Reversing 'drift': changes in the London diphthong system

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

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'Drift' in New Zealand English

- Trudgill (2004): PRICE and MOUTH have 'diphthong-shifted' variants giving rise to pronunciations such as [ɔɪ] and [ɛə]

- NZE inherited the tendency towards diphthong shifting, not the forms themselves

- Among the oldest New Zealanders recorded, born 1850–69, 68% have at least some diphthong shifting, while for those born 1870–1889 the figure is 81%

- Phonetically, the shift gets more marked with the later-born informants

Diphthong Shift in London

- As a typologically similar variety, London English would be expected to parallel New Zealand English, hence:

- More diphthong shift in younger speakers

- If there is not more diphthong shift we would need to look for particular social motivations blocking it

Diphthong Shift

- According to Wells (1982), in diphthong shift, front closing diphthongs shift anti-clockwise, while back closing diphthongs shift clockwise:

- PRICE from [aɪ] to [ɑɪ]
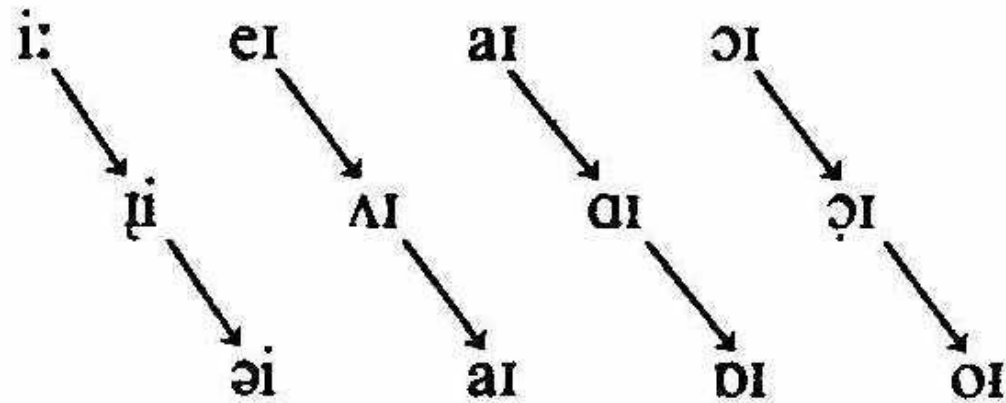
- MOUTH from [ɑʊ] to [æʊ]

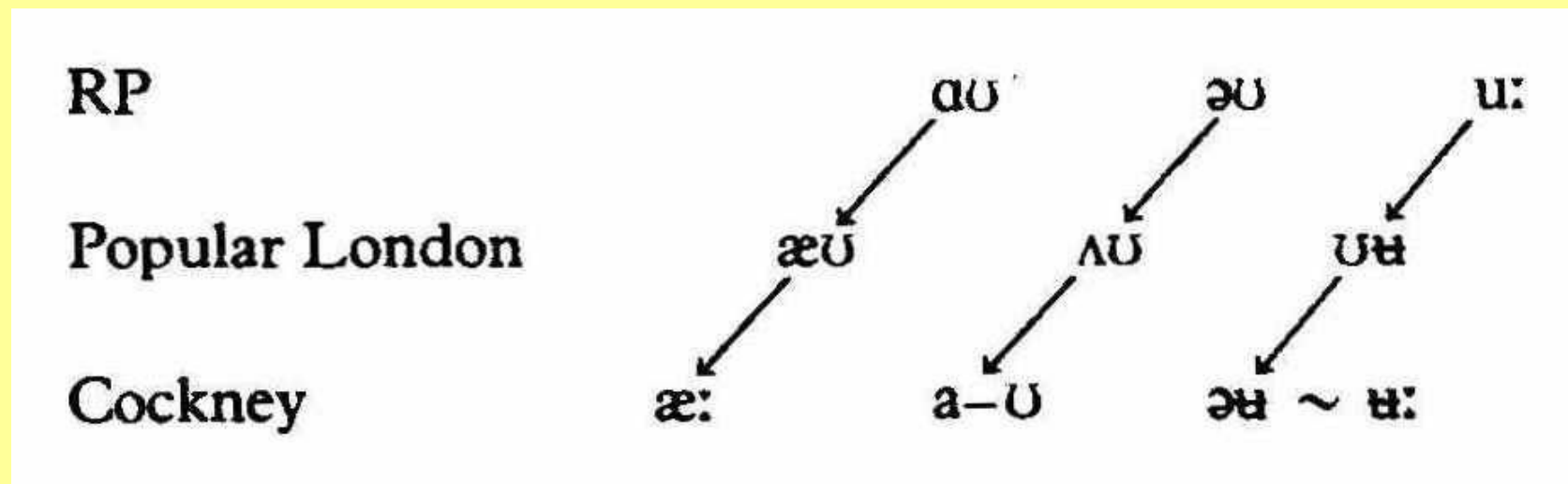# Diphthong Shift (Wells 1982: 308, 310)
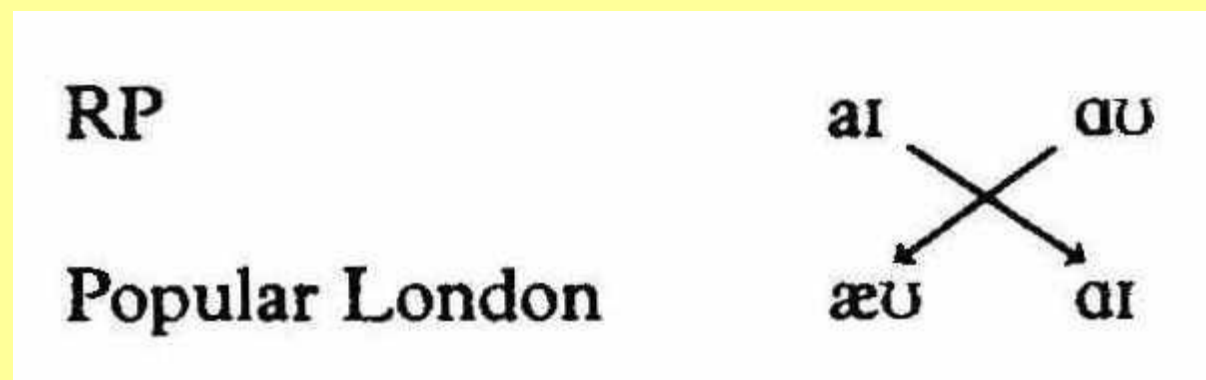
1. Front-closing diphthongs

