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/linguistic/innovators/index.htm

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

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 lower 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)

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

- Diphthong shifted (i.e. broad) diphthongs

Newer developments observed in South-east England:

- Change in MOUTH: ['æ] → [æ] → [iː]
- Change in PRICE: [iː] → [iː]
- Stability in FACE: broad diphthong of the type [aɪ]

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 teenager ‘multiracial vernacular English’ a potential precursor of change in ‘mainstream’ English? (i) beyond the teenage years and (ii) outside ethnically diverse networks?

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 Hackney, but not so in Haringey
GOOSE: strongly fronted in Hackney, less so in Haringey

Effects of ethnicity?

Brian, Caribbean
Jack, Anglo
Laurie, Anglo

John, mixed heritage
Olive, Anglo
Donna, Anglo

Diphthong shift in Hackney and Haringey youth - reversal of diphthong shift, often a near-monomorpholog among Hackney young people, especially non-Anglo
MOUTH remains low-front near-monomorpholog for all speakers – stability of diphthong-shifted variant over time and across ethnicities. Little sign of levelled south-eastern [iː]
FACE: reversal of diphthong shift to a front closing diphthong, most strongly among non-Anglo
GOAT: fronted offset (‘Willon Keyenes’ variant) or a back close monomorpholog