

NWAV38, Ottawa
22–25 October 2009

Age-grading and vowel systems in Multicultural London English: Evidence for regularity and incrementation in high-contact speech communities

Paul Kerswill and Eivind Torgersen
Lancaster University

Age-grading and change

- Childhood and adolescent age-related linguistic change is central to Labov's speech community model
- Labov's speech community model is self-contained, and makes certain assumptions:
 - Uniform evaluation and directions of variation
 - This is predicated on a stratified, functionalist social class model

A background assumption: Language change is best studied in non-contact speech communities

- Labov believes that the causation and progress of language change can be seen most sharply through the study of “changes that emerge from within a linguistic system” (2001: 20)
- He rejects the investigation of dialect contact in this particular pursuit, because, although contact is an important source of change, it is not relevant to the model

Transmission and incrementation

- Children replicate their elders' grammars and phonologies pretty much perfectly by the process known as 'transmission'
- Simultaneously they detect directions of change in phonetic space and subsequently implement further change in the same direction
- This 'incrementation' peaks in the late adolescent years

The incrementation model and the speech community: the “adolescent spike”

- Example: Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2009 on Toronto quotative *be like*

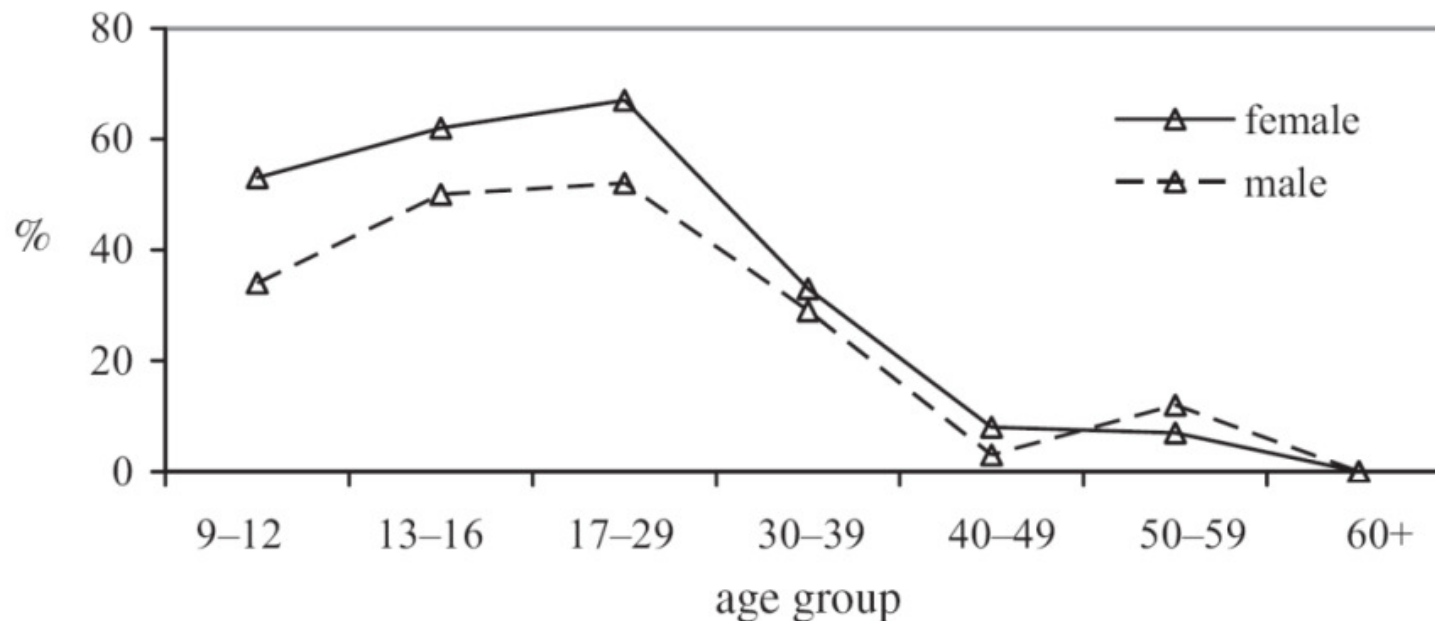


FIGURE 8a. Distribution of quotative *be like* according to speaker sex (sex difference in overall distribution significant at $p < 0.000$).

