

Innovation in inner-London teenage speech

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*Linguistic innovators:
the English of adolescents in London, 2004-7*

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www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/index.htm

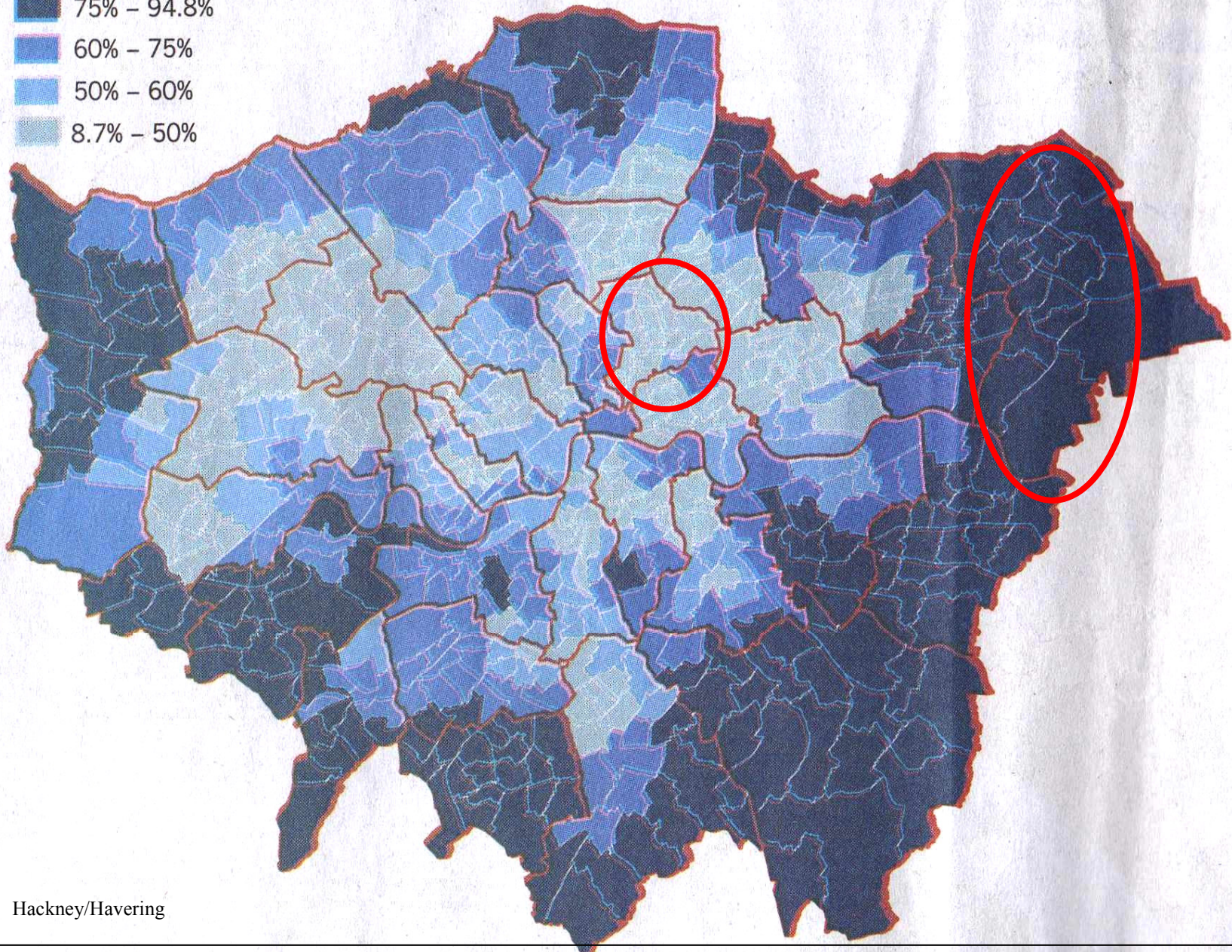
Why study London?

- Wells (1982) on London:
‘Its working-class accent is today the most influential source of phonological innovation in England and perhaps in the whole English-speaking world.’



White British

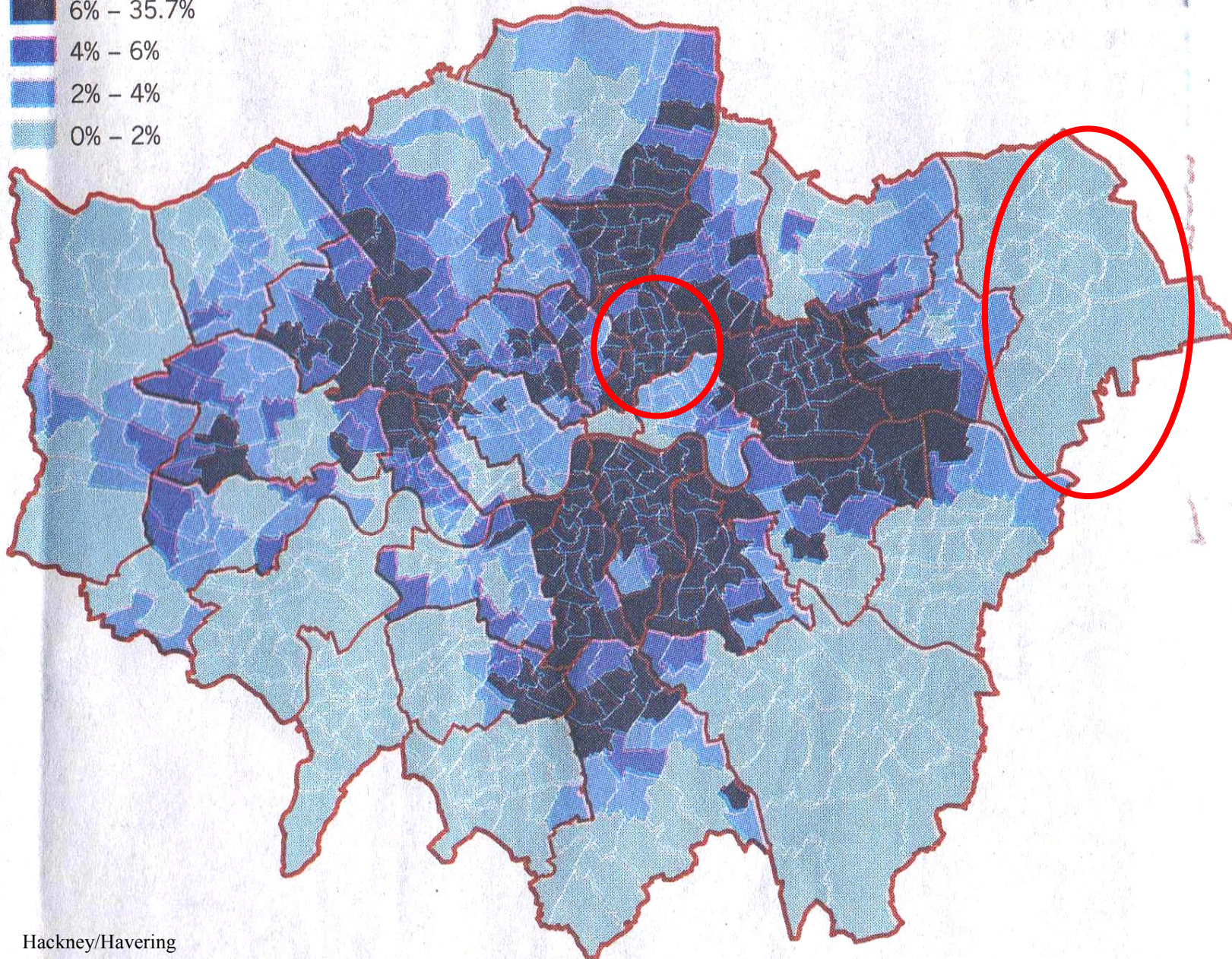
- 75% - 94.8%
- 60% - 75%
- 50% - 60%
- 8.7% - 50%



