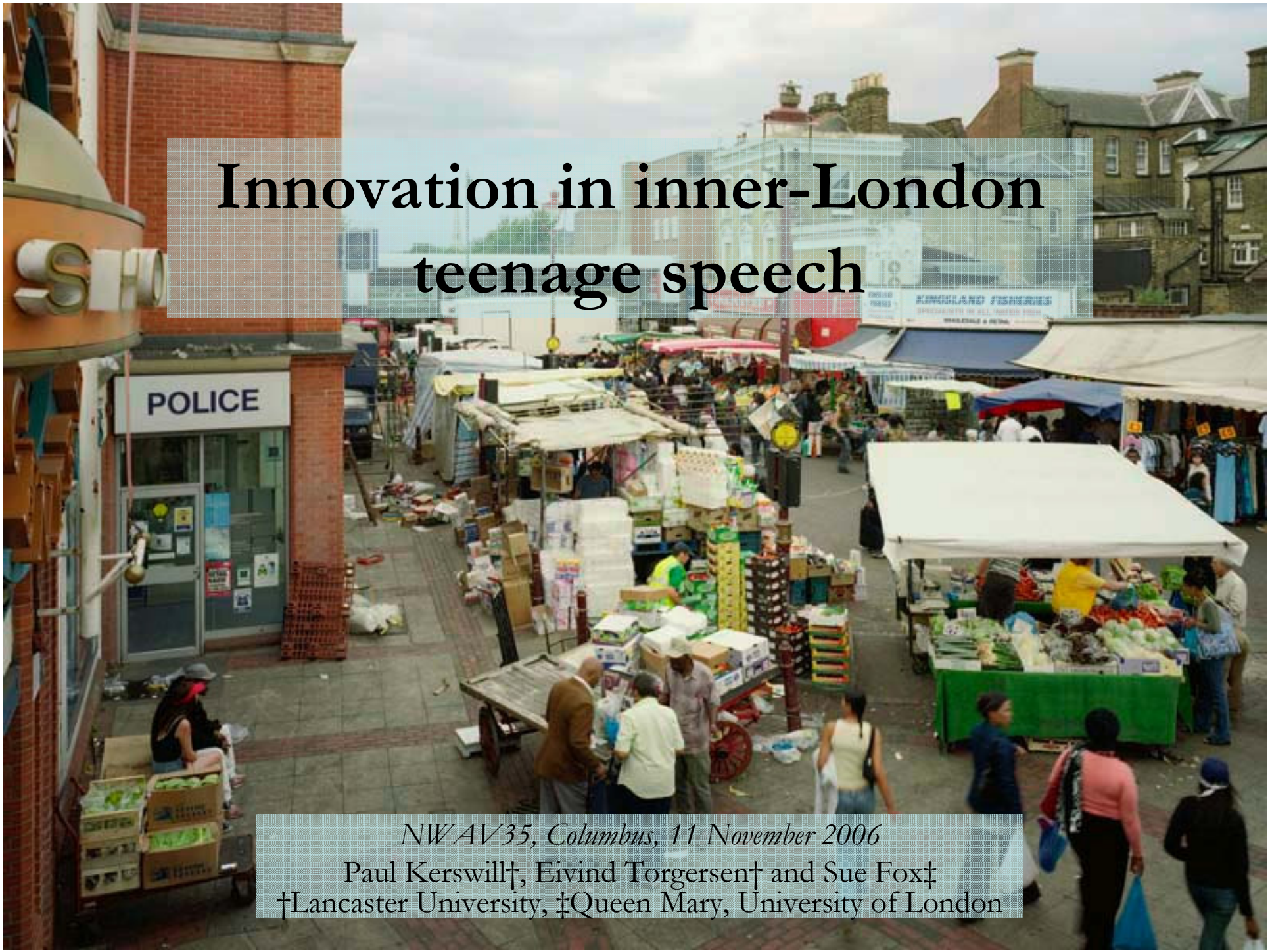

Innovation in inner-London teenage speech

NWAV35, Columbus, 11 November 2006

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†Lancaster University, ‡Queen Mary, University of London

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

Jenny Cheshire, Sue Fox
(Queen Mary, University of London)

Paul Kerswill, Eivind Torgersen
(Lancaster University)

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

Introduction

- Background – 1: London is the largest city by far in the UK, and for at least 200 years innovations have been claimed to start there and then spread outwards, by geographical diffusion: rural dialects in the south-east are much less conservative than those elsewhere.
- Background – 2: We've done a number of studies in the London region looking at the accent/dialect of young people in Milton Keynes, Reading, Ashford. We identified a number of changes there, and argued that the results were largely compatible not with a diffusion model, but with a levelling model – i. e. the same changes happening in different places at the same time. But there remained the possibility that, in fact, all this was due to diffusion from London.
- Background – 3: And indeed John Wells had written back in 1982 that London was the source of linguistic innovation in Britain and perhaps further a field.
- General RQ: Given our results, and Wells's comments, we need to look for evidence to adjudicate between a levelling process and a diffusion process. To do this, we need to look for the origin of these changes precisely in those groups in London which are thought to be most innovative: young people generally, ethnic minority young people especially, and young people with relatively high degrees of contact and mobility.

Project design

- 16 elderly Londoners
- 105 17 year old Londoners
- from inner and outer boroughs
- female, male
- “Anglo” and “Non-Anglo”
- Free interviews in pairs
- 1.1m words transcribed

HERTFORDSHIRE
= LONDON BOROUGHS
BUCKS
ESSEX
BERKSHIRE
KENT
SURREY
Enfield
Barnet
Harrow
Haringey
Waltham Forest
Redbridge
Havering
Hillingdon
Brent
Camden
Isling-ton
Hackney
Barking
Newham
Ealing
West-Minster
Tower Hamlets
City
Ham-mer-smith
Ken. & Chel.
South-wark
Greenwich
Hounslow
Lambeth
Bexley
Richmond
Wandsworth
Lewisham
Merton
Kingston
Bromley
Sutton
Croydon
SCALE
0
Miles
10
0
Km
10