The speech community and phonetic/phonological change

- Labov's speech community model is intimately tied to the explication of Neogrammarian change
- Phonetic gradualness rather than abrupt replacement is integral to this overall model
- N.Am. and British sociophonetic work has led to generalisations about the nature of vowel change
- Model makes explicit claims about social structure and initiation and spread of sound change

Problems of class stratification and the assumption of shared patterns of variation

- Assumption that everybody can be slotted into the class structure
- Assumption that the direction of variation is monotonic and shared
- Assumption of shared evaluation
- A necessary, but not sufficient condition for this to work is that speakers are **native**

Problems with the nativeness criterion – and opportunities

- Works well in some cities (NYC, Norwich, Philadelphia) but not others (Belfast)
- Layered or nested speech community models
 - Bergen early 1980s (Kerswill 1994)
- Crucial point: there are social groups whose quantitative patterns of variation can't be slotted into the mainstream, but which nevertheless can only be understood in terms of their social and linguistic *relationship* with the mainstream.
- The decision to include them is therefore not ideological or ecological
- Some of these social groups are non-native (Bergen) or native-born (cities in the Arab world and Iran)

Ethnicity in variationist research

- USA and Canada: quantitative variation patterns among ethnic minority groups is an integral part of the variation in the city at large
 - Sometimes ethnicity is significant, sometimes it's not; sometimes there's an interaction with class and sex, sometimes not
 - Quantitative effects are small
 - Hoffman & Walker in Toronto, Hall-Lew in San Francisco, Eckert in California
 - Eckert shows how first- and second-order indexicality is used in different ways among different groups of Chicano children – fitting in with the nested speech community idea

The multiethnolect construct – 1

Multiethnolect: a new variety, or range of variants, shared by more than one ethnic group living in an area

- Typically shared across minorities, but also by members of majority groups
- A multiethnolect is, paradoxically, non-ethnic in its affiliation and its indexicality. This is true at least in the community in which it is spoken
 - though outside it, it may sound distinctly 'ethnic'
- Described in northwest European cities: Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Gothenburg, Malmö, Amsterdam, Berlin, Mannheim – and London

The multiethnolect construct – 2

- It follows that the multiethnolect is part and parcel of a speech community in Labov's sense
- That being so, are changes in it gendered and do they follow the incrementation pattern?
- In phonetic/phonological change, can we observe the same patterns as in non-contact communities?

Neogrammarian change, contact and multiethnolects

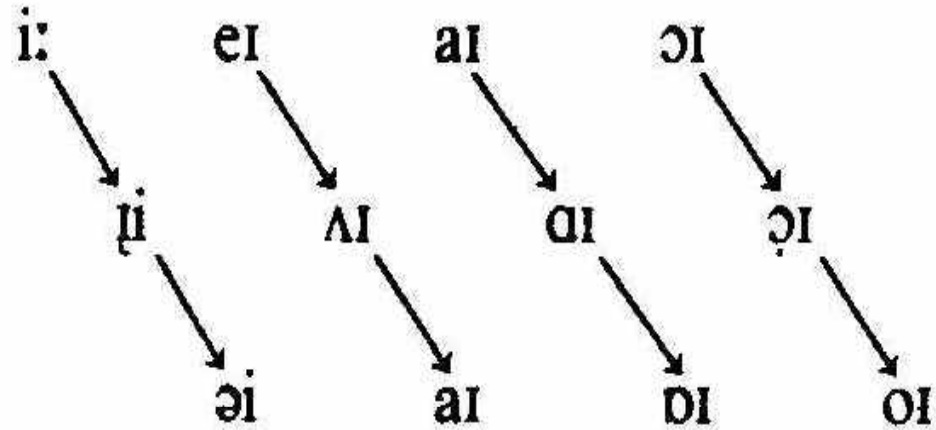
- Southern England Diphthong Shift and the case of the London multiethnolect

Diphthong Shift (Wells 1982)

RP

Popular London

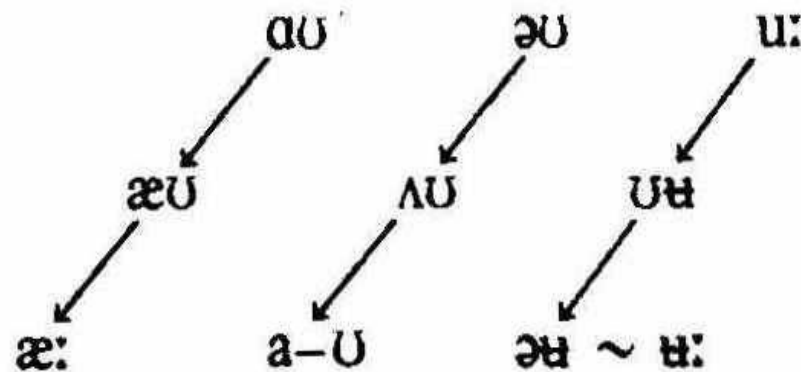
Cockney



RP

Popular London

Cockney



Linguistic Innovators: the English of Adolescents in London (2004–7)

Investigators:

Paul Kerswill (Lancaster University)

Jenny Cheshire (Queen Mary, University of London)

Research Associates:

Sue Fox (Queen Mary, University of London)

Eivind Torgersen (Lancaster University)

