Investigating language and ethnicity in London: Production and perception data

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http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/
http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/multicultural/
Research questions of MLE project

- Is it age-graded?

- Characterisation of the ‘multiracial vernacular’ of London:
  - Is it ethnically neutral?
  - Is it regionally neutral?

- Are there differences between areas within London?
Comparison of production data: teenagers from different areas have very similar vowel systems

Hackney 2005 teenagers

MLE project teenagers
Development in vowel system

4 year olds

8 year olds

12 year olds

Teenagers (2008)
Research questions for the MLE perception study

1. Given our hypothesis that Multicultural London English is ethically neutral, can we identify individuals (of differing ethnic backgrounds) whose accents do not reveal ethnic background?

2. Are some accents more ethnically identifiable than others?
   – Is there an interaction with local accent?
Perception test in London

• Classification of real speech
  – 10 second sound clip per speaker
  – Examine effect of the sociolinguistic factor of friendship network on classification of ethnicity and geographical location of the speaker
  – All listeners from inner London
  – Listeners aged 12 or 17 (N=68)
Friendship network scores of speakers

- 1: all friends same ethnicity as self
- 2: up to 20% of a different ethnicity
- 3: up to 40% of a different ethnicity
- 4: up to 60% of a different ethnicity
- 5: up to 80% of a different ethnicity
Who are the speakers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Anglo</td>
<td>3 (mainly Anglo network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Anglo</td>
<td>3 (mainly Anglo network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Anglo</td>
<td>5 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Anglo</td>
<td>5 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulema</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Non-Anglo</td>
<td>5 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Non-Anglo</td>
<td>5 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Non-Anglo</td>
<td>5 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Non-Anglo</td>
<td>4 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amjad</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Non-Anglo</td>
<td>5 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Non-Anglo</td>
<td>5 (multiethnic network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Havering</td>
<td>Anglo</td>
<td>2 (mainly Anglo network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Havering</td>
<td>Anglo</td>
<td>2 (mainly Anglo network)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Plus four Birmingham voices:
  – 2 female, 2 male
  – One Afro-Caribbean, one White for each sex
Significant effects

- Only speaker’s friendship network had a significant effect on identifications of speaker ethnicity and location

- Speaker sex was not significant
- Listener age, sex and ethnicity were not significant
Forced-choice judgements of Havering (‘Essex’) Anglo (score 2) voices in terms of ethnicity and location

Judgement of ethnicity of speakers based on voice sample

Judgement of location of speakers based on voice sample
Forced-choice judgements of Hackney Anglo voices (score 3 and 5) voices in terms of ethnicity and location
Forced-choice judgements of Hackney non-Anglo (score 4 and 5) voices in terms of ethnicity and location
Forced-choice judgements of Birmingham voices by London listeners in terms of ethnicity and location
Listeners (n=33) and voices from **Birmingham** in terms of **ethnicity** and **location**

![Bar chart showing distribution by ethnicity and location](chart1.png)

![Bar chart showing distribution by location](chart2.png)
Birmingham listeners and London voices in terms of ethnicity and location

![Diagram showing percentages of ethnicities and locations]
Birmingham listeners and London voices in terms of ethnicity and location

![Graph showing comparisons between Birmingham, Essex, and London voices based on ethnicity and location.](chart.png)
Results: ethnicity

- Anglos from Havering (Essex) with Network Score 2 are overwhelmingly identified as ‘white’
- Anglos from Hackney with Network Score 3 are identified as ‘white’, but less consistently than Network score 2
- Anglos from Hackney with Network score 5 are least often identified as ‘white’
- Non-Anglos from Hackney with Network score 4 and 5 are identified in disparate ways
- This suggests lack of specific ethnic marking among Non-Anglos in London
Results: location

• Listener were fairly good at distinguishing between local and non-local voices

• But:
  – Birmingham ‘black’ voices were more often heard as coming from London (London listeners)
  – MLE-voices are heard as coming from cities
    • But it’s difficult to hear which city it is

• Lack of familiar geographical marking = heard as coming from London
Results: location

• ‘White’ traditional voices are heard as coming from Essex (or supposed non-multicultural areas, such Birmingham (for Birmingham listeners))
Summary

• Inner London speech is more ethnically neutral than outer London speech

• *Traditional speech*, whether from Birmingham or London/Essex, is judged as local – even if this means identifying the voice with the wrong city

• *Multicultural voices* are more often placed in London, even if this also results in placing the voice in the wrong city