London and three "London periphery" towns

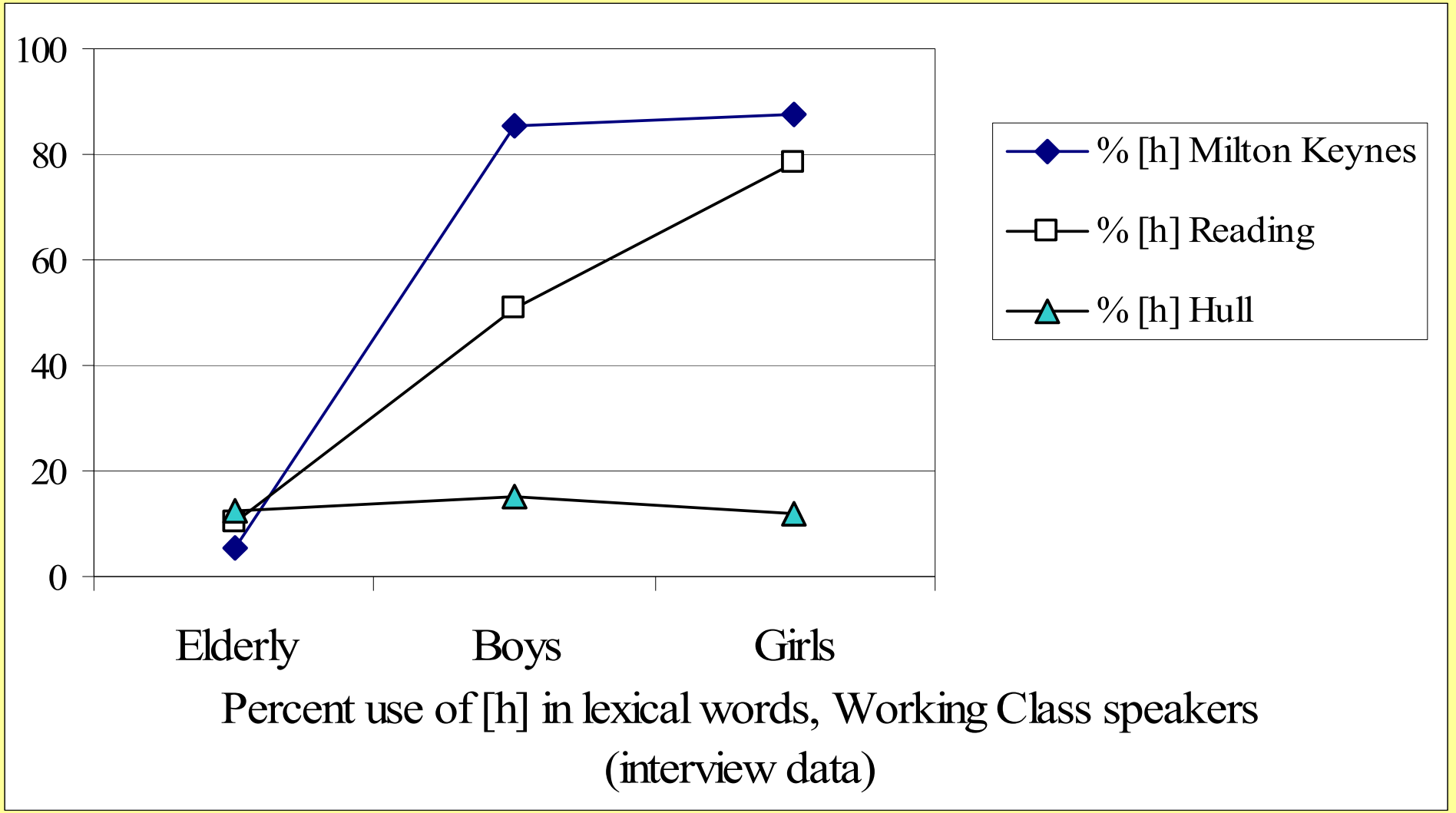
Findings from south-east England ("London periphery")

- Reduced amount of H-dropping
- Increased amount of TH-fronting
- GOAT-fronting to [əʏ]
- "RP" variant in MOUTH [aʊ]
- Low-back onset of PRICE [ɑ̟ɪ]
- Fronting of GOOSE to [ʏː]
- Fronting of FOOT to [ʊ̟] or [ɵ]
- Lowering and backing of TRAP to [a̠]
- Backing of STRUT to [ɑ̟] or [ʌ̟]

Research questions

- Can we find these features in London teenage English? If so, are they more advanced there than in the London periphery? They should be, given that the diffusion model depends on time elapsing, and on the fact that we are now recording teenagers some 10 years after the London Periphery studies

Reduced H-dropping in London periphery



Percent use of [h] in lexical words, Working Class speakers
(interview data)

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).

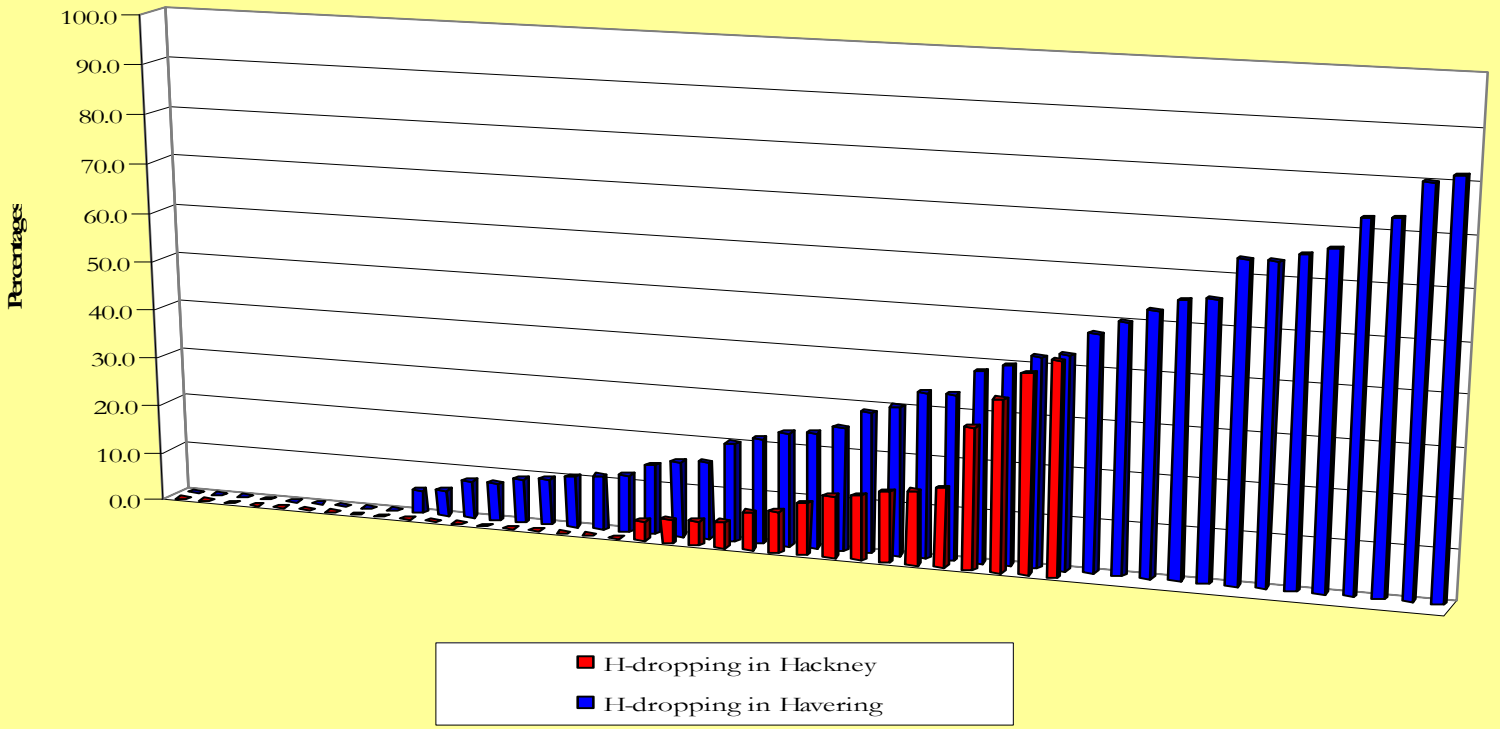
Possbible explanations for changes

- Innovation
  - endogenous: from within the community
- Diffusion
  - from centre to periphery: directional
  - exogenous change (contact-induced)
- Levelling (or supralocalisation)
  - Changes affect a whole region at once, with no directionality
  - again, exogenous change (contact-induced)