RP	iː	eɪ	aɪ	ɔɪ
Popular London	ĭi	ʌɪ	ɑɪ	oɪ
Cockney	əi	aɪ	ɒɪ	oɪ

2. Back-closing diphthongs

RP	ɑʊ	əʊ	uː
Popular London	æʊ	ʌʊ	ʊɹ
Cockney	æː	a–ʊ	əɹ ~ ɹː

3. PRICE-MOUTH crossover

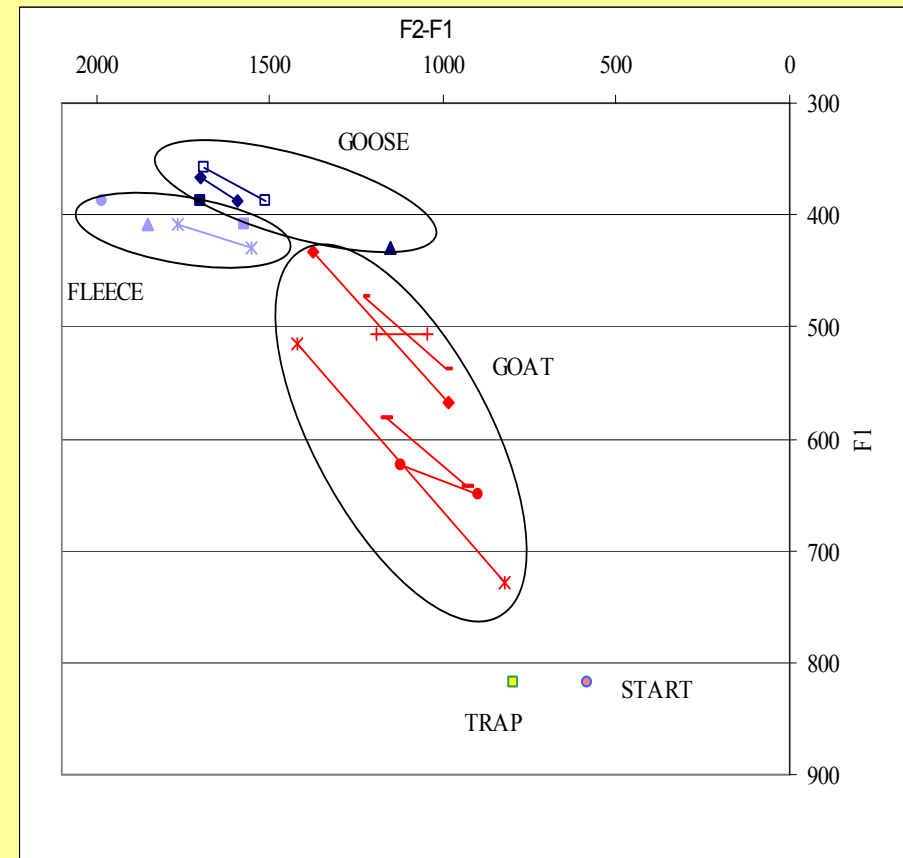|		
RP	aɪ	ɑʊ
Popular London	æʊ	ɑɪ

GOAT in Reading and Milton Keynes
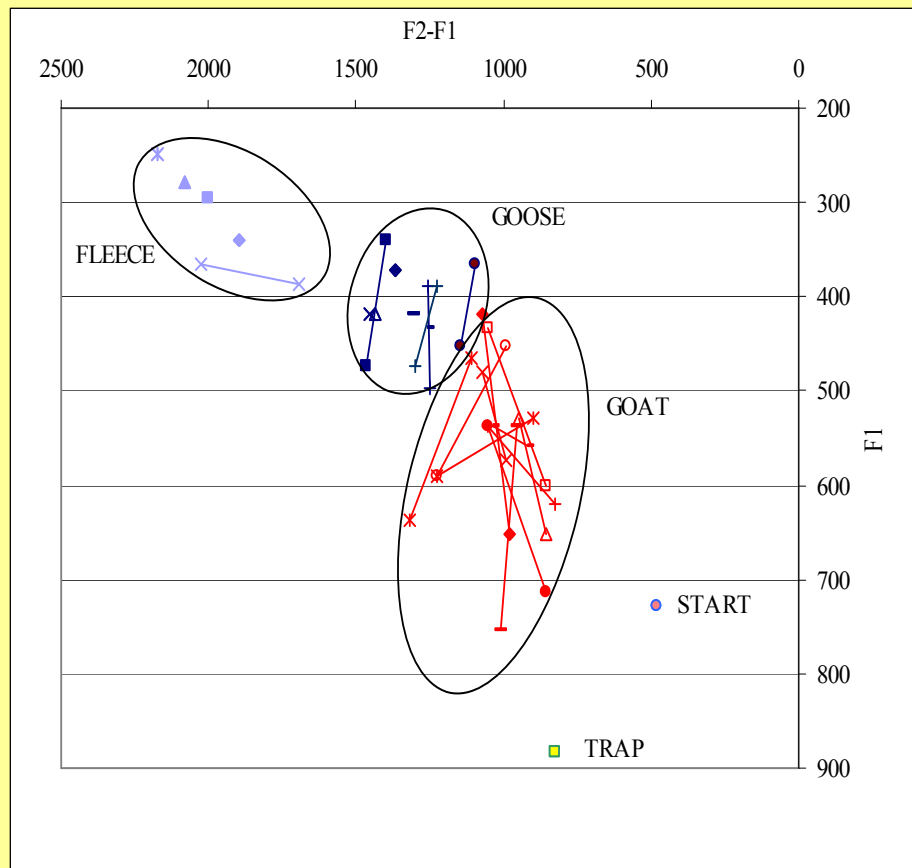
Man, b1915, Reading

Boy, b1981, Reading

Percentage use of variants of /au/ (MOUTH), Milton Keynes Working Class, interview style

	[εʉ]	[εɪ]	[εː]	[aˑə]	[æʊ]	[aʊ]
Survey of English Dialects (SED) informants, 1950-60s (Orton & Wakelin, 1968)	✔					
Elderly (2f, 2m)	63.2	25.6	9.8	0	1.2	0
Women age 25-40 (n=48)	0	0	11.7	17.2	38.6	31.5
Girls age 14/15 (n=8)	0	0	0	5.9	4.7	88.8
Boys age 14/15 (n=8)	0	0	0	12.3	3.8	83.1

Percentage use of variants of /au/ (MOUTH), Reading Working Class, interview style

	[ɛʊ̈]	[ɛɪ]	[ɛː]	[aːə]	[æʊ]	[aʊ]
Survey of English Dialects (SED) informants, 1950-60s (Orton & Wakelin, 1968)	✓					
Elderly (2f, 2m)	53.5	38.1	3.3	0	4.1	0.7
Girls age 14 (n=8)	0	2.3	0	8.0	0	90.4
Boys age 14 (n=8)	3.8	3.2	0	5.7	0	87.1

- Replacement of both rural and urban local forms by an RP-like [aʊ] – perhaps a levelled, regionally and socially unmarked form