Hackney/Havering

Black African

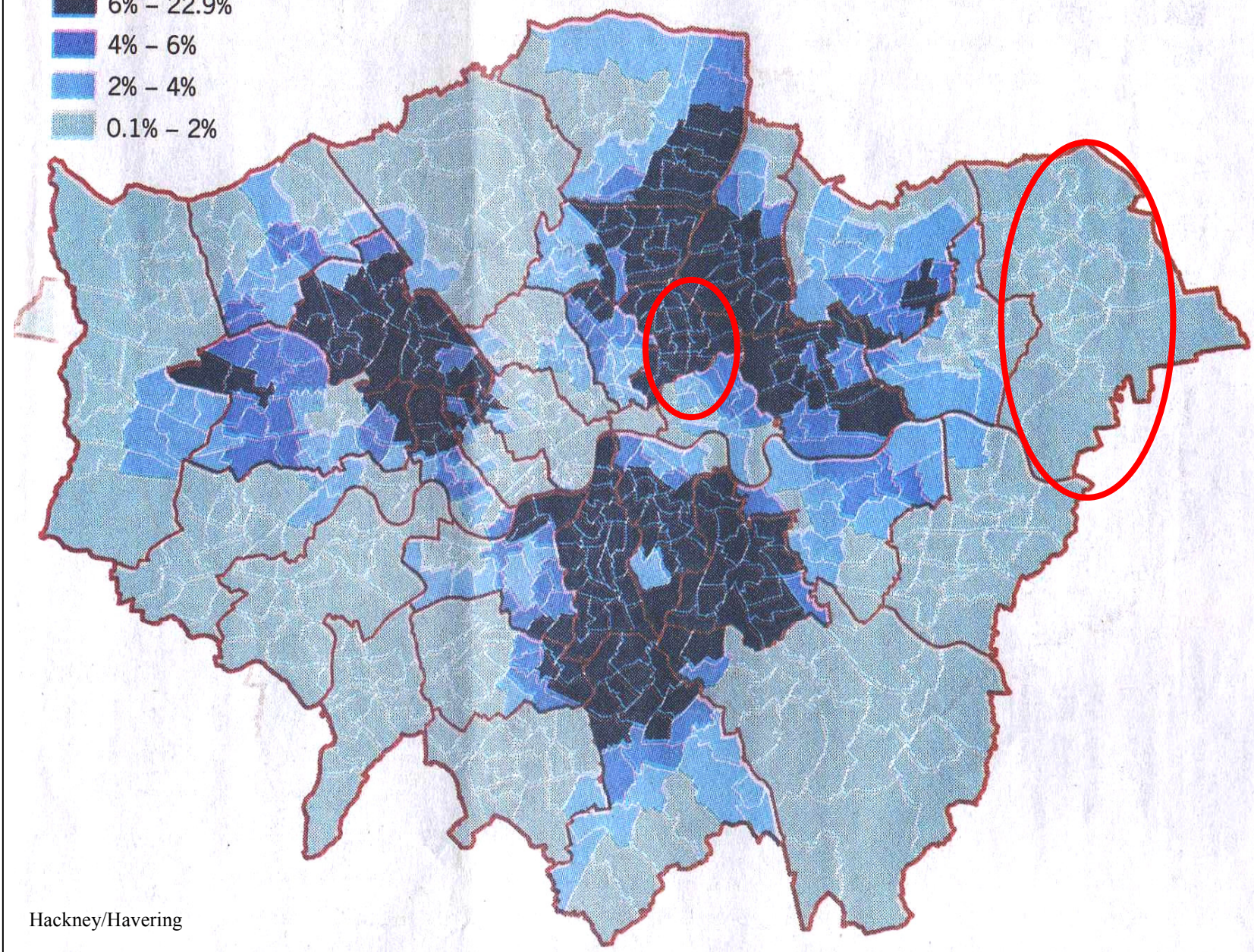
- 6% – 35.7%
- 4% – 6%
- 2% – 4%
- 0% – 2%



Hackney/Havering

Black Caribbean

- 6% - 22.9%
- 4% - 6%
- 2% - 4%
- 0.1% - 2%




Hackney/Havering

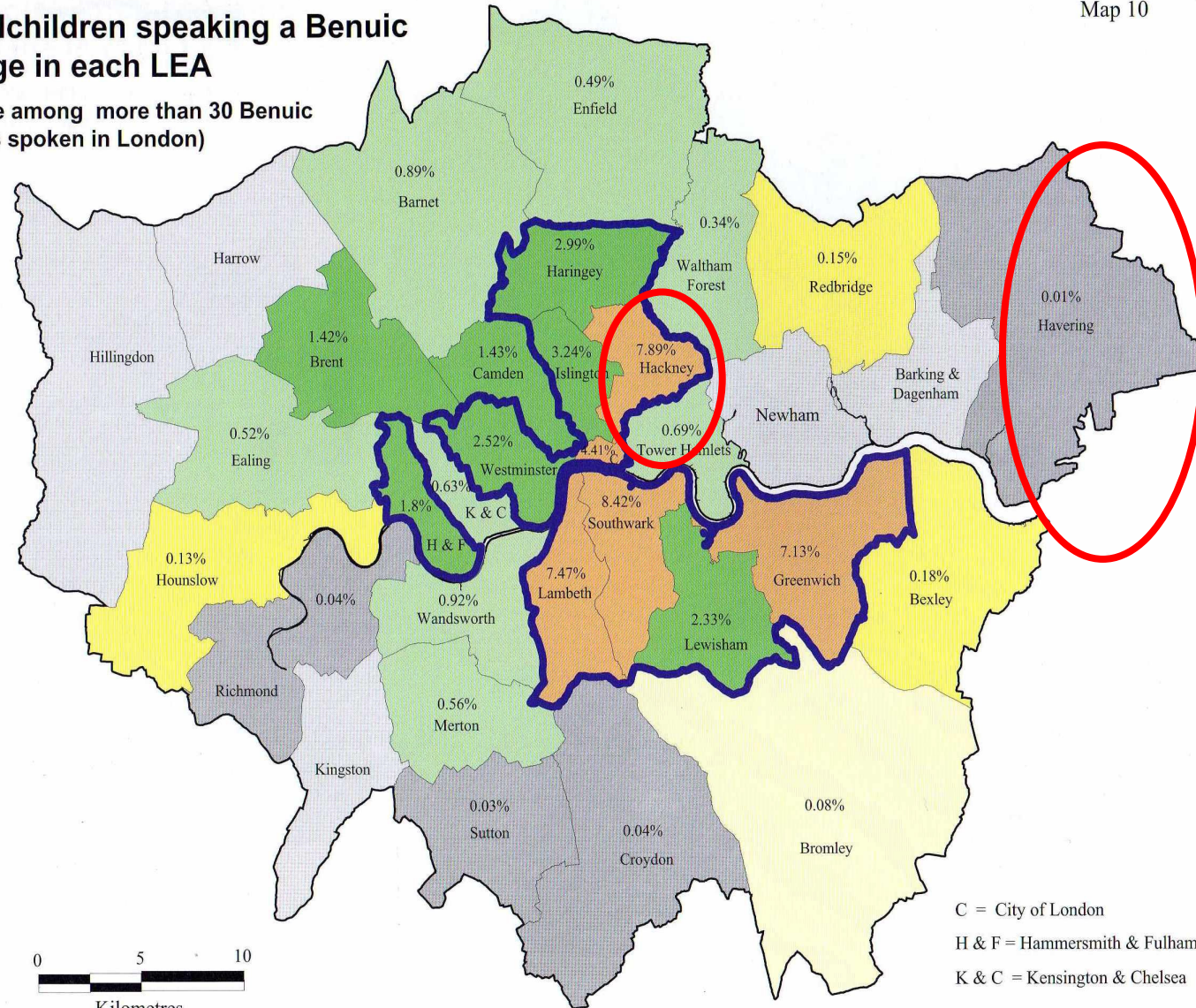
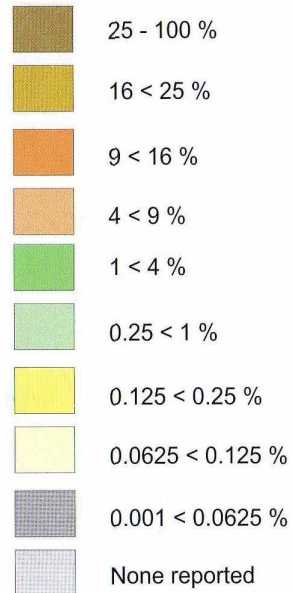
Percentage of schoolchildren speaking a Benuic language in each LEA