H-dropping young speakers in London

Hackney 9%

Havering 32%



H-dropping - summary

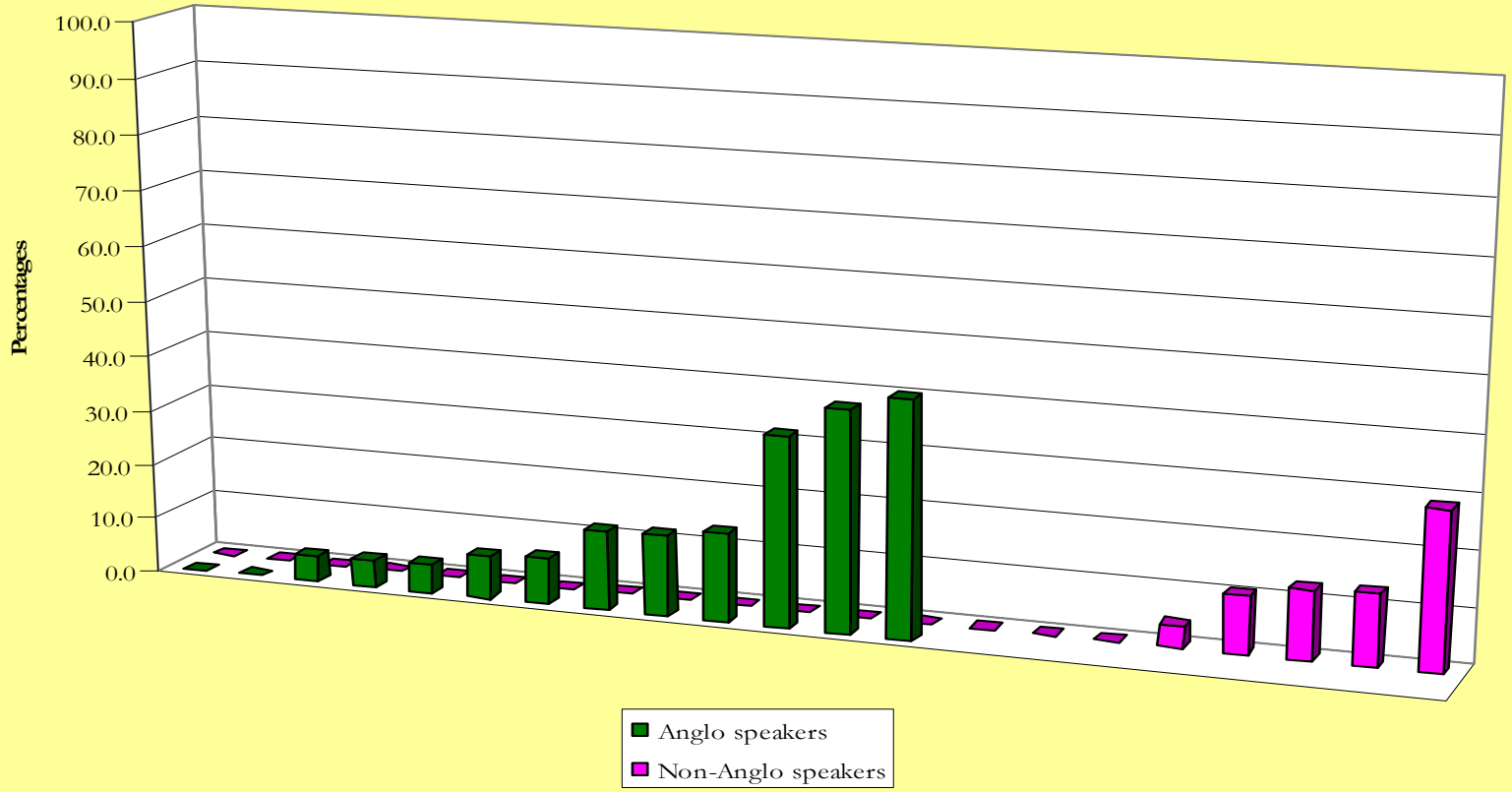
MK & Reading elderly (1995)	MK 14 year olds (1995)	Reading 14 year olds (1995)	Hackney 17 year olds (2005)	Havering 17 year olds (2005)
92%	14%	35%	9%	32%

Percent 'dropped' H in lexical words (interviews)