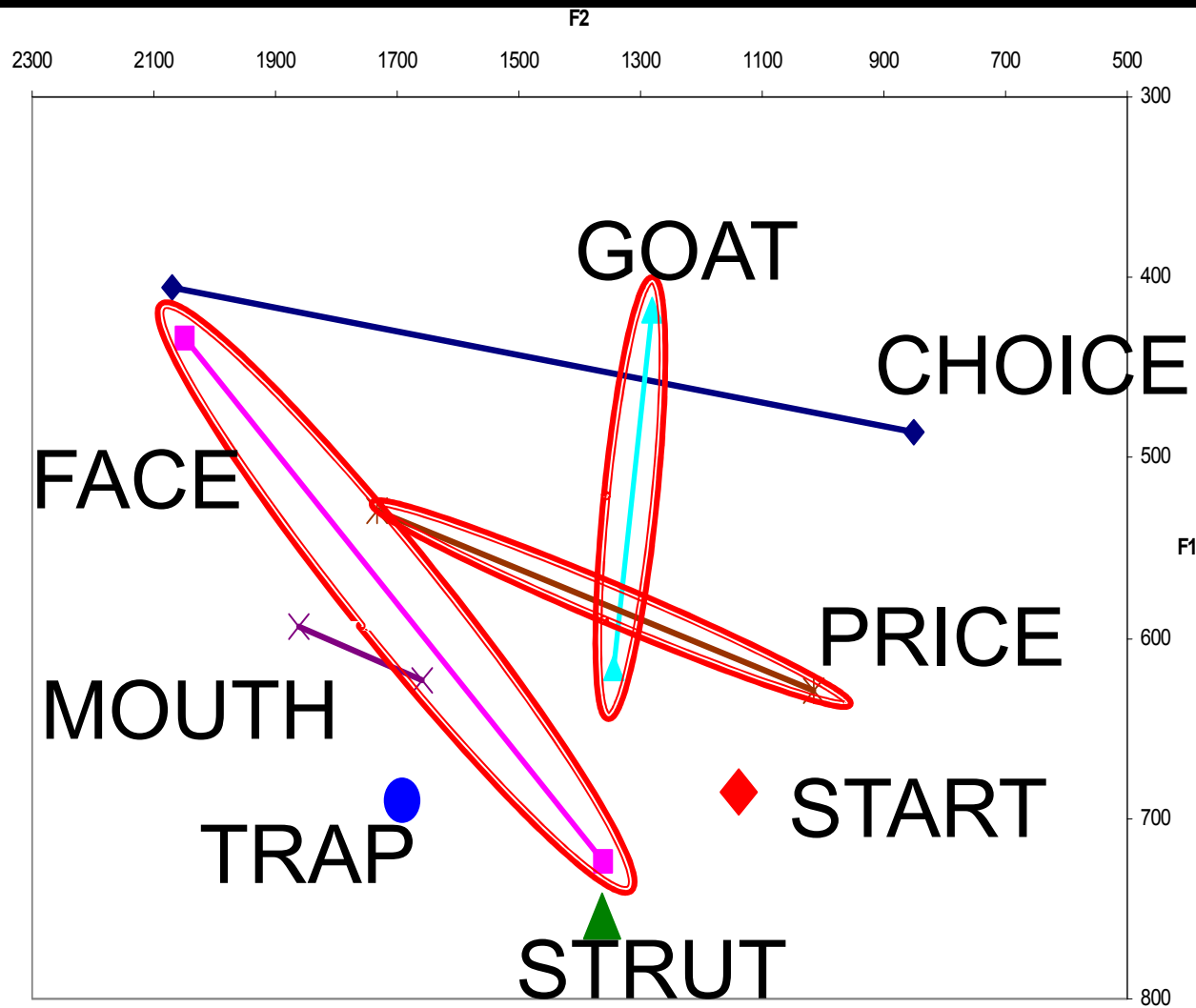
Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council
www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/activities/278/