- Difficulties for diphthong shift interpretation:
  - Shift from [ɛʉ] to [aʊ] appears to reverse it
  - Evidence from Britain (2002) that [ɛʉ] may be a pre-shifted diphthong anyway, being widespread in rural C19 dialects

Percentage use of variants of /ai/ (PRICE), Milton Keynes Working Class, interview style

	[a̲ɪ]	[ɐ̟ɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌ̟ɪ]	[ʌɪ]
Elderly age 70-80 (2f, 2m)	0	0	24.4	56.6	15.3	3.4
Girls age 14/15 (n=8)	25.4	44.6	29.2	0.5	0	0
Boys age 14/15 (n=8)	1.0	38.0	60.0	0	0	0

Percentage use of variants of /ai/ (PRICE), Reading Working Class, interview style

	[a̠ɪ]	[ɑ̟ɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌ̟ɪ]	[ʌɪ]
Elderly age 70-80 (2f, 2m)	0	12.4	47.8	21.8	1.7	15.7
Girls age 14/15 (n=8)	2.8	21.2	45.1	21.1	4.3	5.1
Boys age 14/15 (n=8)	0.6	19.1	63.7	13.7	2.7	0

- Replacement of widely stereotyped [ɔɪ] by a regionally and socially unmarked [ɑ̈ɪ]~[ɑɪ]
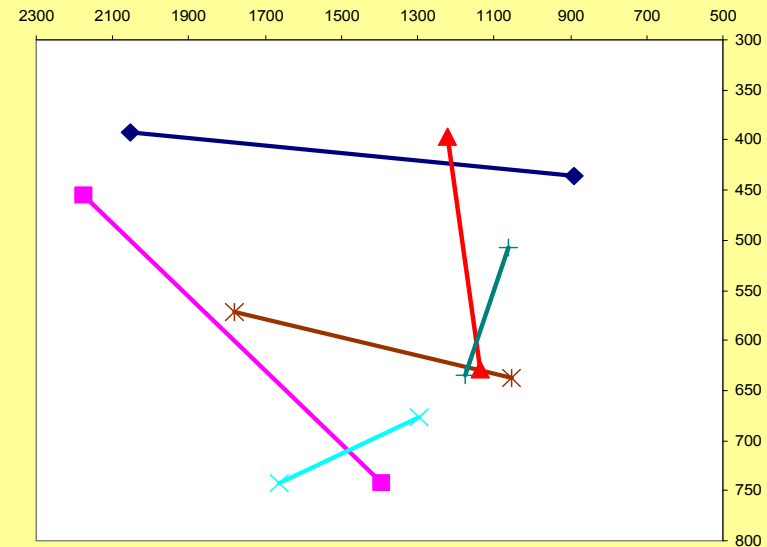
- Uncontroversially a reversal of diphthong shift

- change in MOUTH (onset being lowered and backed to a low-front position):

    [ɛʊ̞]   →   [æʊ]   →   [aʊ]

    (rural S.E. →   urban S.E.   →   'levelled
                                                        southern'?)

