t', or standard British English /t/, but also including the glottal stop [ʔ])
6. Diphthongal ***face*** ('diph e', the southern England pronunciation, including RP and Cockney)
7. Diphthongal ***goat*** ('diph o', the southern England pronunciation)
8. Dark /l/: [ɬ] (the 'dark', or velarised pronunciation; also the vocalised pronunciation typical of London).

As you can see, the Asian and British features are in fact paired, so that feature 5 is in fact the 'British' equivalent of feature 1, and so on. In order to find out more about how an immigrant community integrates linguistically over time, the researchers carried out a case study of a small number of British-born individuals, divided between those who grew up

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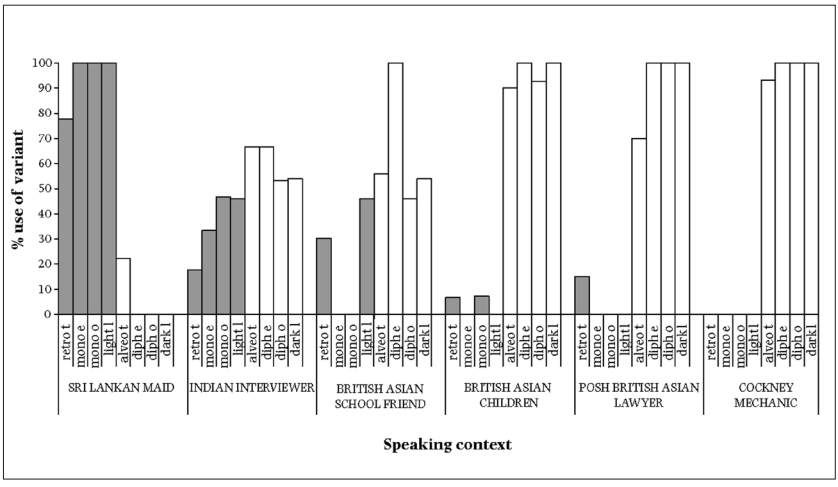

Figure 5. Use by older man (Anwar) of Indian and British and British variants across speaking situations. ■ = Indian variants □ = British variants (from Sharma 2011: 475).

in the 60s and 70s and those who did so in the 80s and 90s. Anwar, aged 41, made six self-recordings, as shown in Figure 5, above.

Figure 5 shows the percentage use of Indian vs. British variant forms. It is easy to see that Anwar varies greatly across the six conversation partners, from close to 100 percent Indian forms when talking to the maid to 100 percent British forms when talking to the 'Cockney mechanic'. The figure does not show it, but in the context with the 'posh British Asian lawyer', Anwar uses many RP forms, contrasting with the Cockney forms in the conversation with the mechanic. This, then, is a speaker with a wide linguistic repertoire – even without counting Punjabi, which he also speaks.

Contrast this with a much younger man, Ravinder, aged 20, part of whose speech repertoire is shown in Figure 6 (page 37, below).

With each conversation partner, Ravinder seems to vary his usage only slightly, with a greater preponderance of British forms with his immediate peer group, but (almost) never an exclusive use of one or other form for any of the features. This is in sharp contrast to Anwar, who spans the entire range.

Why is there this contrast? Sharma (2011: 481-3) suggests that, for the older group represented by Anwar, people needed to find ways of integrating linguistically when faced with the hostile, anti-immigrant

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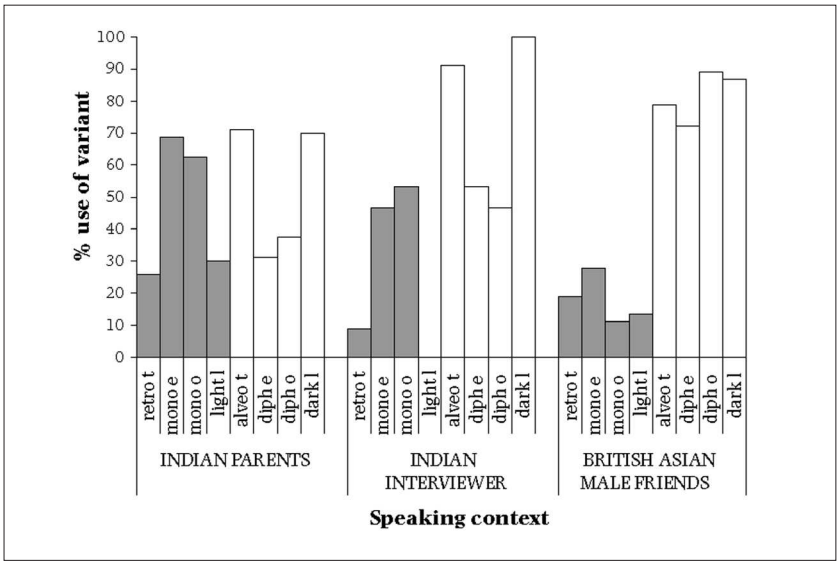