H-dropping in Hackney

Anglo 16%

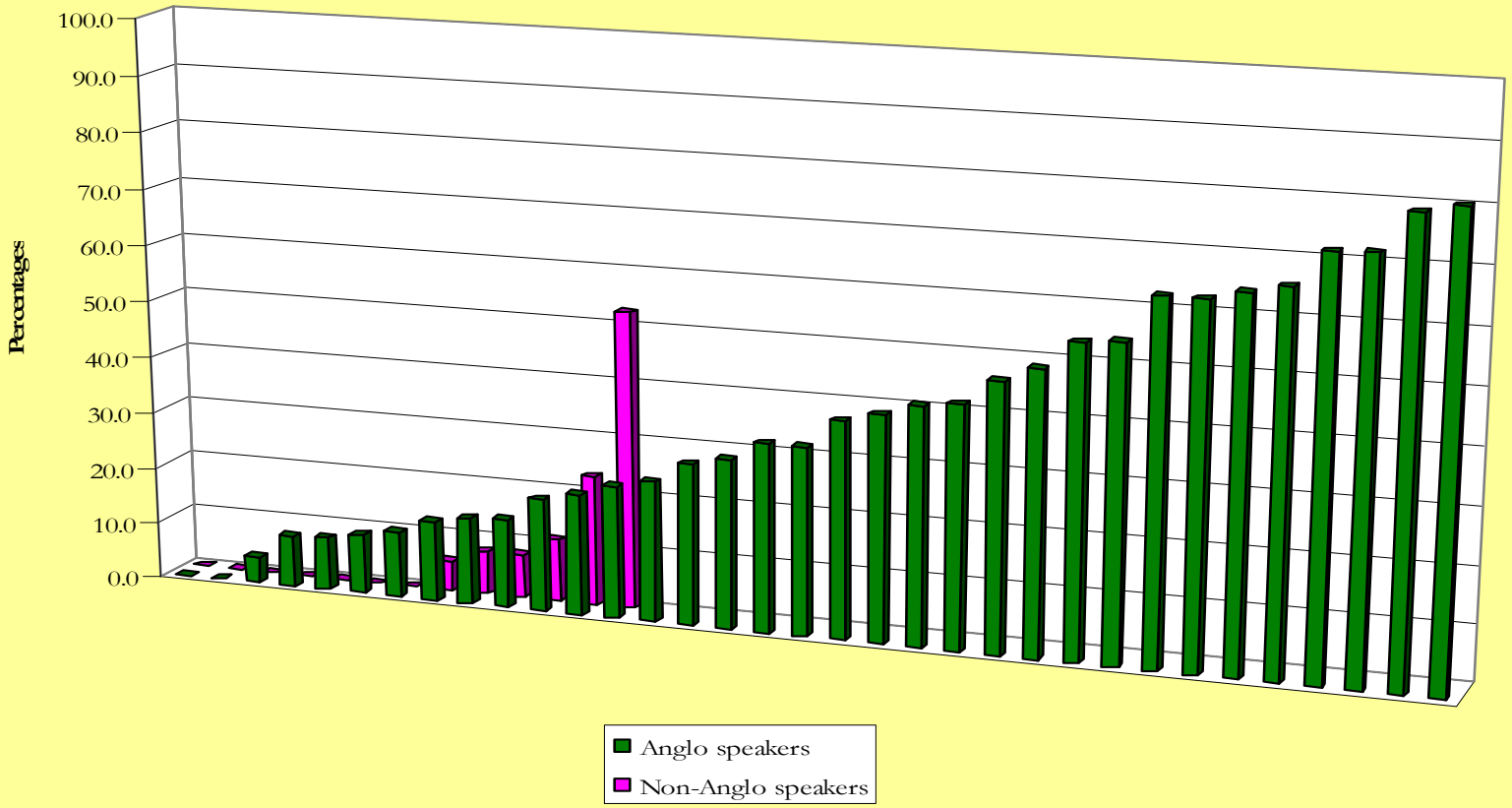
Non-Anglo 4%



H-dropping in Havering

Anglo 40%

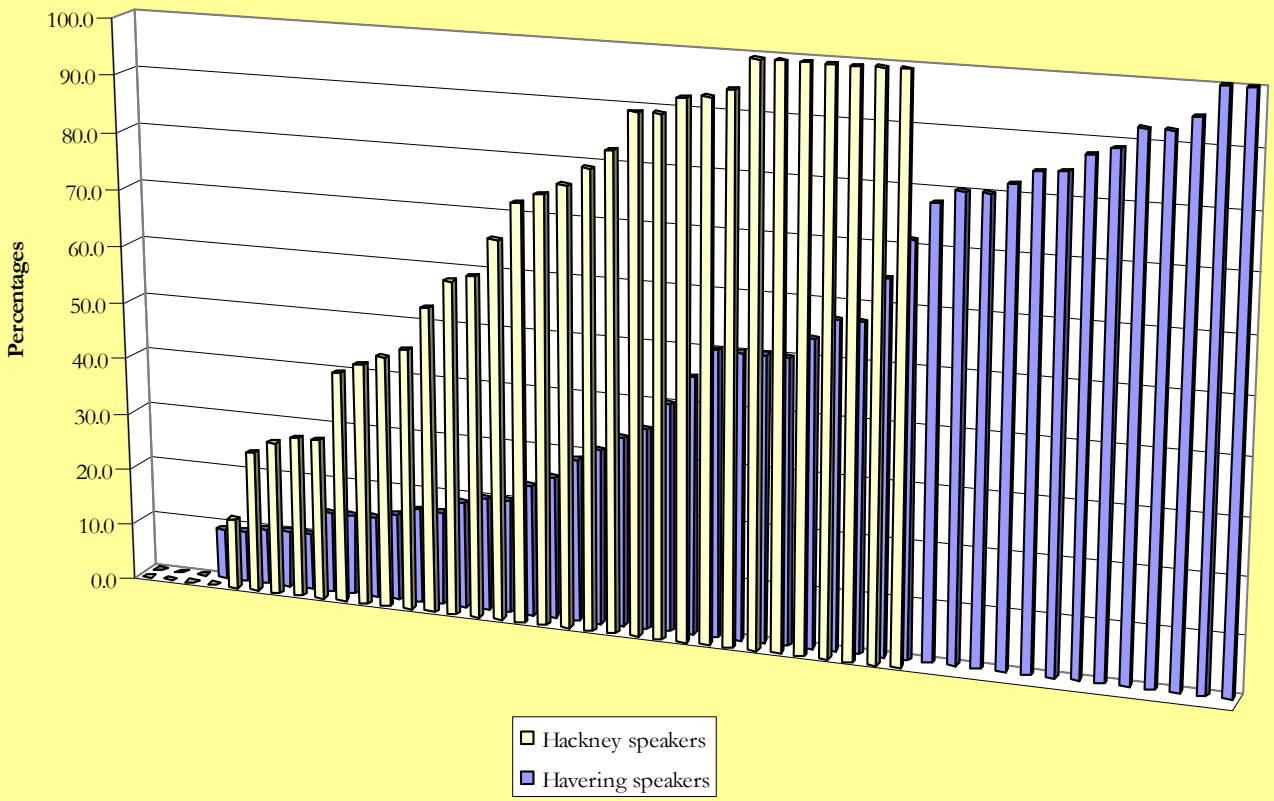
Non-Anglo 9%



K-backing young speakers in London