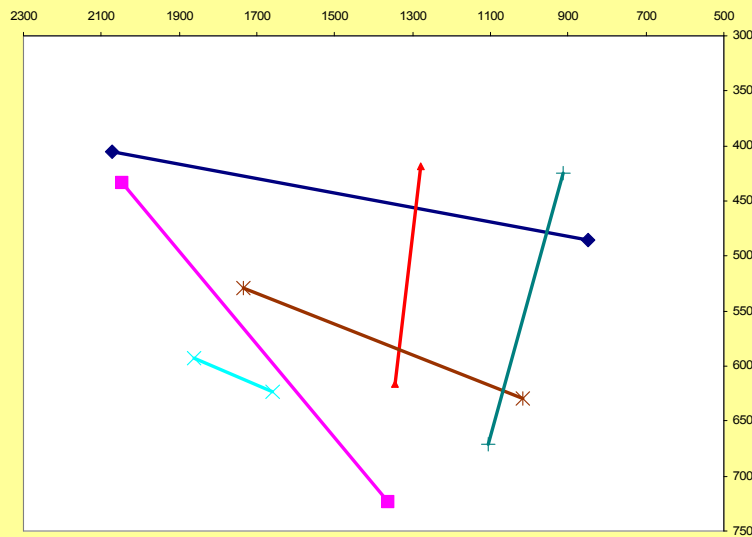- change in PRICE: [ɔɪ] → [ɑɪ]

- stability in FACE – broad diphthong of the type [æ̞ɪ]

Diphthongs in new London data
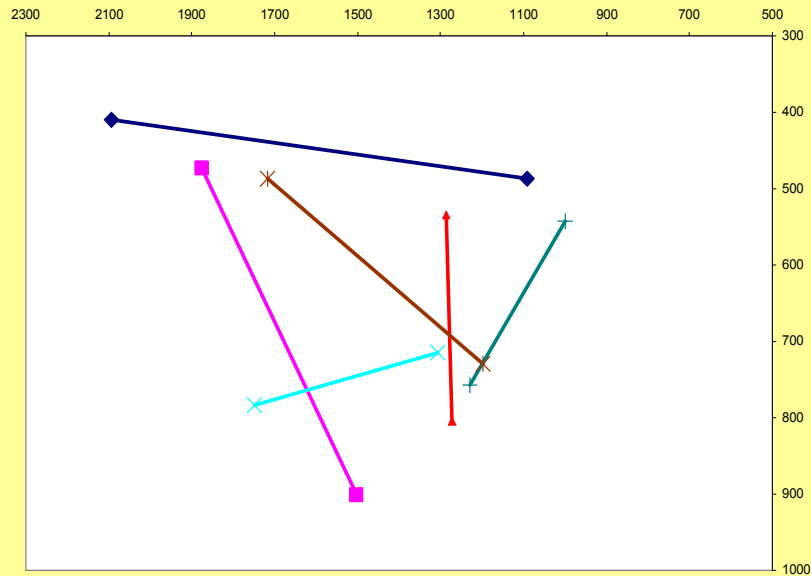
Elderly informants in Hackney and Havering