(Igbo and Yoruba are among more than 30 Benuic languages spoken in London)

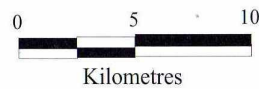
Average for London:
1.44%

 Above average for London

Percentage of Speakers




C = City of London
H & F = Hammersmith & Fulham
K & C = Kensington & Chelsea



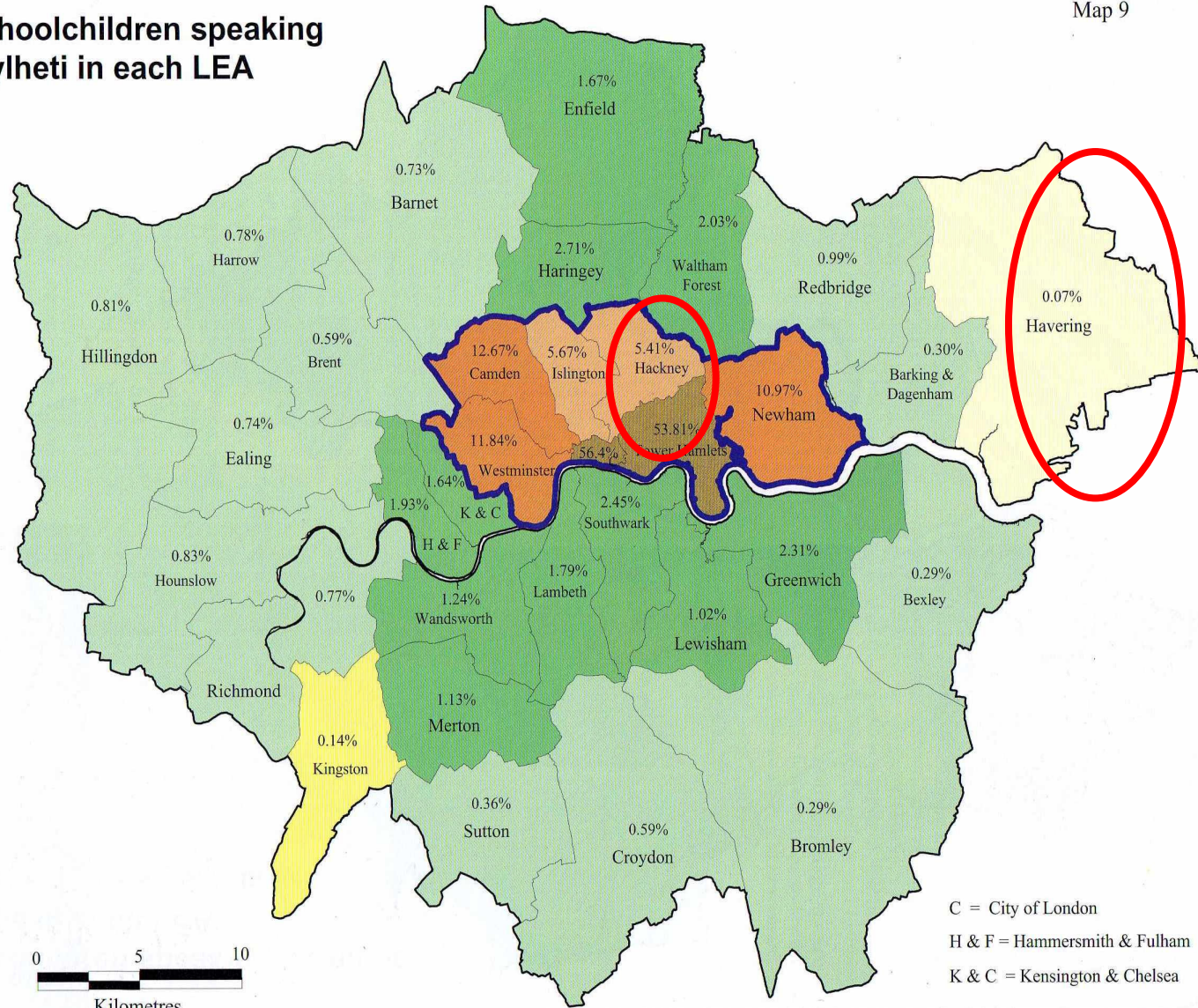
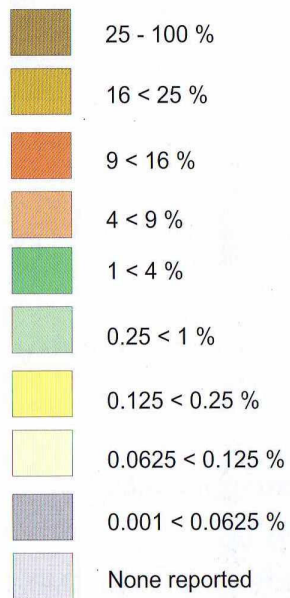
Hackney/Havering