Hackney 67%

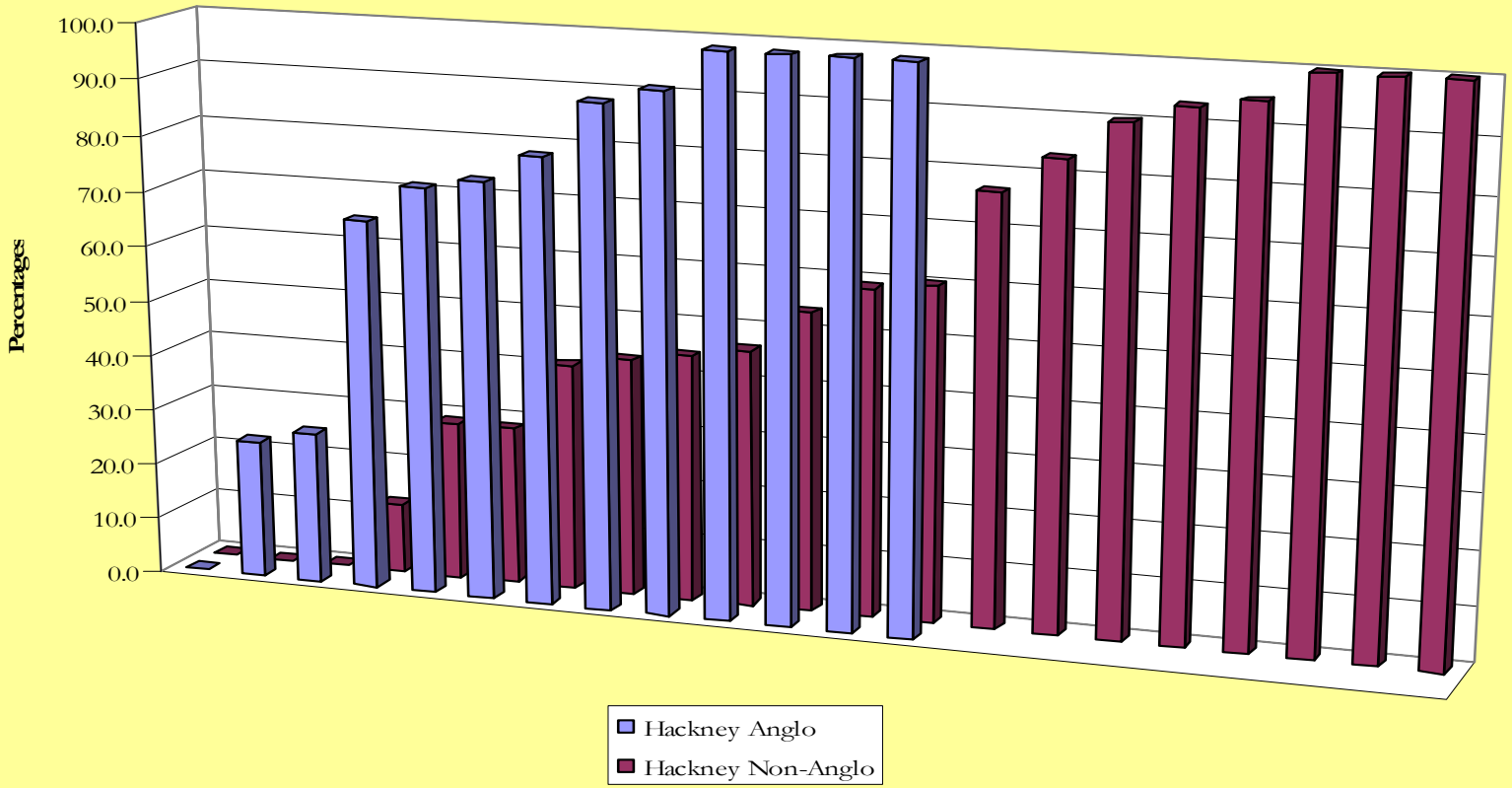
Havering 51%



K-backing in Hackney

Anglo 80%

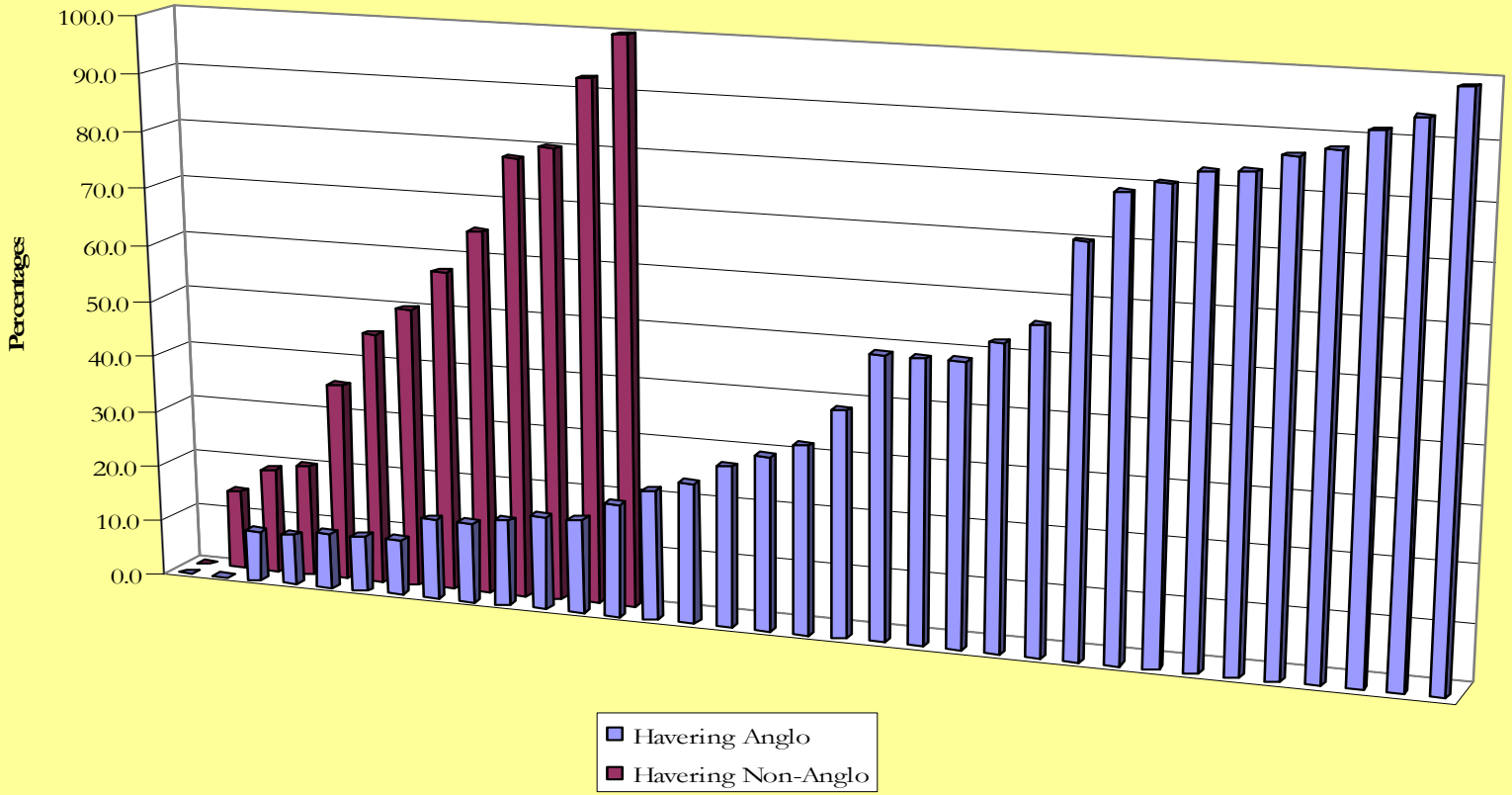
Non-Anglo 60%



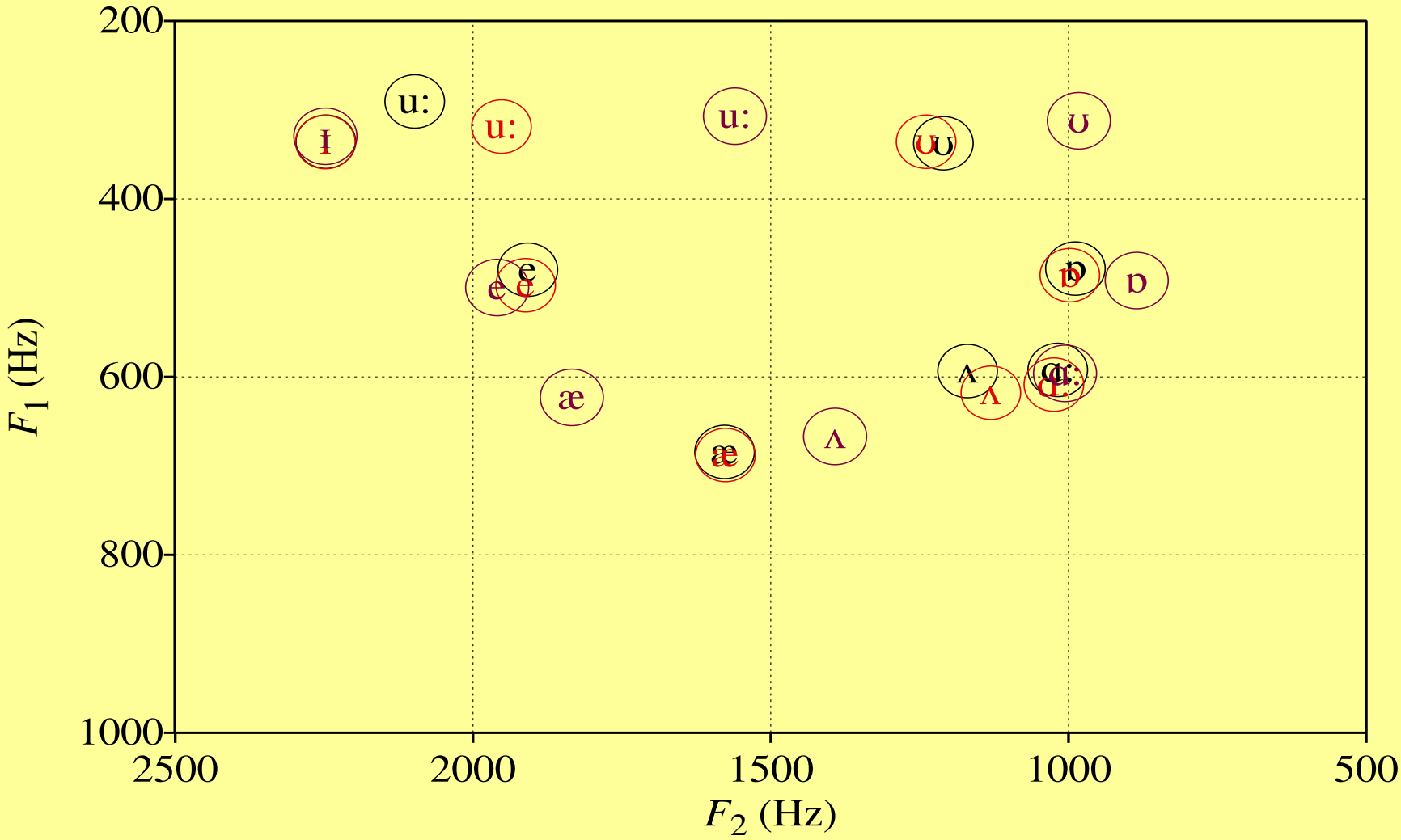
K-backing in Havering