Legend: CHOICE, FACE, GOAT, MOUTH, PRICE, ROLLING
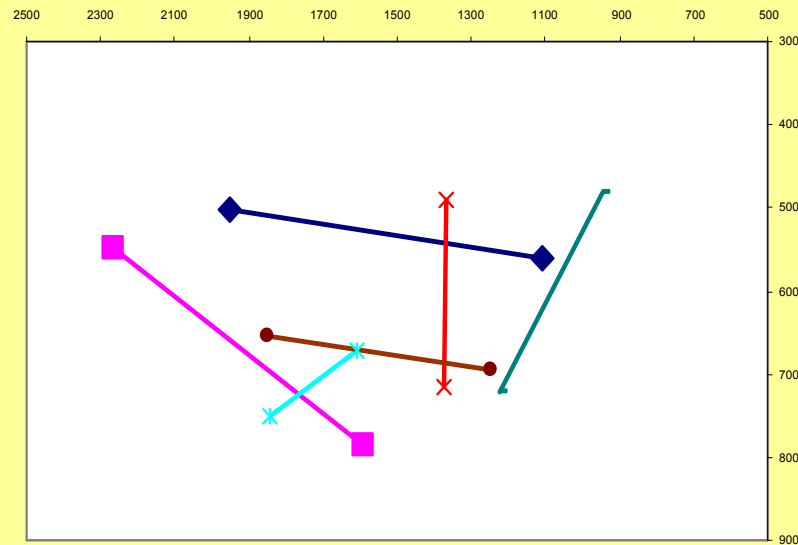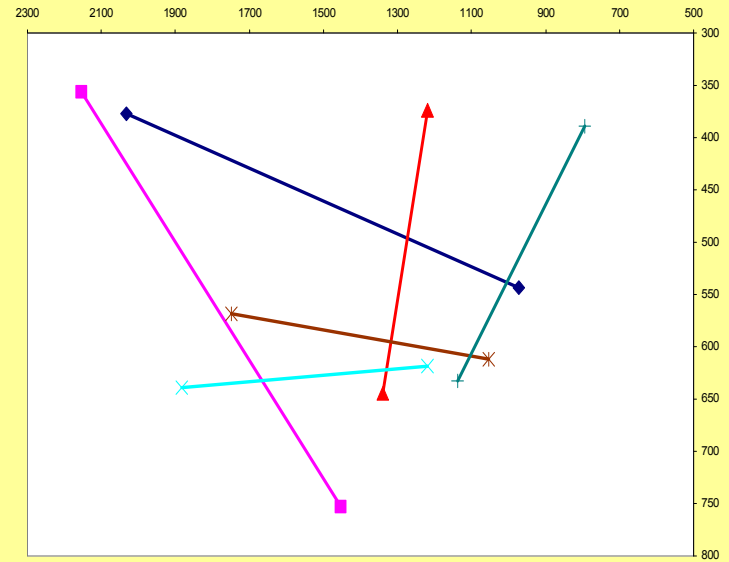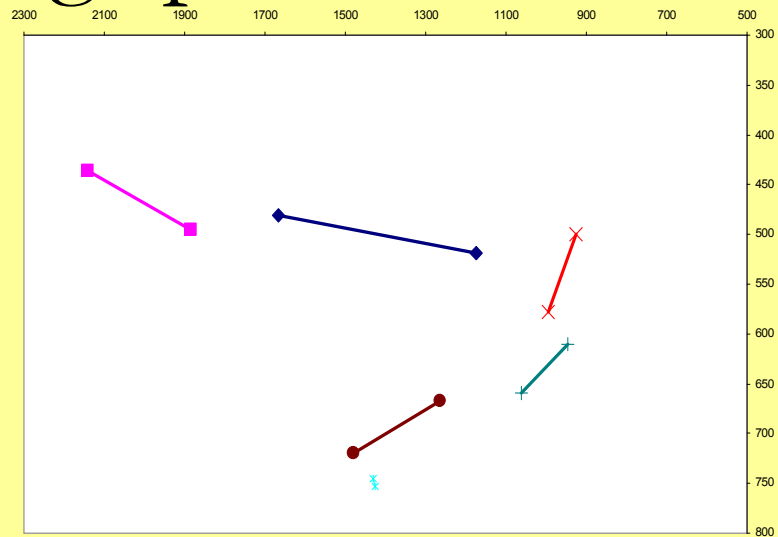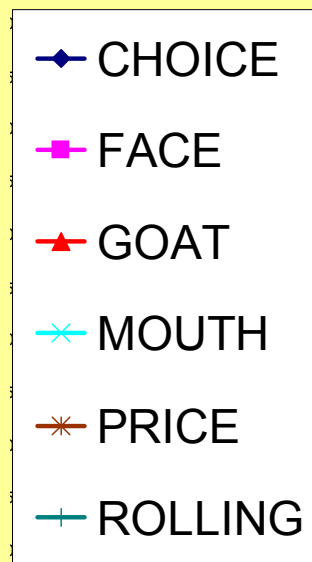
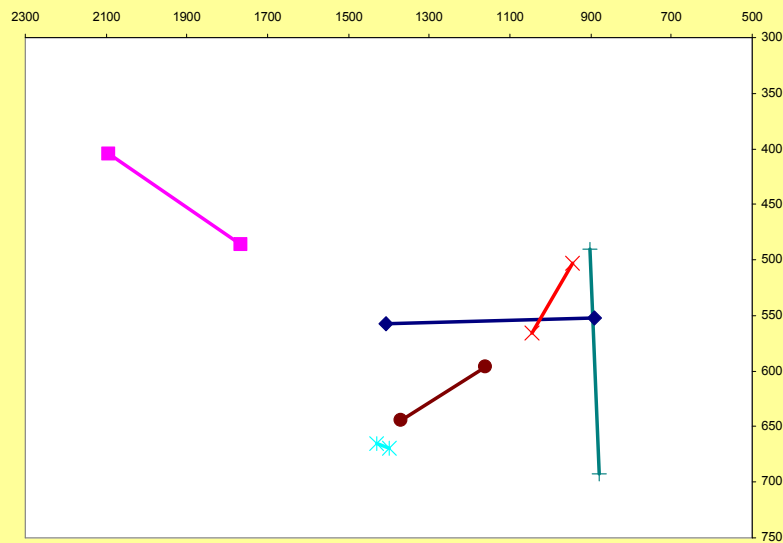Mr S, b1927, Havering