E · S · R · C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL

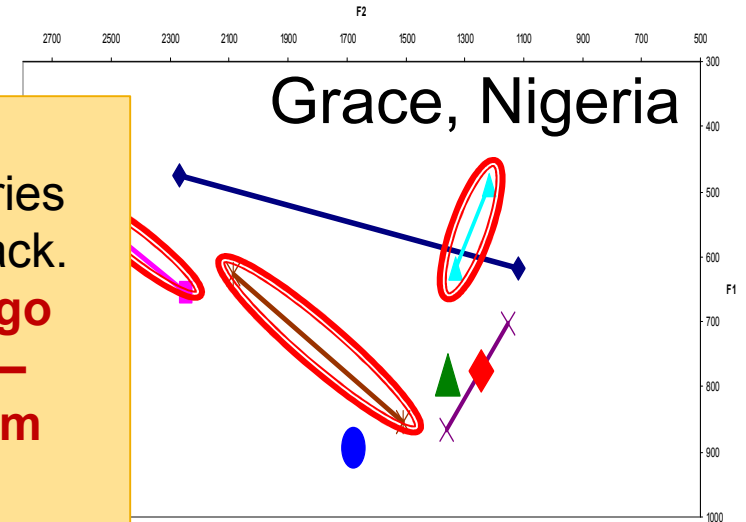
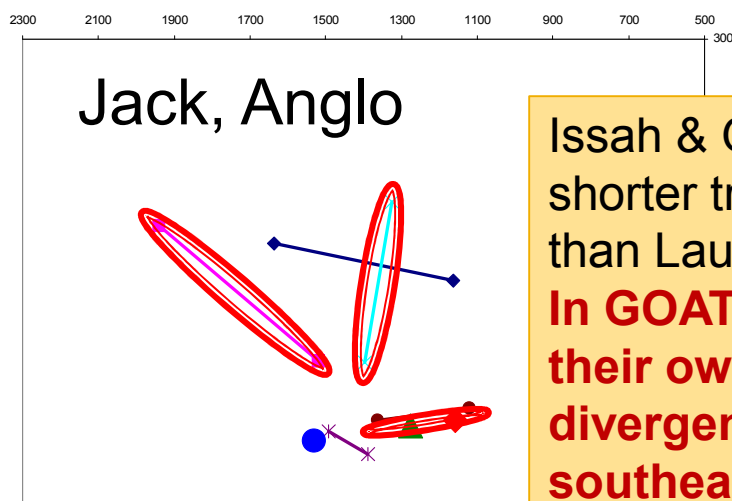
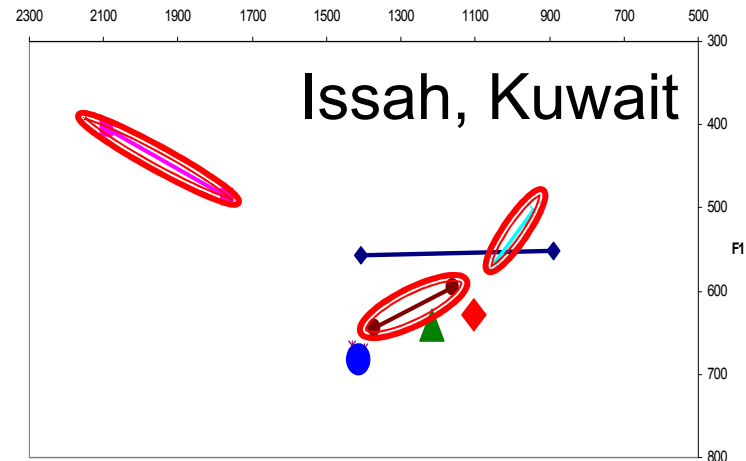
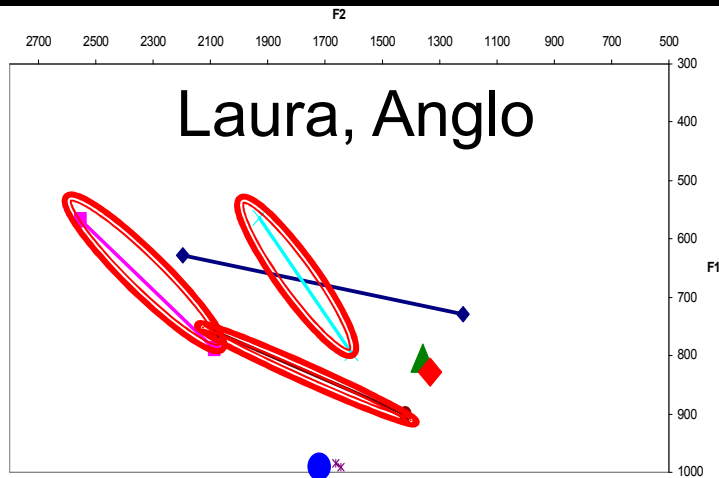
Project design: 'Innovators' project

- 16 elderly Londoners
- 98 17 year old Londoners
- from inner London (Hackney) and outer London (Havering)
- female, male
- "Anglo" and "non-Anglo"
- Free interviews in pairs
- 1.4m words transcribed orthographically, stored in a database time-aligned at turn level

Diphthongs: Working-class white male Londoner born 1938 (Hackney)



Young Hackney speakers, aged 17 (inner city)