Figure 6. Use by younger man (Ravinder) of Indian and British variants across speaking situations ■ = Indian variants □ = British variants (from Sharma 2011: 478).

environment which lasted until the early 1980s. At the same time, the community maintained strong ties with India, with men entering the family business. By the next generation, born 20 or so years later, hostility had greatly reduced, and the neighbourhoods were more ethnically mixed with the British Asians often in a majority. Young men socialised in mainly Asian groups, but their employment and entertainment were local. Sharma believes there was much less need to switch between speech styles to the same extent. The result is, for the young men, a fairly uniform style of speaking, with little style shifting, but with a distinct London Asian flavour.

We have not specifically looked at women's speech here: it turns out that the older women have a narrower repertoire than the men, reflecting the fact, according to Sharma (2011: 485), that they are more home-bound. The younger women, on the other hand, have a broader repertoire than their male counterparts. Sharma argues that this represents a British working-class pattern in which women have a greater range of social contacts than men. In this respect, they have made the transition from a set of traditional, Indian family roles to a British one. This is, I would argue, a form of integration, and their language reflects this to the extent that their repertoires are more like those of their white neighbours, while still retaining Indian traits.

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I have referred to the more 'British' way of talking of the young West London Indian speakers. How do these young people fit in linguistically with the remainder of London's youth? The Indians' Punjabi is just one of some 300 languages spoken in the city's primary schools (Baker & Eversley 2000), with over 100 spoken in many of its boroughs. Is there a distinct way of speaking English associated with each and every one of these potential ethnicities? A prominent young speaker of London Asian English is the rapper Shizzio: to what extent is his accent similar to those of other young people in the capital?

To begin to get some answers, we now turn to sociolinguistic research carried out with a wide range of working-class people, mostly young and mainly in the East End. Jenny Cheshire, Paul Kerswill, Sue Fox and Eivind Torgersen were interested, first, in whether new linguistic features identified in projects carried out in the New Town of Milton Keynes (Kerswill 1996, Kerswill & Williams 2000a, 2000b, 2005) in fact emanated from London. Second, they wanted to find out whether the factor of ethnicity made any difference to pronunciation and grammatical features. Third, they wanted to see if young people of Afro-Caribbean origin continued to code-switch between Patois and London English as Sebba had found 25 years before. In order to address these questions, the researchers used sociolinguistic interviews with the participants in pairs, as well as some self-recordings, to get at a portion of their linguistic repertoires (Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox & Torgersen 2011, Cheshire & Fox 2010). Young people were selected on the basis of their gender and their ethnicity. Unlike in previous studies, the researchers did not focus just on one ethnicity, but made sure the people chosen represented the breadth of ethnic backgrounds in the East End.

What kind of results did they get? In answer to the first question, they found that most of the pronunciation features in south-eastern towns like Milton Keynes and Reading did not originate in London, but rather in the Home Counties surrounding London as part of **regional dialect levelling** (for more detail see Watson this volume, chapter 3).

The second question relates to whether there is a new, pan-ethnic way of speaking. There is some evidence for this, since a number of features seemed to be shared across all the young speaker groups, including:

- A new quotative for reported speech, as in ***This is me**: you're having a laugh!*
- Use of ***a*** instead of ***an*** before vowels, as in: ***I had a apple***.
- In English, the definite article ***the*** has two forms, one (roughly) ***thuh*** before consonants as in ***the pears***, the other ***thee*** before

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vowels, as ***<u>the</u> apples***. Young Londoners of all ethnicities tend to use ***thuh*** before vowels as well.

- Young Londoners tend to use more what is called syllable timing, giving a more staccato impression.
- The vowels of ***face*** and ***goat*** both tend to be monophthongs or narrow diphthongs, giving ***fehs*** ([feɪs] or [feːs]) for 'face' and ***goht*** ([gɒʊt] or gɒːt]) for 'goat', rather than the diphthongs of Cockney and the south-east generally: ***fice*** ([fæɪs]) and ***gowt*** ([gʌʊt]) or even ***gate*** ([gəʏt]), which is the pronunciation favoured by many young people in the south-east.

The researchers conclude that these forms are used in varying degrees by all groups of young people, but especially those living in the inner city (for instance, in Hackney) rather than the suburbs, as well as people of non-white British backgrounds, and young males. Notice that the two vowel features, ***face*** and ***goat***, are identical with those used by the West London Indians. By contrast with the British Asians' use of the retroflex [ʈ], none of these features is limited to just one ethnicity. This suggests that there is, in fact, a wider, new youth accent which is used, to different degrees, by young working-class people across the capital. To make this more concrete, it is worth listening to the spoken accents of the three London-based rappers Dizzee Rascal, Plan B and Shizzio, who have very different ethnic backgrounds: their speech has a lot in common, and none speaks traditional Cockney or even with a general south-east accent.