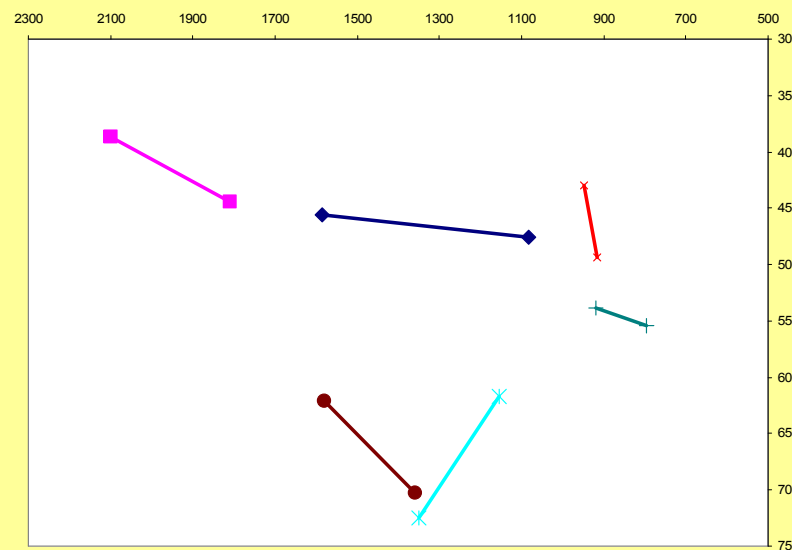Mrs S, b1935, Havering
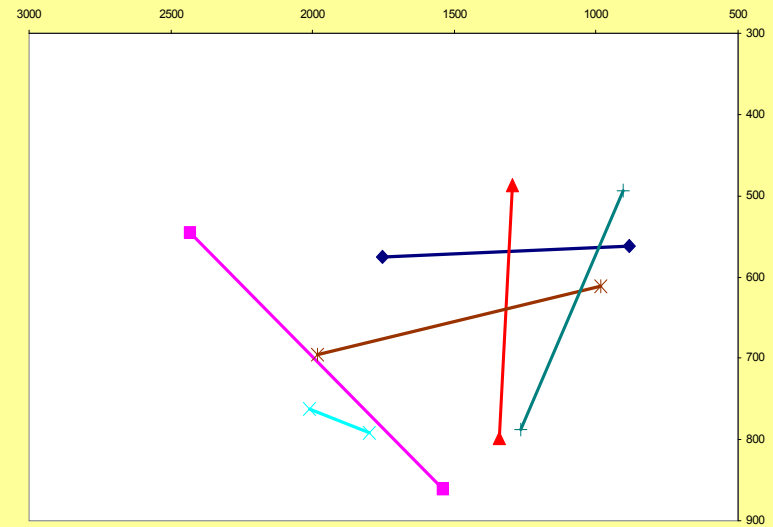
Mrs W, b1943, Havering