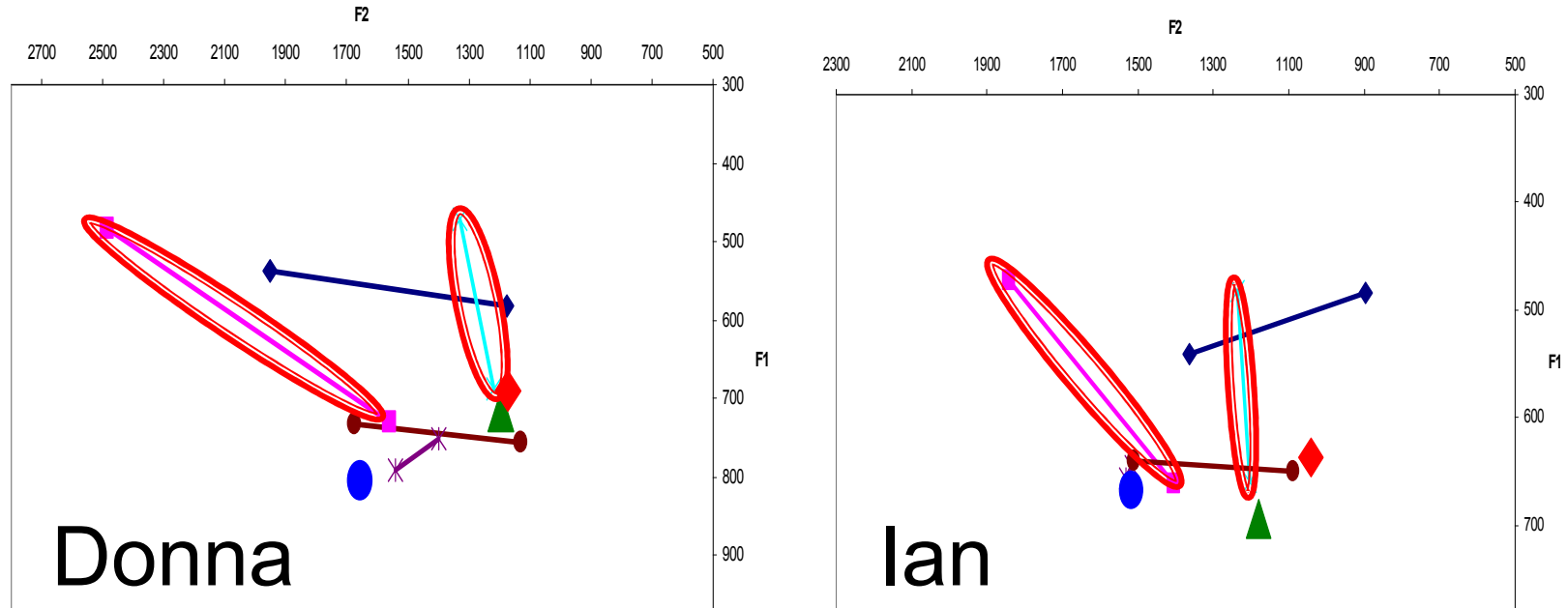


Issah & Grace:
shorter trajectories
than Laura & Jack.
**In GOAT, they go
their own way –
divergence from
southeastern
fronting change**

**But this looks like ethnolects, not a
multiethnolect ...**

... let's look at outer-city young
people's vowels

Young Havering Anglo speakers, aged 17 (outer city)



Donna & Ian: longer trajectories than Laura & Jack – Cockney preserved in the suburbs!

Inner-city Anglos variably converge with Non-Anglos, forming a new, multiethnolectal variety. Outer-city people do so to a much lesser extent.

Can we have Neogrammarian change in high-contact communities?

- Yes!
- It's regular and highly structured
- But it goes against the grain – it's not 'natural' in the sense of following any general principles
- This particular case is in many senses a reversal (and a rapid one at that) of an age-old chain shift

Multicultural London English: the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety (2007–10)

Investigators:

Paul Kerswill (Lancaster University)

Jenny Cheshire (Queen Mary, University of London)

Research Associates:

Sue Fox, Arfaan Khan, (Queen Mary, University of London)

Eivind Torgersen (Lancaster University)

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council
www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/activities/539/

E · S · R · C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL

Project design: MLE project

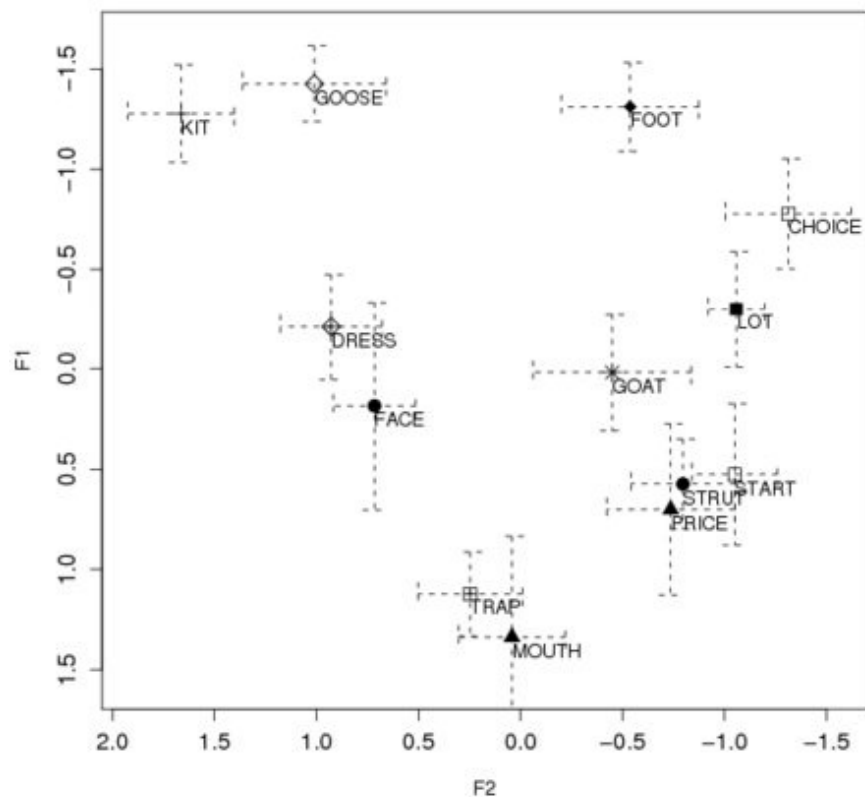
- Six age groups: 4-5, 8, 12, 17, c.25, c.40
- North London
- female, male
- “Anglo” and “non-Anglo”
- Free interviews in pairs
- c. 1.5m words transcribed
- Phonological and grammatical analysis
- Perception tests