Anglo 49%

Non-Anglo 54%

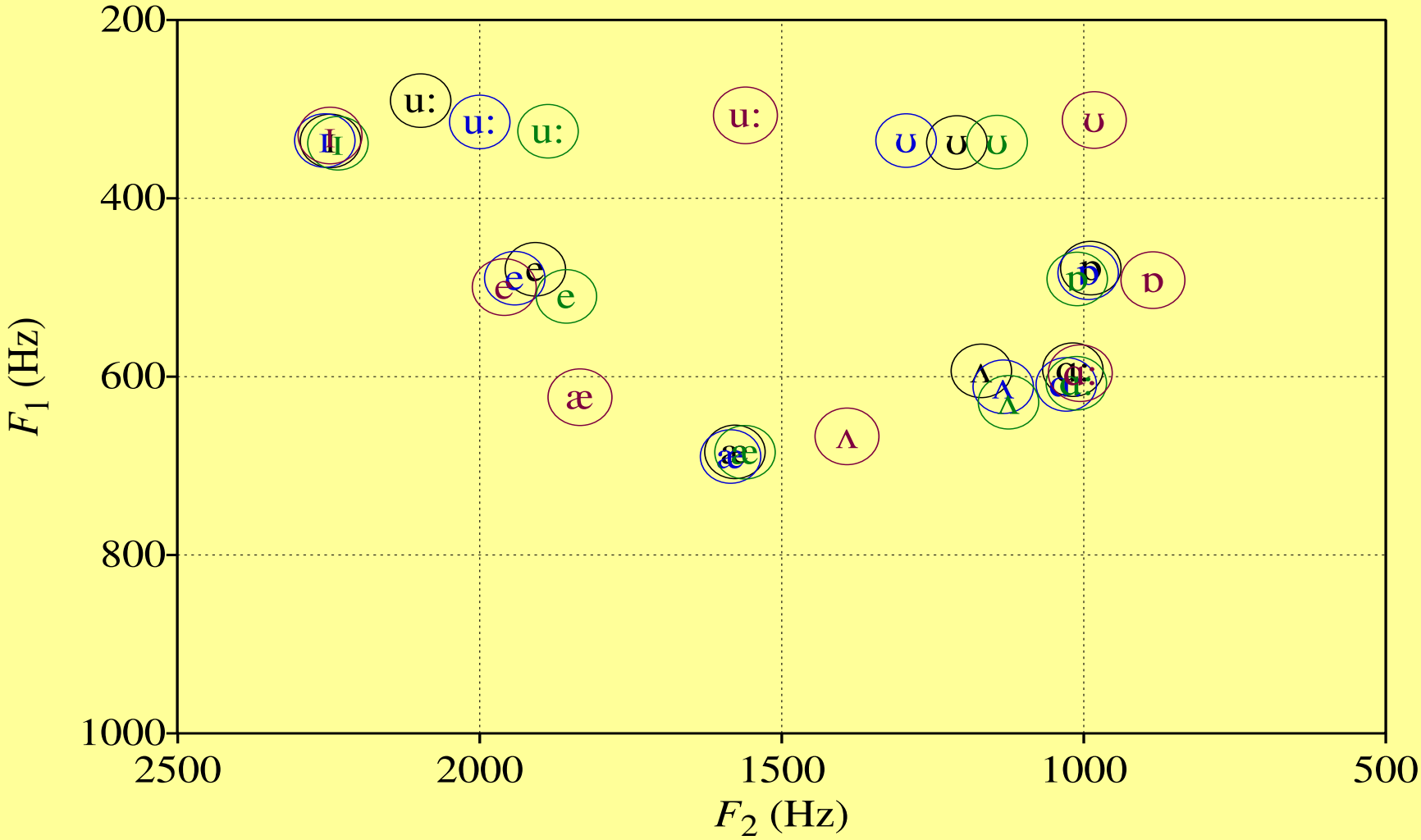


Monophthongs in Hackney



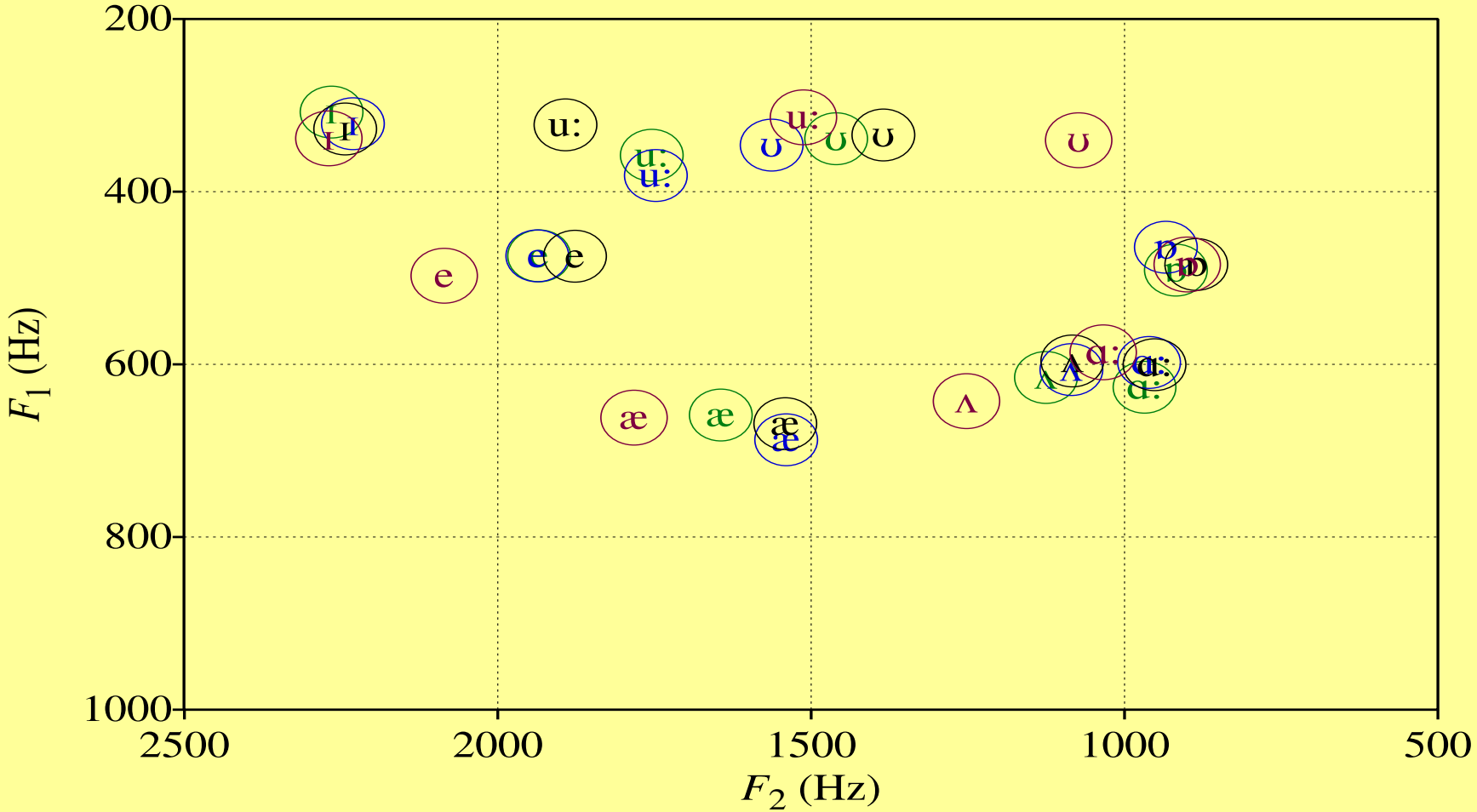
Elderly speakers (purple), Non-Anglo speakers (black), Anglo speakers (red)