The researchers call this new accent Multicultural London English (MLE). The print media, however, have dubbed it 'Jafaican', a rather inappropriate term since it is clearly not 'Jamaican'. Nor is it 'fake' in any way!

The third question concerns the linguistic repertoire of young Londoners. Sharma noted that the West London Indians seemed to have moved from a wide-ranging to a narrower, less flexible repertoire in the space of a generation. Sebba noted a similarly wide repertoire among London Jamaicans in the 1980s. The question is whether young Londoners, and Afro-Caribbeans in particular, have also narrowed their linguistic range. There is, today, very limited evidence of the sustained use of London Jamaican among young people, unless they have direct links with the Caribbean. This is not surprising, given the much slower rate of immigration from Jamaica (and the Caribbean generally) than was the case 20 or 30 years ago. Young speakers are likely to be second or third generation, and to have wide contacts with the white British community and other groups, too. Instead, the young Caribbeans buy into MLE, and in fact use its features more strongly than most other groups. It is this strength of use that might

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make people of Caribbean origin linguistically distinctive, rather than any wider use of Patois. The Caribbeans' experience is, then, parallel to, but not identical with, that of the West London Indians. What is clear is that all these speakers, of whatever ethnicity including white British, have converged in the space of one or two generations on the use of one set of language features, while still retaining some distinctiveness along ethnic lines.

6. Looking to the future

Regional accents and dialects continue to fascinate (see Watson this volume, chapter 3). This is increasingly true of researchers' interest in what motivates social differences in speech. In this chapter, we have looked specifically at social class and ethnicity, with a glance at gender, too. We have seen that these three factors are closely intertwined. There is still much need, however, for further research on this relationship. For example, why there is a gender difference in the use of 'ethnic' features, and why do the two sexes appear to have different repertoires? Is the nature of these differences the same across ethnic groups? Indications are that they are not. What of the relationship between class and ethnicity? It is well known that immigrants tend to take a 'cut' in social class after they arrive: thus, a qualified teacher may find herself working as a shop assistant or cleaner. What are the linguistic consequences of that? One is that the second generation may regain the social status their parents lost, giving rise to greater social mobility among immigrants than among the indigenous population. And finally, to what extent is ethnically-marked speech, including MLE and similar language forms elsewhere, exclusive to the less privileged, or is it also characteristic of middle-class young people? Does it spread to other places, and do adolescent speakers of it continue to use it into their 20s and on into middle age? The future for sociolinguistic research on accents and dialects looks bright.

7. Key ideas to consider and further reading

7.1 Key ideas

- Social class is part of British people's everyday understanding of society. To what extent does it inform how you see society? To what extent do you think the idea of class is now redundant?
- Try to think of some non-linguistic (i.e. social) factors which differentiate people by class. Then think of some linguistic features. When making these lists, did you resort to stereotypes about how different classes live and speak?

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- Why do you think women in every social class tend to speak slightly more standardly than men in the same class?
- Ethnicity is not just about race. It may well encompass where you were born, what language you and your parents speak, your religion, and how you celebrate festivals. Some of these factors are permanent and unchanging, like race or your birthplace. Other factors become important through the way you relate to the society around you; for example, your experience of being 'white English' or 'British black' in the UK changes if you move, say, to the USA. Consider the case of African Americans who travel to West Africa: in Ghana local people might label them ***obruni***, or 'white man' – to their surprise and sometimes dismay. It is not the case that the Ghanaians are denying that the Americans have the same phenotype, or physical appearance, as themselves, but they are instead emphasising their foreignness.
- Often, the term 'ethnic' is reserved for members of minorities. Is this reasonable? Can majorities be 'ethnic' as well?
- In this chapter, we have looked at cases where minority ethnic people have a distinct accent. In your experience, is this always the case?

7.2 Further reading

Linguistics Research Digest blog: http://linguistics-research-digest.blogspot.co.uk/ This site summarises recent journal articles on linguistics, with a focus on English. The London projects are also covered in four digests on this site, with the titles 'Multicultural London English' 1-4.

For an excellent, scholarly account of the rise of attitudes to class-based varieties of English, particularly in the Victorian period, see Mugglestone (2003). For a more detailed account of language and social class, see Kerswill (2009). A more detailed account of language and ethnicity can be found in Khan (2009).

The rise of Standard English and attitudes to varieties of English is treated in Kerswill and Culpeper (2009). The Milton Keynes projects are described in Kerswill (1996/2007), Kerswill and Williams (2000a, 2000b/2010, 2005), Williams and Kerswill (1999). For further discussion of Julia Snell's research, see http://linguistics-research-digest.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/me-pencils-up-me-jumper.html

Robert Lawson has done extensive research on the language of young working-class males in Glasgow. This is presented in Lawson (2011).

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