Percentage of schoolchildren speaking Bengali + Sylheti in each LEA

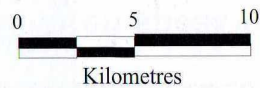
Average for London:
4.51%

 Above average for London

Percentage of Speakers



Hackney/Havering



C = City of London
H & F = Hammersmith & Fulham
K & C = Kensington & Chelsea

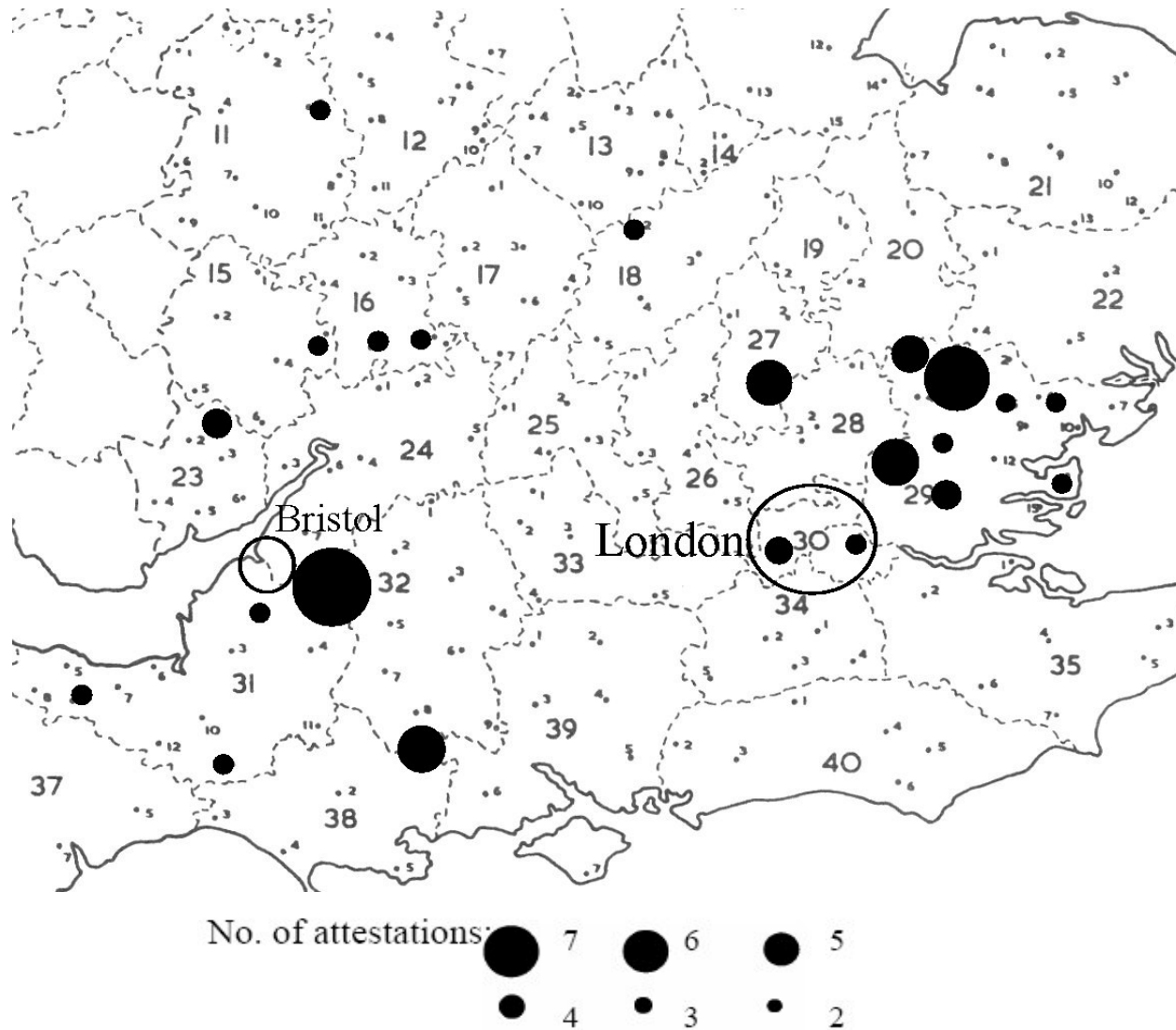
Methodology

- Digital recordings of 100 adolescents aged 16-19 attending colleges in two London Boroughs, Hackney and Havering
- Anglo speakers: white British
- Non-Anglo speakers: other ethnicities
- Informal semi-structured directed conversations in single, paired and group conversations
- Word-lists
- Home recordings
- Orthographic transcriptions of all conversations
- Corpus of around 1,000,000 words

TH-fronting: an example of geographical diffusion

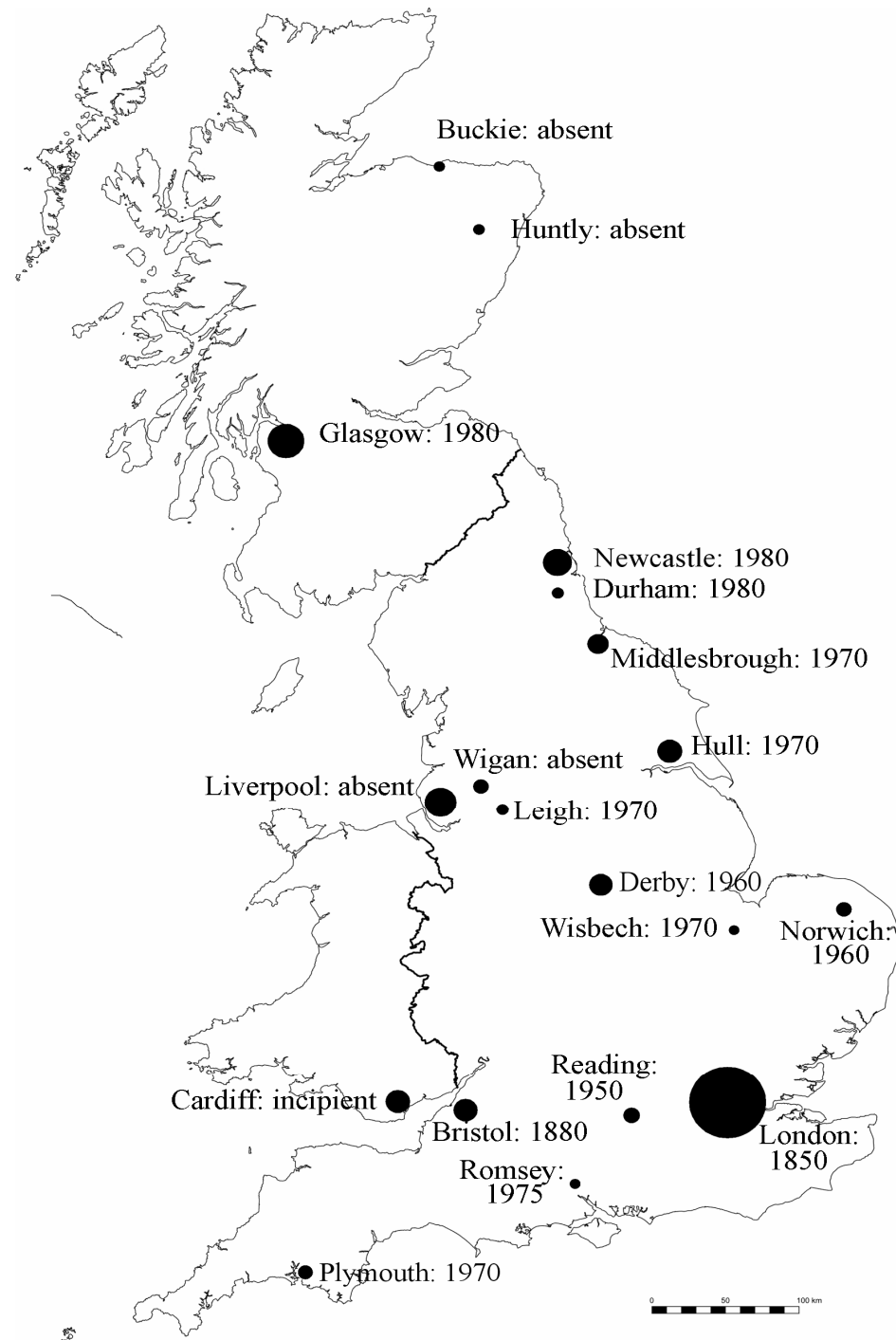
- Pronunciations such as ‘fink’ for *think*, ‘mafs’ for *maths*
- Symbols used: [f] and [θ]
- How is the fronted th-sound different from the non-fronted one?