Age grading in high-contact communities

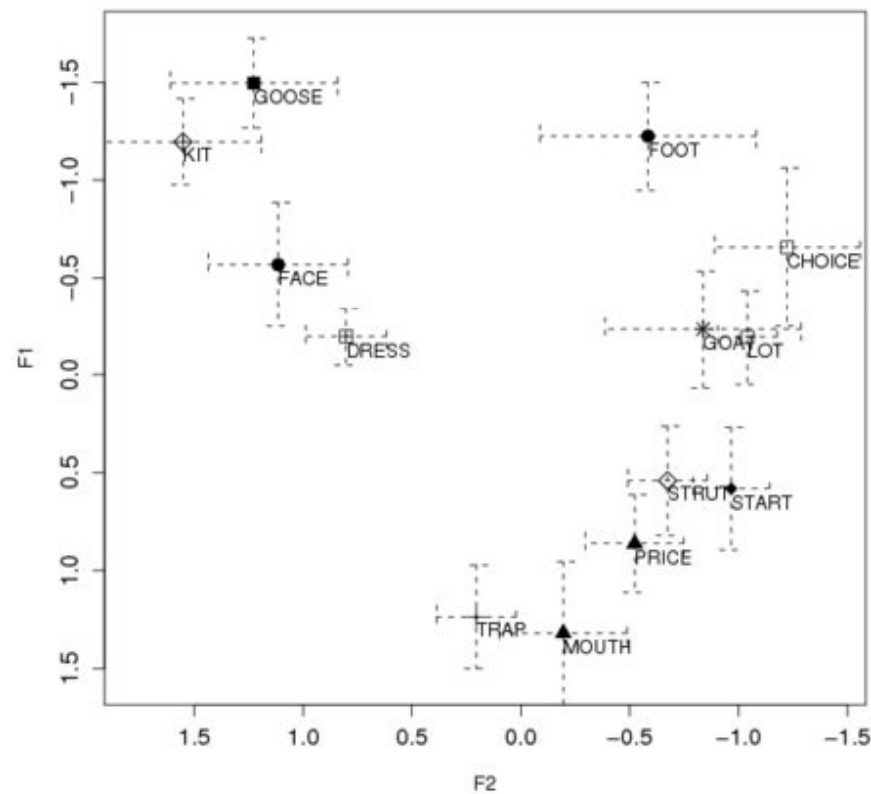
Can the incrementation model work in a community which contains:

- high language contact
- low generational continuity
- widespread presence of adult L2 speakers of English
- high ethnic diversity
- low proportions of speakers from (in our case) traditionally English-speaking backgrounds?

The MLE target: Hackney 17 year olds (2005 recordings)

