Reversing ‘drift’: changes in the London diphthong system

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• www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/index.htm
‘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 [əɪ]
  - MOUTH from [aʊ] to [æʊ]
Diphthong Shift (Wells 1982: 308, 310)

1. Front-closing diphthongs

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RP
Popular London
Cockney
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![Diagram showing the diphthong shift with arrows indicating the transitions from RP to Popular London to Cockney vowels.](image-url)
2. Back-closing diphthongs

3. PRICE-MOUTH crossover
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[εψ]</th>
<th>[εː]</th>
<th>[ɛː]</th>
<th>[əː]</th>
<th>[æu]</th>
<th>[au]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey of English Dialects (SED) informants, 1950-60s (Orton &amp; Wakelin, 1968)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elderly (2f, 2m)</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women age 25-40 (n=48)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls age 14/15 (n=8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>88.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys age 14/15 (n=8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>83.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of English Dialects (SED) informants, 1950-60s (Orton &amp; Wakelin, 1968)</td>
<td>[eɔ]</td>
<td>[εɪ]</td>
<td>[εi]</td>
<td>[ərə]</td>
<td>[æʊ]</td>
<td>[au]</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elderly (2f, 2m)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<td>4.1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Replacement of both rural and urban local forms by an RP-like [au] – perhaps a levelled, regionally and socially unmarked form

• Difficulties for diphthong shift interpretation:
  – Shift from [əʏ] to [au] appears to reverse it
  – Evidence from Britain (2002) that [əʏ] 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[ai]</th>
<th>[ɻi]</th>
<th>[ɑi]</th>
<th>[ɔi]</th>
<th>[ʌi]</th>
<th>[ʌi]</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elderly age 70-80 (2f, 2m)</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls age 14/15 (n=8)</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys age 14/15 (n=8)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Percentage use of variants of /ai/ (PRICE), Reading Working Class, interview style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[aI]</th>
<th>[ɶI]</th>
<th>[œI]</th>
<th>[œI]</th>
<th>[ʌI]</th>
<th>[ʌI]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elderly age 70-80 (2f, 2m)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls age 14/15 (n=8)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys age 14/15 (n=8)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Replacement of widely stereotyped [ɔi] by a regionally and socially unmarked [əi]~[ai]

• Uncontroversially a reversal of diphthong shift
• change in MOUTH (onset being lowered and backed to a low-front position):

\[ \varepsilon \psi \rightarrow [\partial u] \rightarrow [\partial u] \]

(rural S.E. → urban S.E. → ‘levelled southern’?)

• change in PRICE: [ɔɪ] → [aɪ]

• stability in FACE – broad diphthong of the type [æɪ]
Diphthongs in new London data
Elderly informants in Hackney and Havering

Mr D, b1918, Hackney

Mrs E, b1928, Hackney

Mr J, b1938, Hackney
Mr S, b1927, Havering

Mrs S, b1935, Havering

Mrs W, b1943, Havering
Hackney young speakers

Alan, Middle Eastern

Brian, Caribbean

Adam, West African
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 [au]
• FACE: reversal of diphthong shift to a front closing diphthong, most strongly among non-white
• GOAT: fronted offset (‘Milton Keynes’ variant) OR 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 [au] for MOUTH
In detail II: types of changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FACE</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
<th>MOUTH</th>
<th>GOAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monophthongisation</td>
<td>Hackney NW</td>
<td>Hackney NW</td>
<td>Hackney Havering Elderly</td>
<td>Hackney NW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Onset raising</td>
<td>Hackney W</td>
<td>Hackney W</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Onset fronting</td>
<td>Hackney W</td>
<td>Hackney W</td>
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<tr>
<td>Onset lowering</td>
<td>Havering</td>
<td>MK/Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offset fronting</td>
<td>MK/Reading</td>
<td>MK/Reading</td>
<td>MK/Reading</td>
<td>Hackney girls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
Bibliography