Use of [f] in words in which [θ] is expected. Based on data from *Survey of English Dialects* (1950-61)



Unfilled circles show positions of Bristol and London.

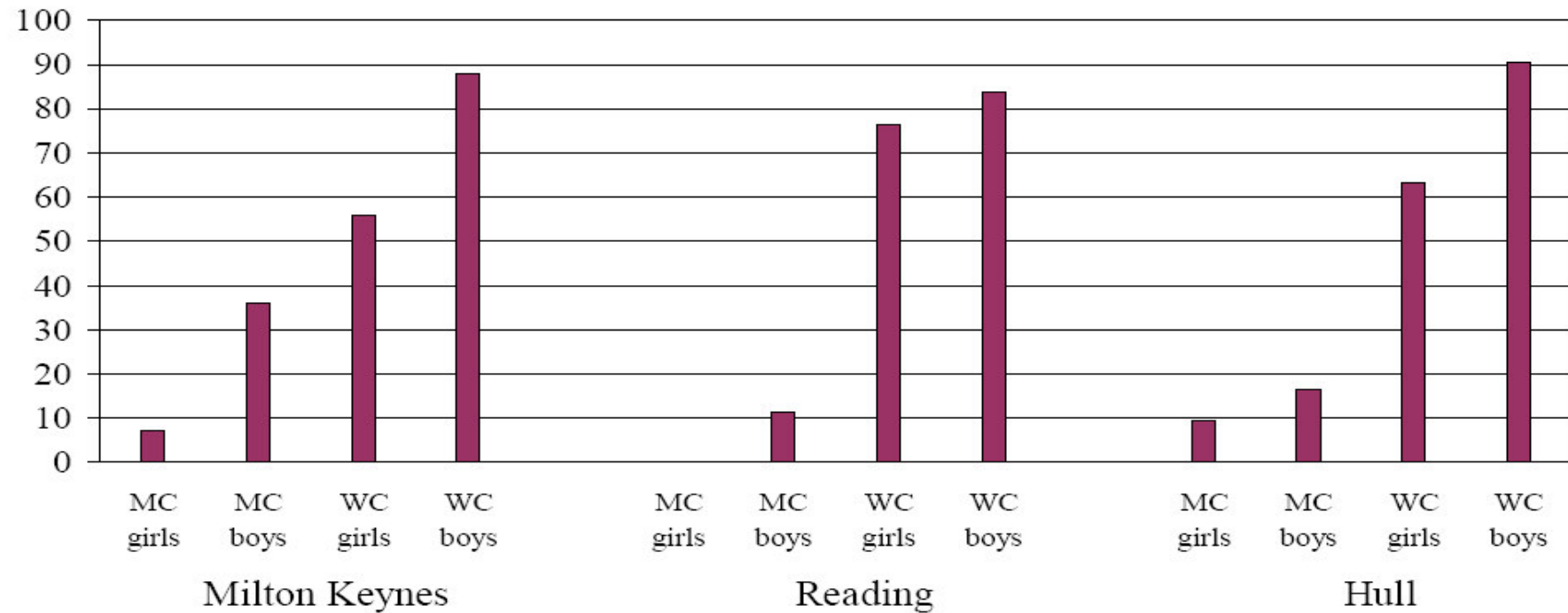
Spread of [f] for /θ/ and [v] for /ð/ in low-status urban varieties



Leading language change

- What kind of person is in the lead in TH-fronting?

TH-fronting in three towns



MC = 'middle class'

WC = 'working class'

Figure 3. Percent use of th-fronting in Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull (interview data).