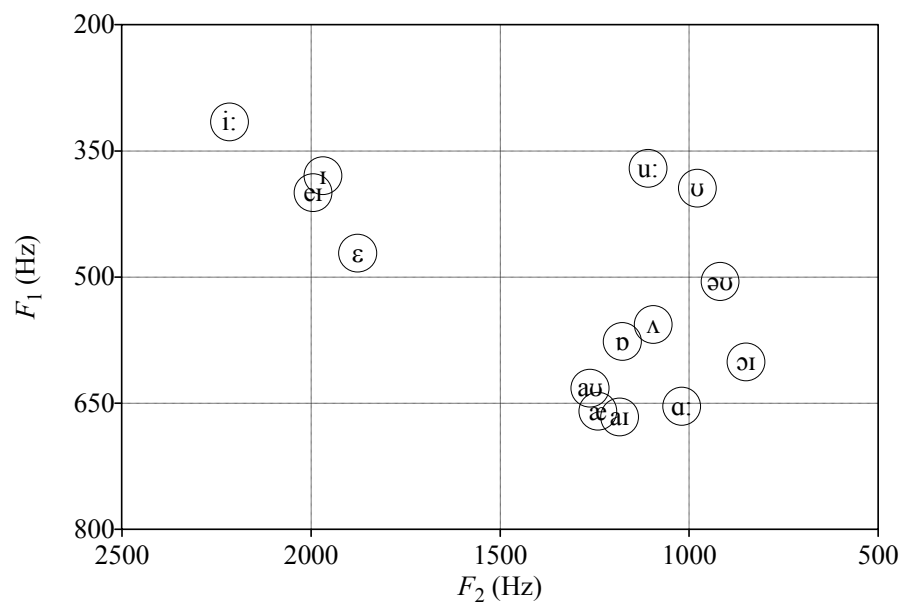


HACKNEY ANGLO TEENAGERS

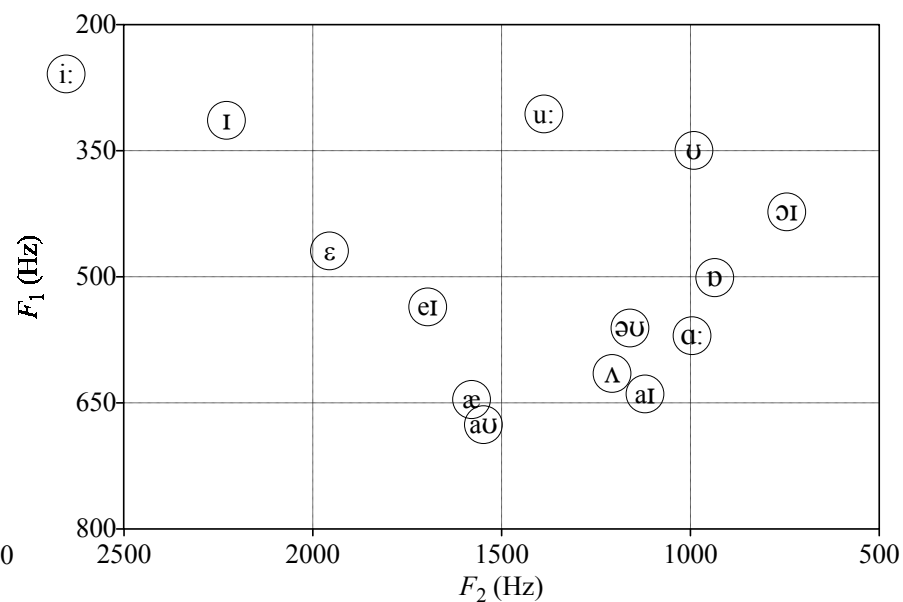


HACKNEY NON-ANGLO TEENAGERS

The pre-multiethnolect: The 'Creole' and 'London' varieties of speakers of Jamaican origin (Sebba's data, rec. 1983)