Groups of young speakers in Hackney



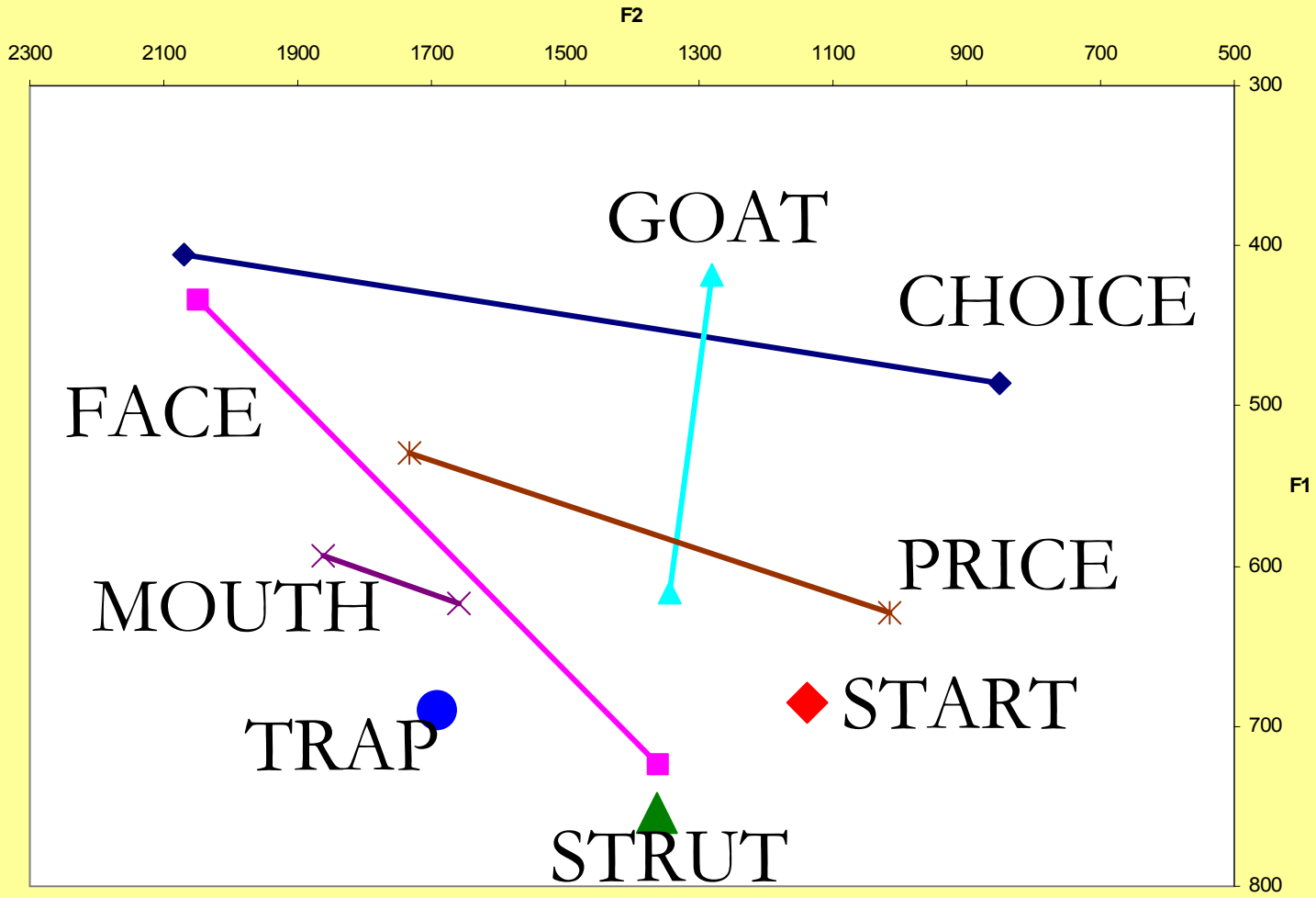
Elderly speakers (purple), Non-Anglo speakers (black), Anglo speakers with Non-Anglo network (blue), Anglo speakers with Anglo network (green)

Elderly speakers and groups of young speakers in Havering

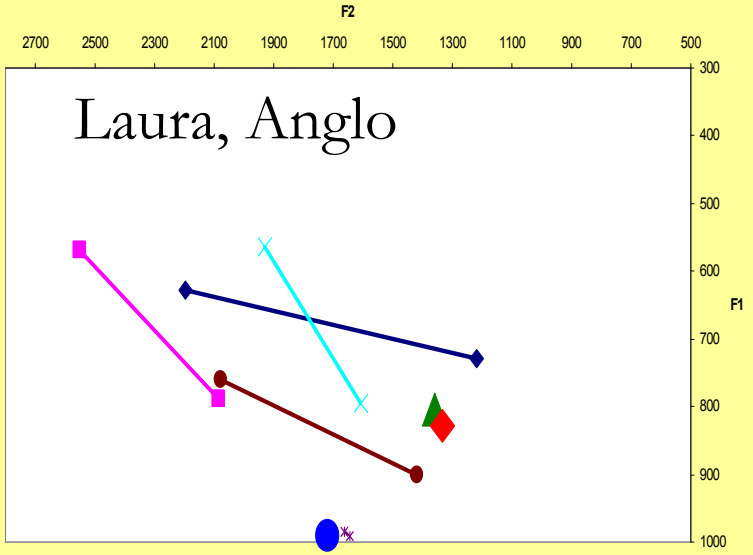


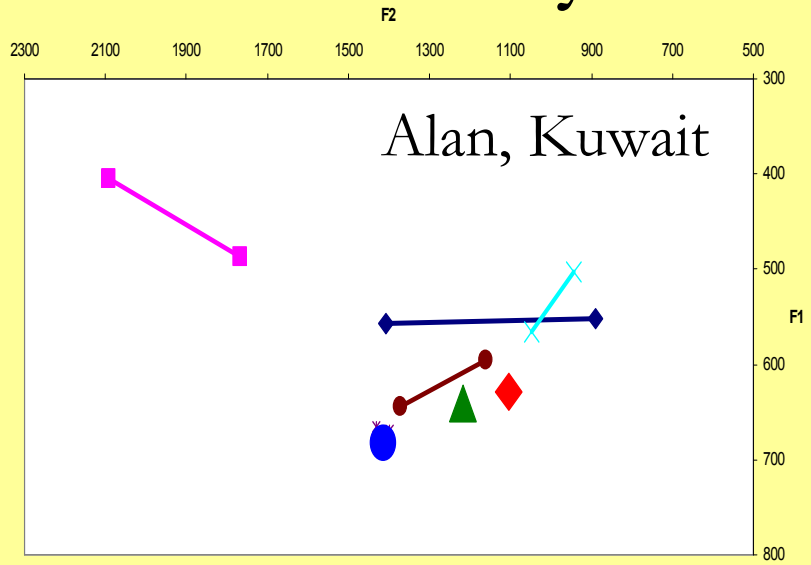
Elderly speakers (purple), Non-Anglo speakers (black), Anglo speakers with Non-Anglo network (blue), Anglo speakers with Anglo network (green)