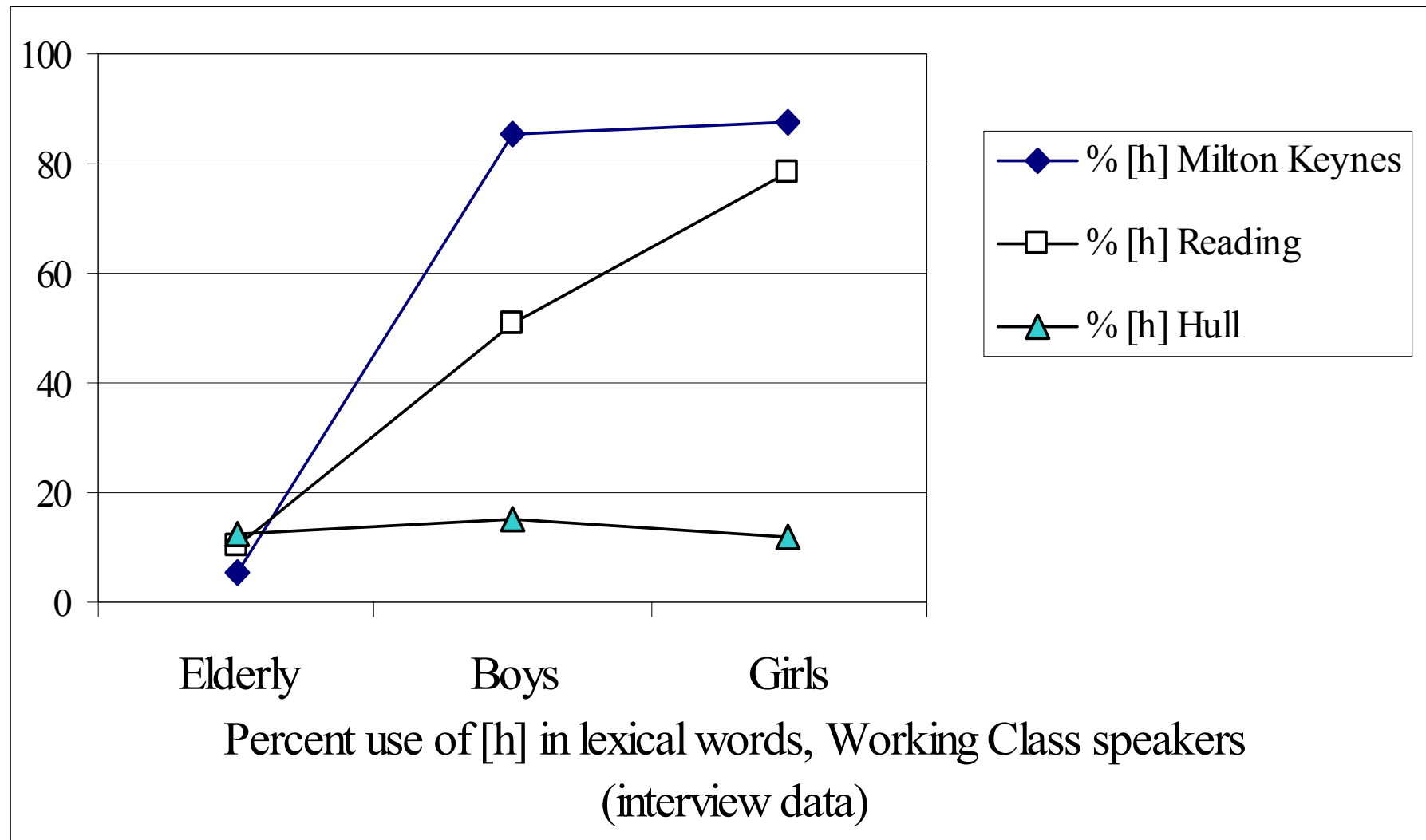
TH-fronting in London today

- We find almost categorical TH-fronting
- TH-fronting is more common in frequent words and expressions (*three, I think* vs. *thirteen, Thursday*)

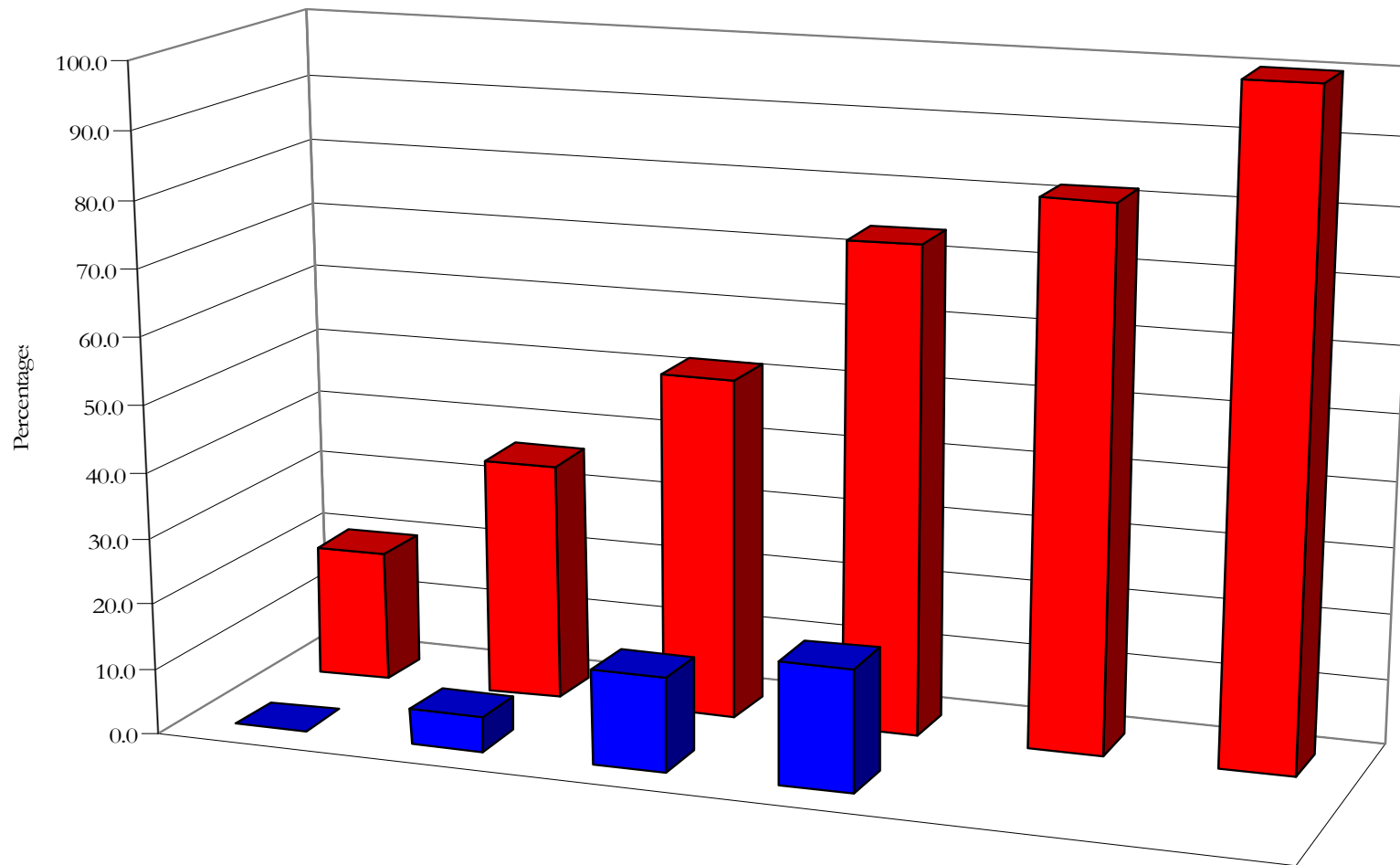
Loss of H-dropping: a new example of geographical diffusion

- Retention of h in lexical words: *house*, *home*, *hold*
- Seminar task: look at H-dropping datasets