Hackney young speakers
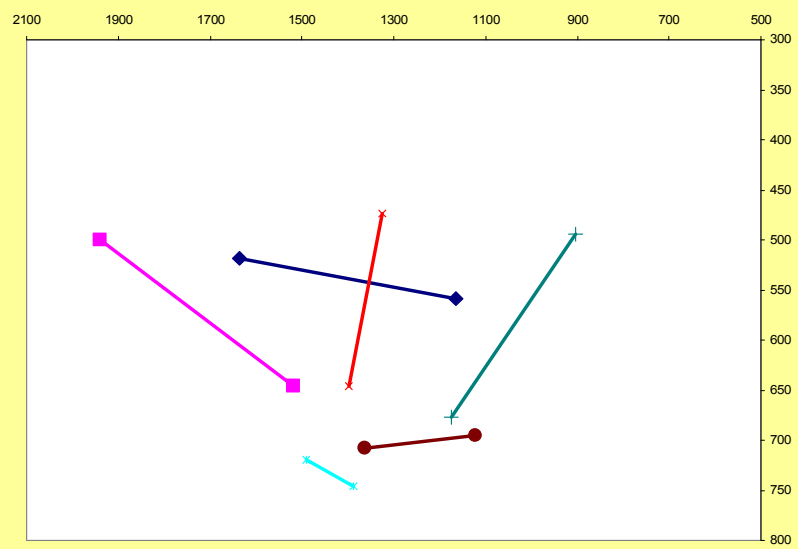

Brian, Caribbean

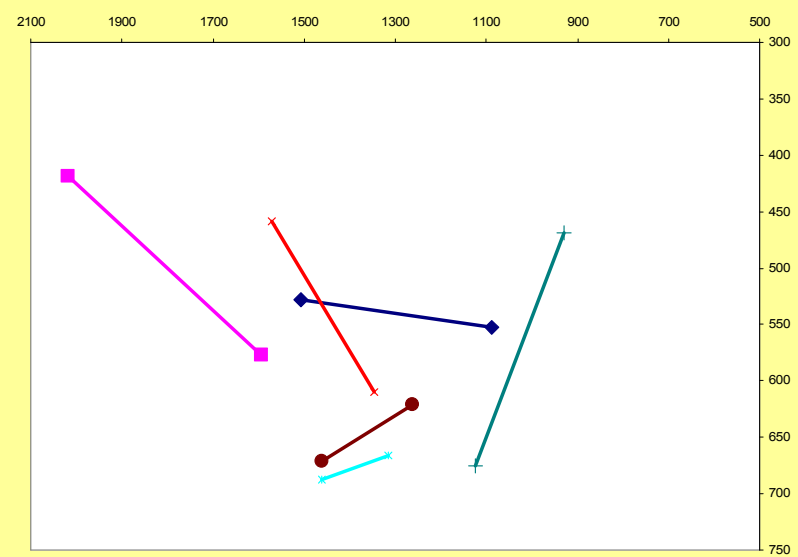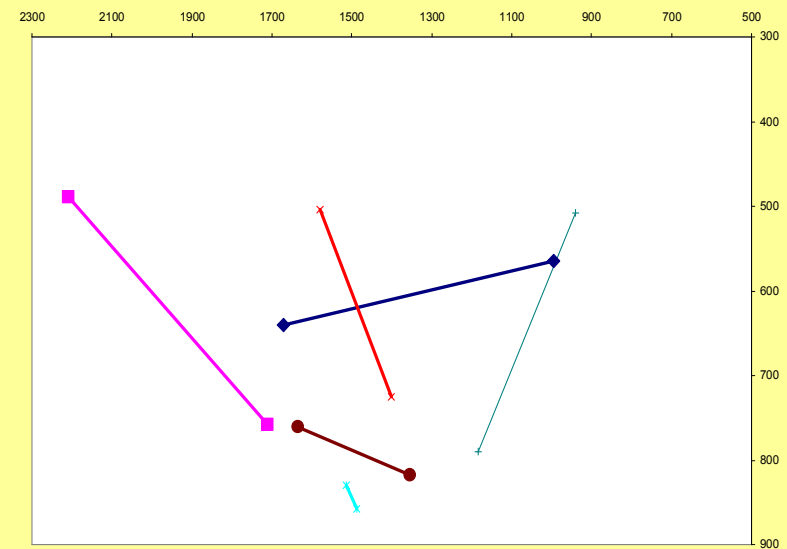Alan, Middle Eastern

Adam, West African

Legend:
- CHOICE
- FACE
- GOAT
- MOUTH
- PRICE
- ROLLING

Legend:
- CHOICE
- FACE
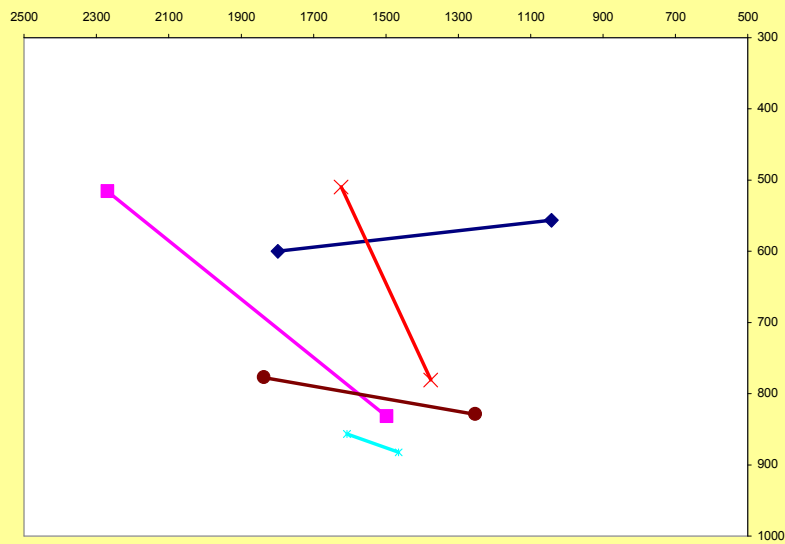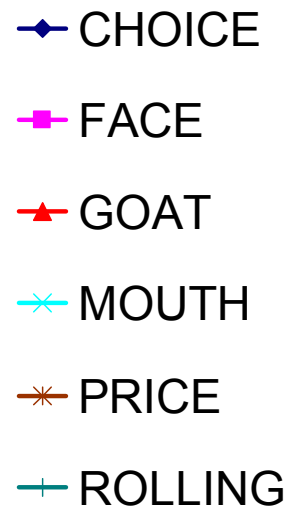- GOAT
- MOUTH
- PRICE
- ROLLING