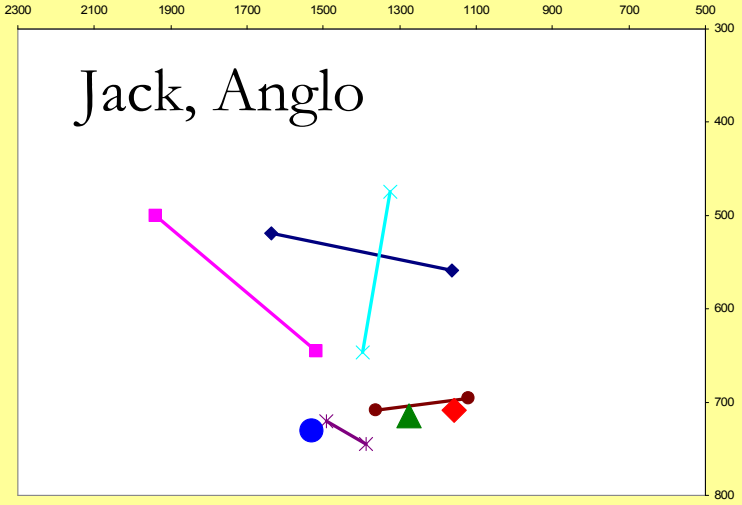
Working-class white Londoner born 1938

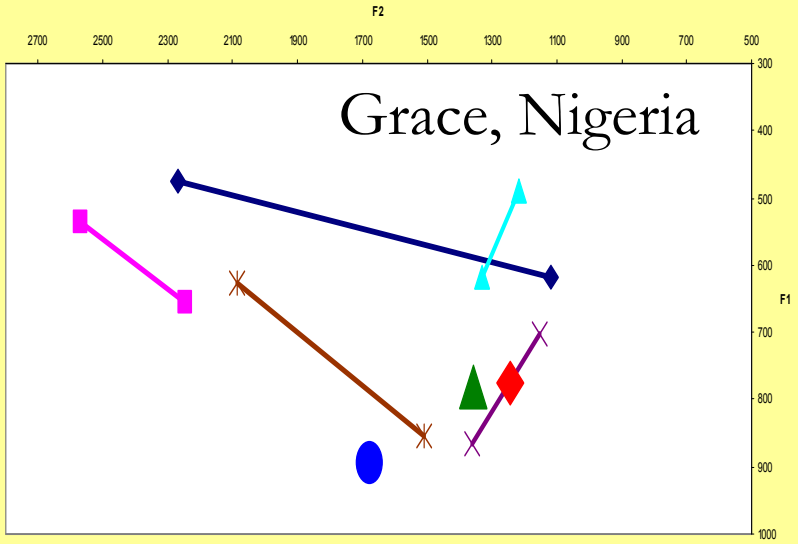


Young speakers in Hackney

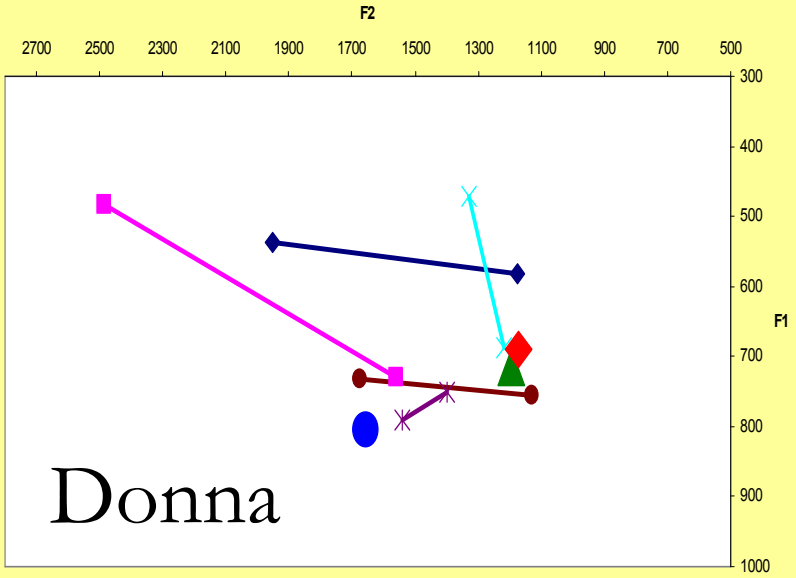


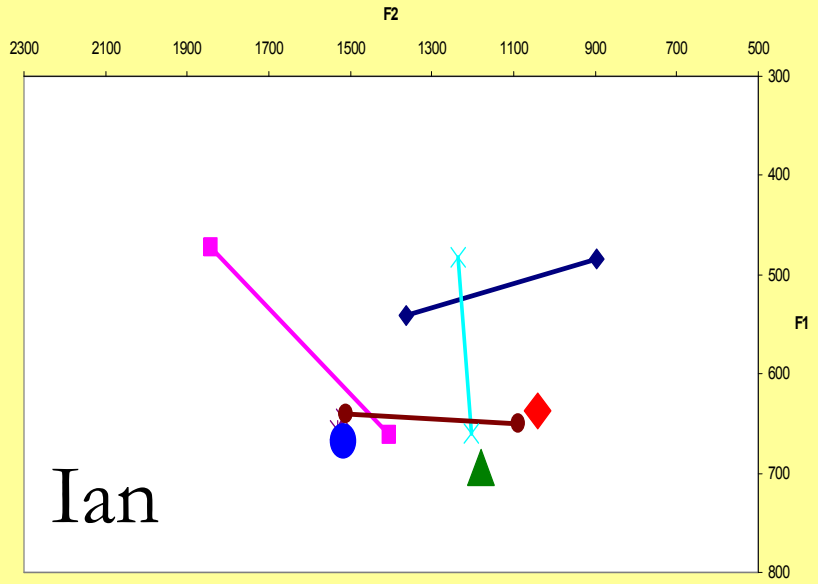






Young Havering Anglo speakers





Innovation, diffusion and levelling revisited

Loss of H-dropping

- London matches London Periphery in loss of h-dropping
  - But unexpected match between inner-city non-Anglos and high-contact Periphery Anglos (Milton Keynes – New Town)
  - Same feature – different social embedding

TH-fronting

- Young Londoners have almost universal TH-fronting (not quantified!)
  - The feature is so advanced that comparisons are no longer useful

K-backing

- More in inner London than in outer London
- but not, apparently, linked to ethnicity

GOAT-fronting

- Prevalent among Periphery speakers
- Absent in most London speakers, present in outer-city girls
- Instead, GOAT-monophthongisation
  - highly correlated with ethnicity (Afro-Caribbean, Black African) and multi-ethnic network (for Anglos)

PRICE

- More fronted than Periphery
  - Fronting and monophthongisation correlated with ethnicity

- Monophthongisation of FACE, PRICE and GOAT is correlated with four interacting scales:
- 1. Non-Anglo > Anglo
- 2. Non-Anglo network > Anglo network
- 3. Male > female
- 4. Inner London > outer London > London periphery (Milton Keynes, Reading, Ashford)

- These innovatory monophthongs are **centred on the inner city**. They are rare outside.

Fronting of GOOSE

- Advanced in London, matching Periphery
  - Unexpectedly, most advanced among non-Anglo Londoners and Anglos with non-Anglo networks
  - As with loss of H-dropping, the same feature has different social embedding in inner London and Periphery

Fronting of FOOT

- *Less* advanced in London than in Periphery
  - In London, more advanced among Anglos, in line with the Anglos in the Periphery

TRAP-backing

- London matches London Periphery town of Ashford (Torgersen & Kerswill 2004, *JS*)

STRUT-backing and raising

- London again matches London Periphery town of Ashford

TRAP-backing and STRUT-backing and raising are no longer active changes

Conclusions

Each variable has its own history and trajectory:

- Loss of H-dropping
  - In Periphery, possibly influenced by standardisation and high mobility
  - In London, possibly a result of high contact with L2 varieties of English

- K-backing: motivations still to be tested

- GOAT
  - Fronting: a result of **levelling** in the periphery
  - Monophthongisation: a result of (endogenous) **innovation** in the inner city, resulting from contact with British Caribbean English and L2 Englishes
  - (Hip-Hop influence??)

- GOOSE-fronting
  - **Levelling** in Periphery
  - Extreme fronting among inner city non-Anglos is **innovatory**

- FOOT-fronting
  - **Levelling** in Periphery
  - Lack of fronting in inner city is conservative, matching Caribbean Englishes