Loss of H-dropping outside London



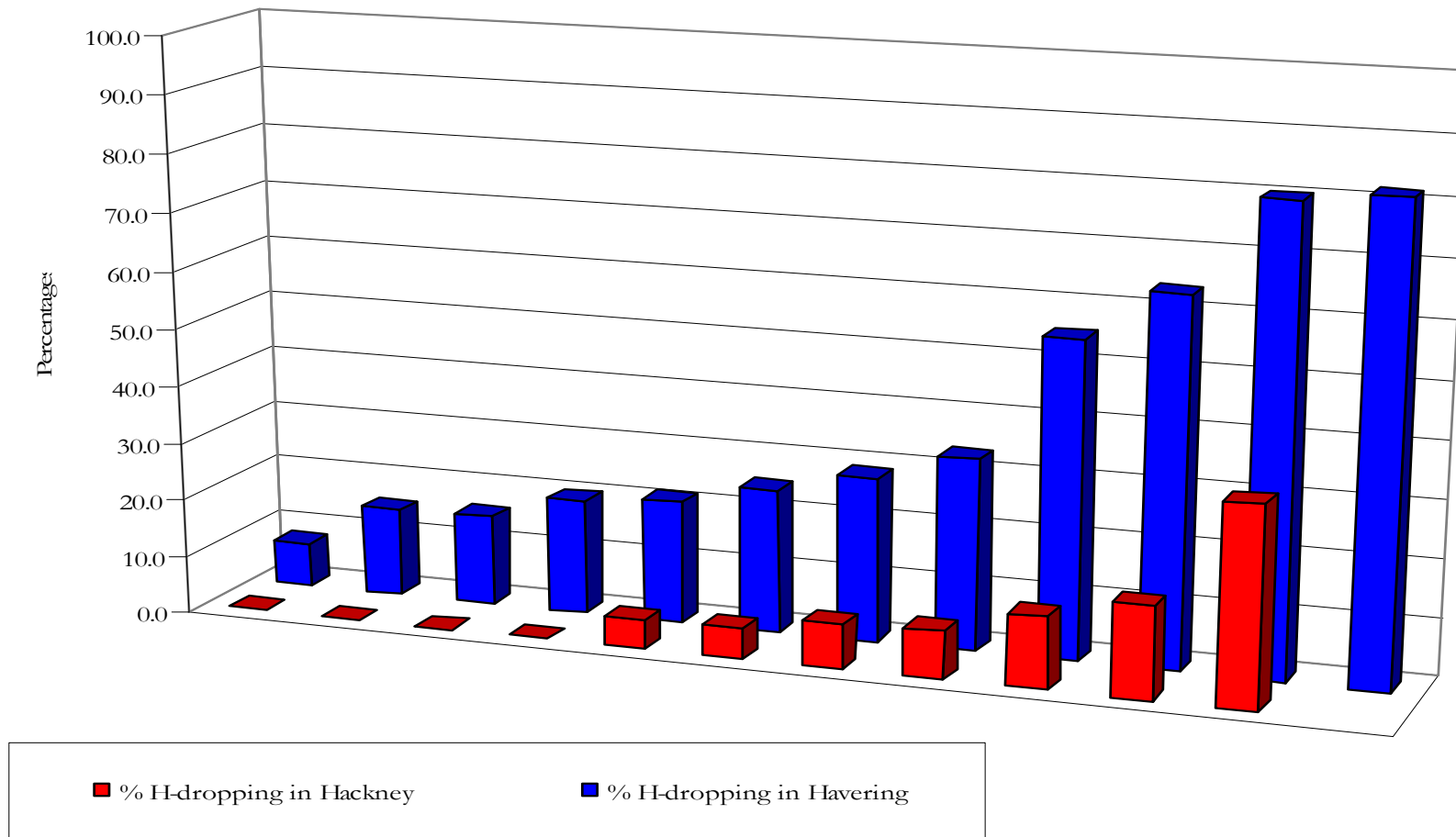
H-dropping elderly speakers



■ Havering H-dropping

■ Hackney H-dropping

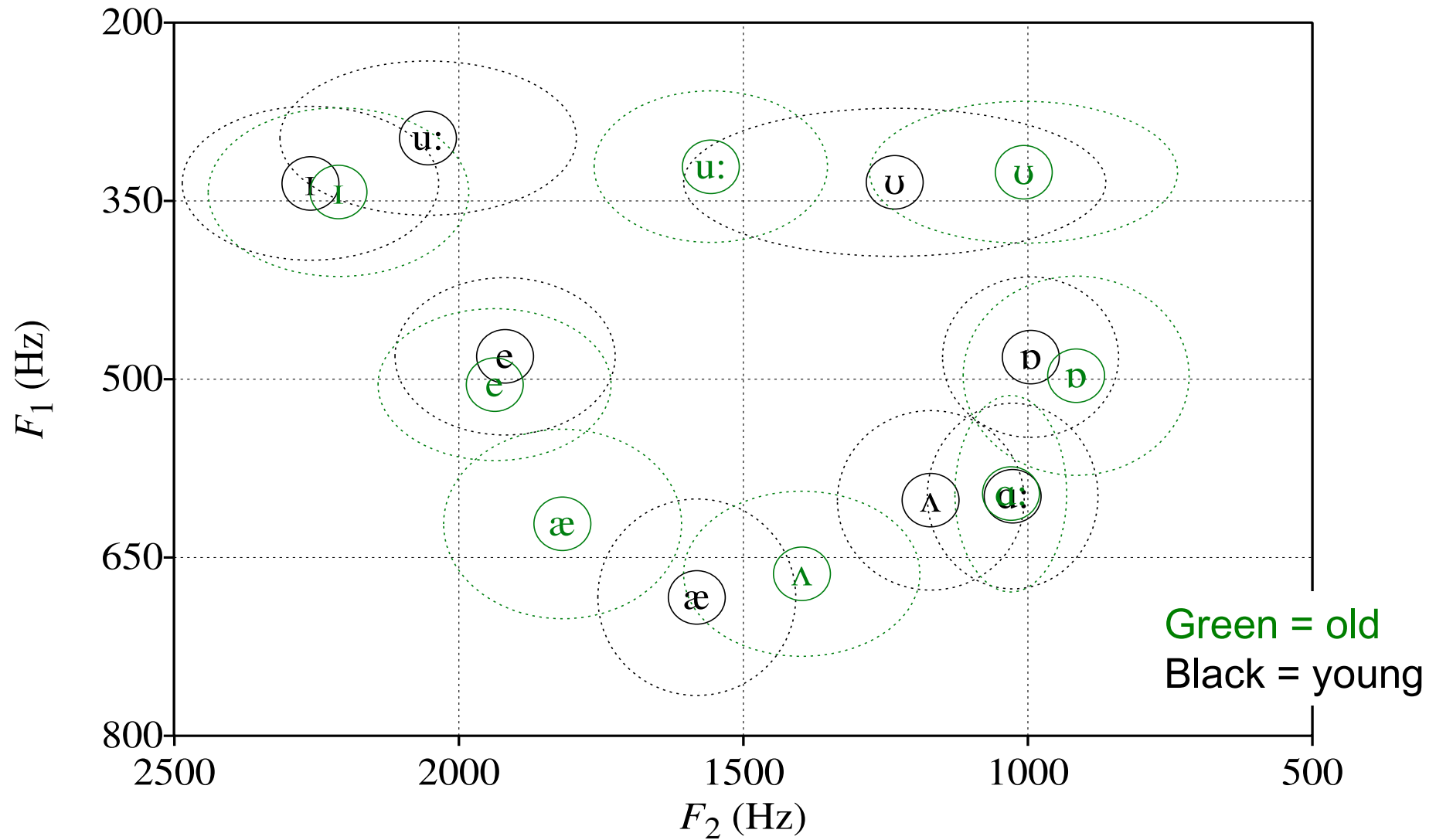
H-dropping young speakers



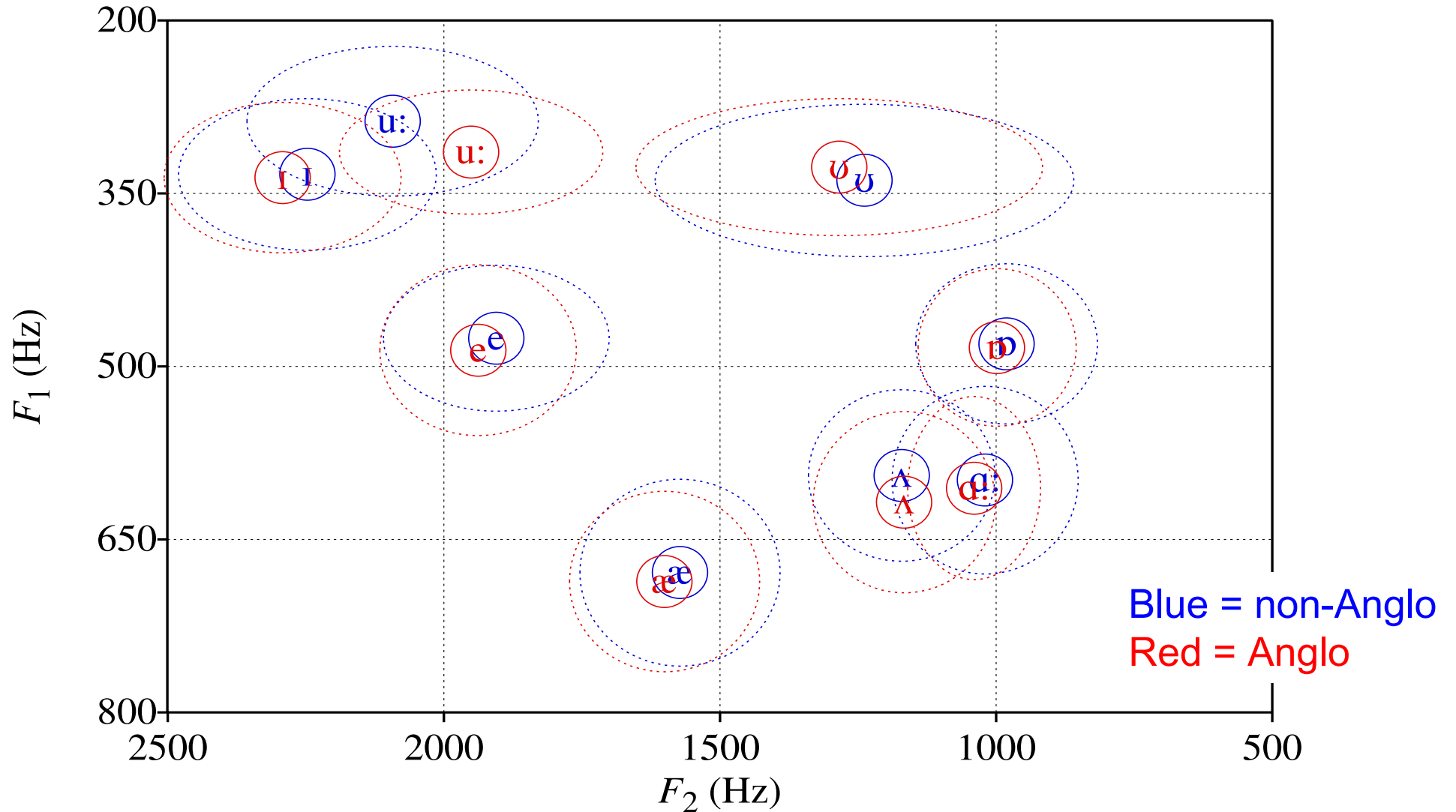
Monophthongs

- No change in vowel quality during the syllable
- KIT [ɪ]
- DRESS [e]
- TRAP [æ]
- STRUT [ʌ]
- LOT [ɒ]
- FOOT [ʊ]
- START [ɑː]
- GOOSE [uː]

