

# Endogenous linguistic change in inner-London teenage speech as the generator of innovations: Implications for models of innovation, levelling and diffusion

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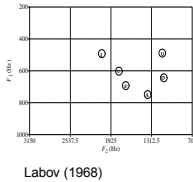


Linguistic innovators: The English of adolescents in London (ESRC RES-000-23-0680 )  
www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/index.htm

Writing about London in 1982, John Wells asserted that 'its working-class accent is today the most influential source of phonological innovation in England ...'. Until now this has remained an article of faith. Our project is the first large scale sociolinguistic study of London.

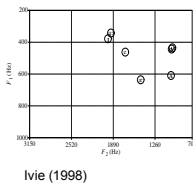
Acoustic analyses of newly available recordings suggest that working-class white Londoners born 1900–1940 have vowels matching older descriptions:

- ❖ Mid realisations for DRESS
- ❖ Front half-open TRAP
- ❖ Front-central open STRUT
- ❖ Back FOOT
- ❖ Back-central GOOSE



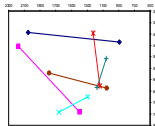
Newer recordings of teenagers of West Indian background born in London show some vowel qualities typical of West Indian English:

- ❖ Back FOOT vowel
- ❖ Back and raised STRUT vowel

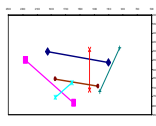


Working-class white Londoners born 1900–1940 have diphthongs matching older descriptions:

- ❖ Diphthong shifted (i.e. broad) diphthongs



Man born 1918



Woman born 1928

Legend for diphthong plots:  
 CHOICE (blue circle)  
 FACE (pink circle)  
 GOAT (red circle)  
 MOUTH (cyan circle)  
 PRICE (orange circle)  
 ROLLING (green circle)

Newer developments observed in South-east England:

change in MOUTH: [ɛʊ] → [ɛu] → [au]

change in PRICE: [ɔɪ] → [ɑɪ]

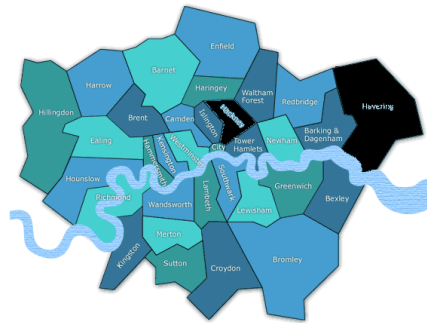
stability in FACE: broad diphthong of the type [ɛɪ]

- ❖ Does London follow this pattern as well?

- ❖ What evidence is there that linguistic innovations start in London and spread out from London?

- ❖ Does the high degree of multilingualism in London have any long-term impact on 'mainstream' English? (One-third of London's primary school children have a first language other than English)

- ❖ Is the use of a teenage 'multiracial vernacular English' a potential precursor of change in 'mainstream' English (i) beyond the teenage years and (ii) outside ethnically diverse networks?



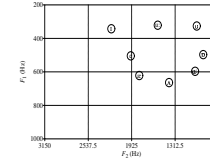
The project examines two boroughs in London, one in the inner, the other in the outer city

The boroughs were chosen:

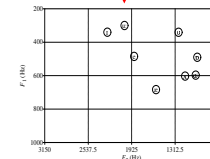
To reflect a high proportion of non-'Anglo' inhabitants of immigrant descent (inner London) vs. a low proportion (outer London)

To reflect a contrast between relatively closed networks (inner London: group and family based) and relatively open networks (outer London: more geographical and social mobility, reflecting out-migration and greater prosperity)

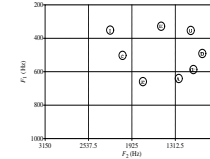
|  |                |                                  |                |
|--|----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| 32 students aged 16-19 in each borough                                   |                |                                  |                |
| 16 female  |                | 16 male                          |                |
| 8 white 'Anglo' native to London   | 8 other-ethnic | 8 white 'Anglo' native to London | 8 other-ethnic |
| 8 working-class Anglo adults aged 65-80 (4 women, 4 men) in each borough |                |                                  |                |



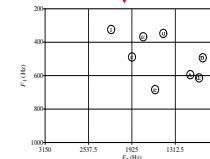
Hackney elderly informants



Hackney young informants

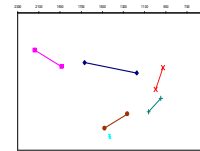


Havering elderly informants

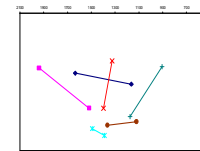


Havering young informants

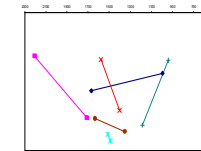
- ❖ TRAP: backing
- ❖ STRUT: backing and raising
- ❖ TRAP and STRUT backing is more advanced in London than in South East periphery (e.g. Milton Keynes, Reading)
- ❖ FOOT: fronted in Havering, but not fronted in Hackney
- ❖ GOOSE: strongly fronted in Hackney, less so in Havering
- ❖ Effects of ethnicity?



Brian, Caribbean



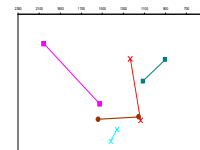
Jack, Anglo



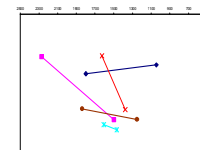
Laura, Anglo

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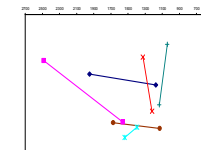
Hackney young informants



John, mixed heritage



Ollie, Anglo



Donna, Anglo

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Havering young informants

- ❖ PRICE: fronting and lowering of onset among Hackney and Havering youth - reversal of diphthong shift, often a near-monophthong among Hackney young people, especially non-Anglo
- ❖ MOUTH: remains low-front near-monophthong for all speakers - stability of diphthong-shifted variant over time and across ethnicities. Little sign of levelled south-eastern [aʊ]
- ❖ FACE: reversal of diphthong shift to a front closing diphthong, most strongly among non-Anglo
- ❖ GOAT: fronted offset (Milton Keynes' variant) OR a back close monophthong