Jack, white British

Mark, mixed race

Laura, white British

Havering young speakers

Ollie, mixed race
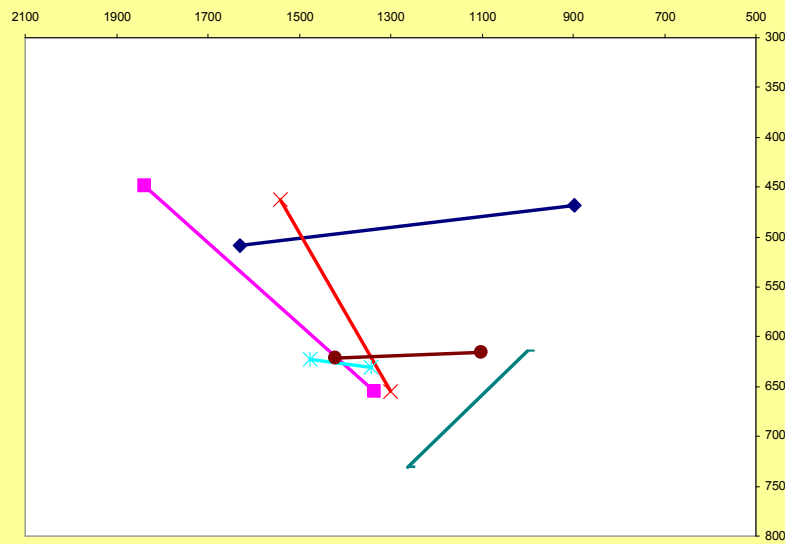
Carl, white British
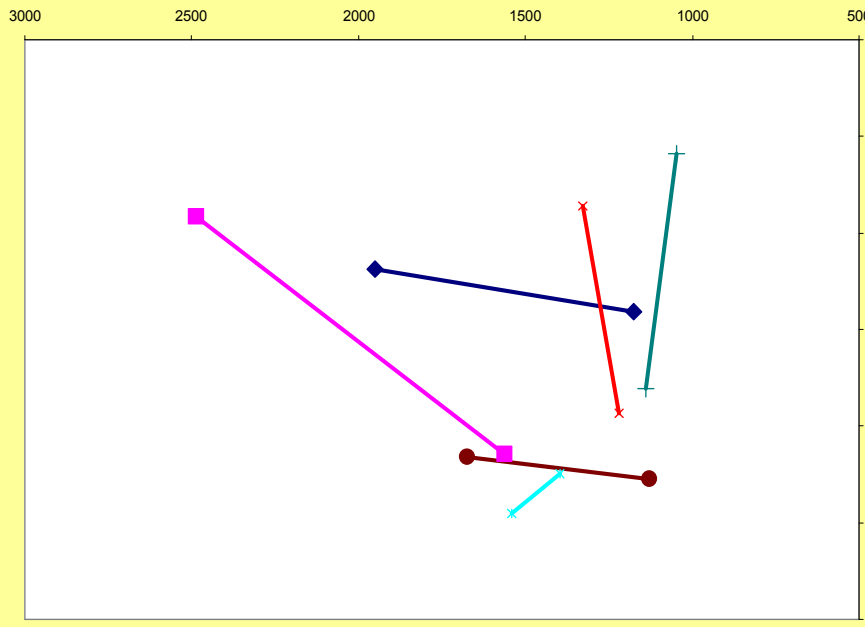
Donna, white British   Chloe, white British
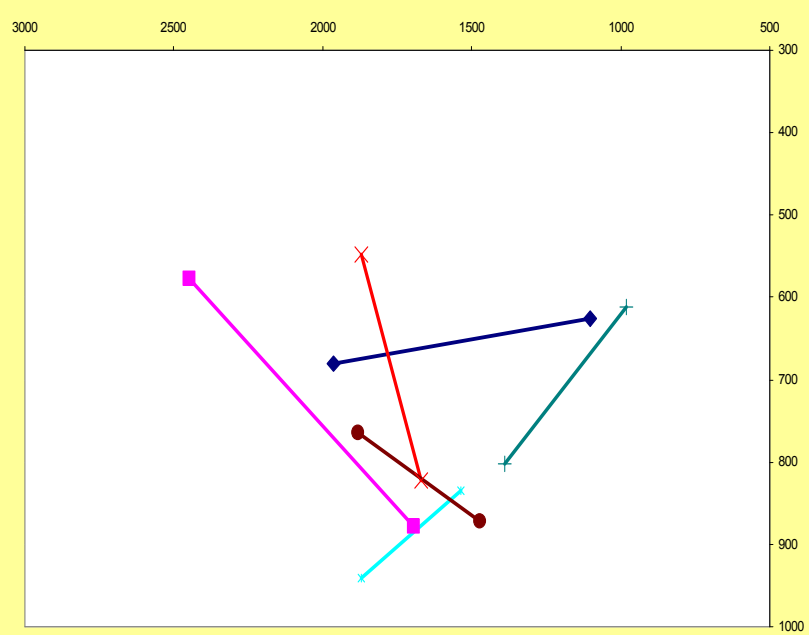
Summary of recent London vowel changes

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

In detail I: ethnicity and gender

- GOAT
  - fronted offset among girls and in Havering across ethnicities
  - Hackney boys: monophthongisation (non-white), fronted offset (white) or 'traditional' non-fronted diphthong (white)
- FACE onsets
  - high-front (non-white boys)
  - half-open (the rest)
  - open (elderly)
- PRICE
  - monophthong front onset (non-white boys)
  - diphthong low-central onset (Havering youth)
  - diphthong raised-back onset (elderly)

General pattern

- Non-white boys in Hackney are in the lead in the reversal of diphthong shift

- White boys follow closely behind

- Girls and white Havering boys bring up the rear

- Girls and Havering speakers tend to use levelled 'Milton Keynes' variants, though not [aʊ] for MOUTH

In detail II: types of changes

	FACE	PRICE	MOUTH	GOAT
Monophthongisation	Hackney NW	Hackney NW	Hackney Havering Elderly	Hackney NW
Onset raising	Hackney W Havering			
Onset fronting		Hackney W		
Onset lowering		Havering MK/Reading	MK/Reading	
Offset fronting				MK/Reading Havering Hackney girls

W=white   NW=non-white

Innovation   Anti-drift   Levelling

Conclusion

- For FACE, PRICE and GOAT, the reversal of diphthong shift is more advanced in Hackney than in Havering

- Non-white boys seem to be strongly in the lead

- Developments in London and in the South East differ, but most run counter to the idea of 'drift'

- All these developments lead to:
  - divergence/innovation in inner London
  - levelling in the periphery – Havering, Reading, MK
  - the outer periphery, e.g. MK, in the lead in levelling

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