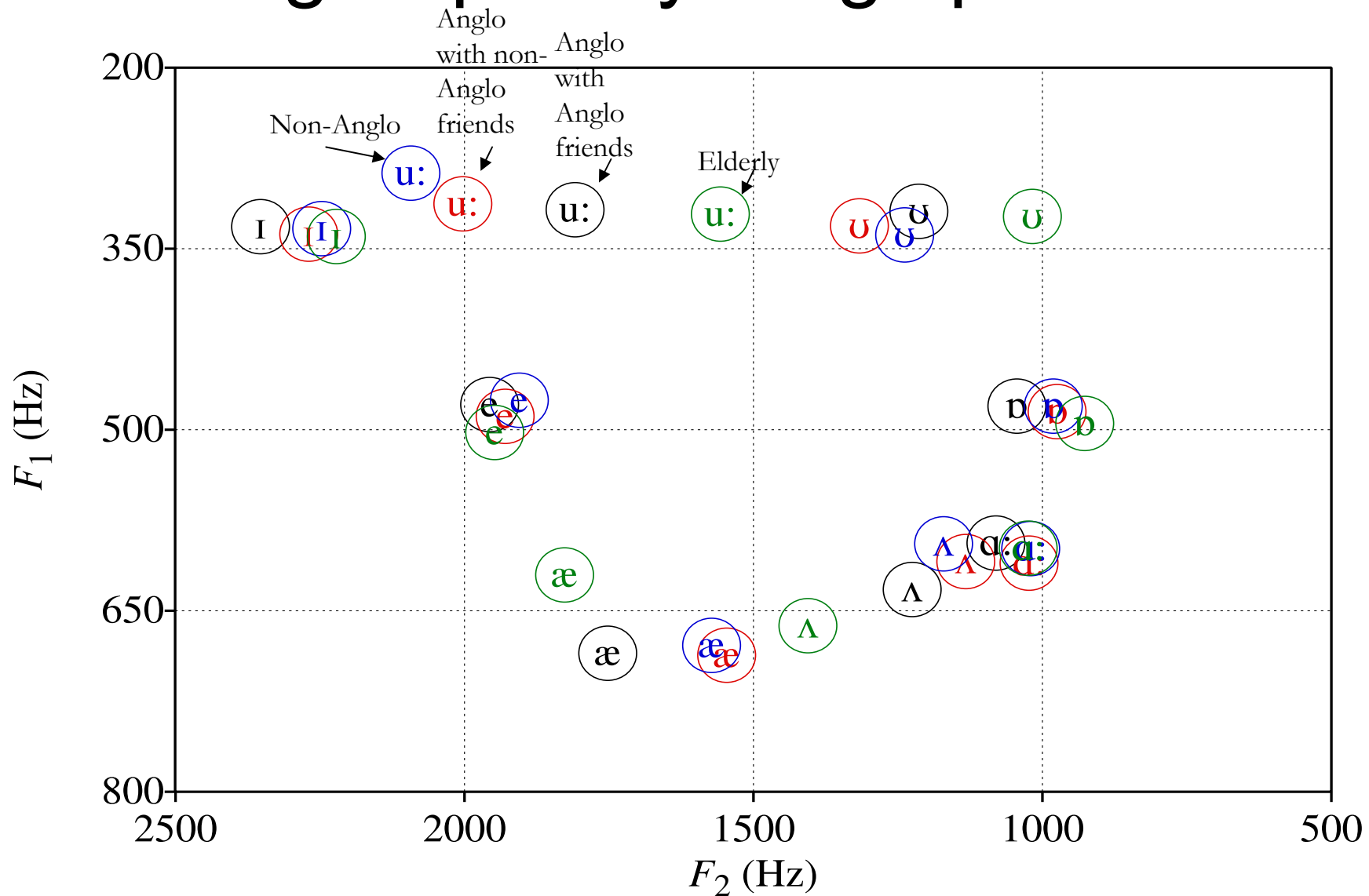
Hackney 2005



Hackney young Anglo and non-Anglo speakers



Hackney elderly speakers and groups of young speakers



Conclusion

Innovation with diffusion, e.g. changes spread out from a centre (TH-fronting, loss of H-dropping, possibly STRUT-backing and raising)

Innovation without diffusion (?extreme fronting of GOOSE)

Non-Anglo speakers seem to be in the lead in changes in the monophthongs