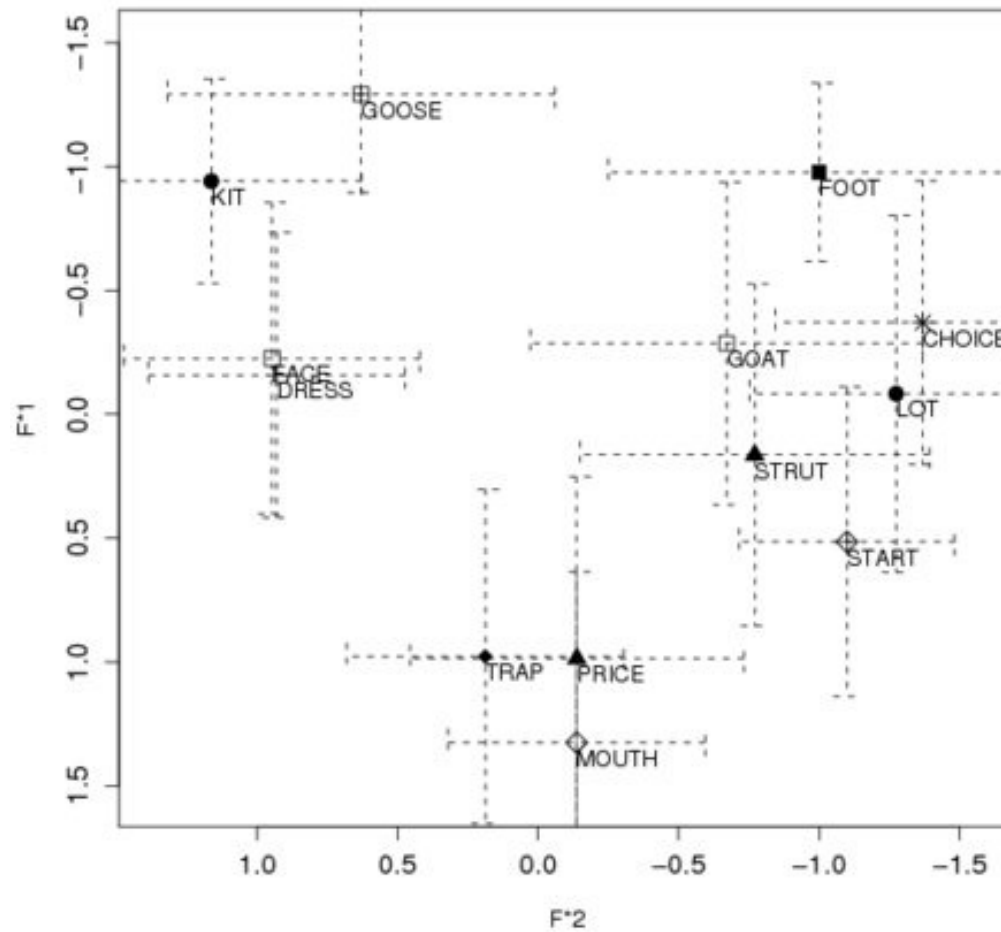
'Creole' variety



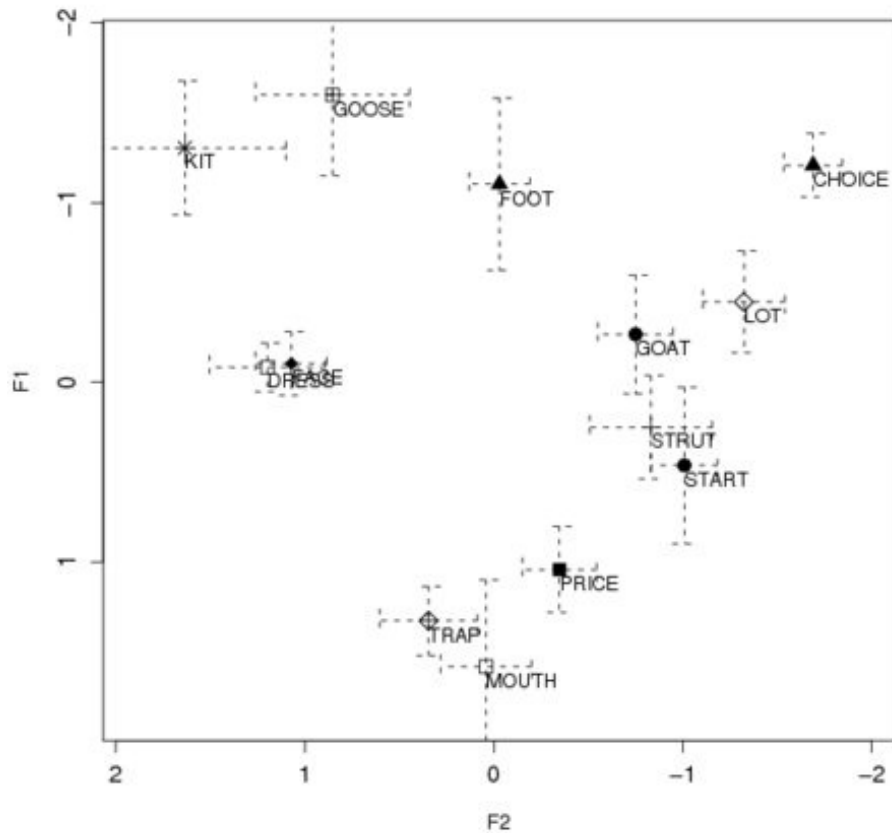
'London' variety

- Code-switching
- 'Creole' variety matches Jamaican English/Creole
- 'London' variety *intermediate* between older speakers and 2005 young speakers

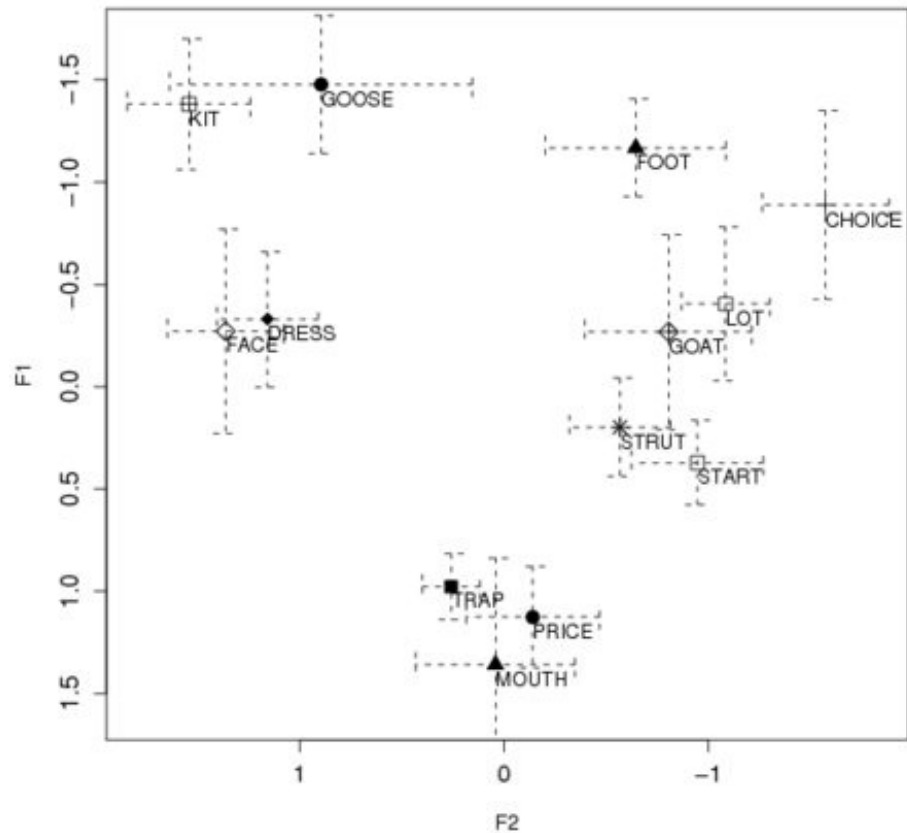
MLE 4 year olds (All Non-Anglo)



MLE 8 year olds

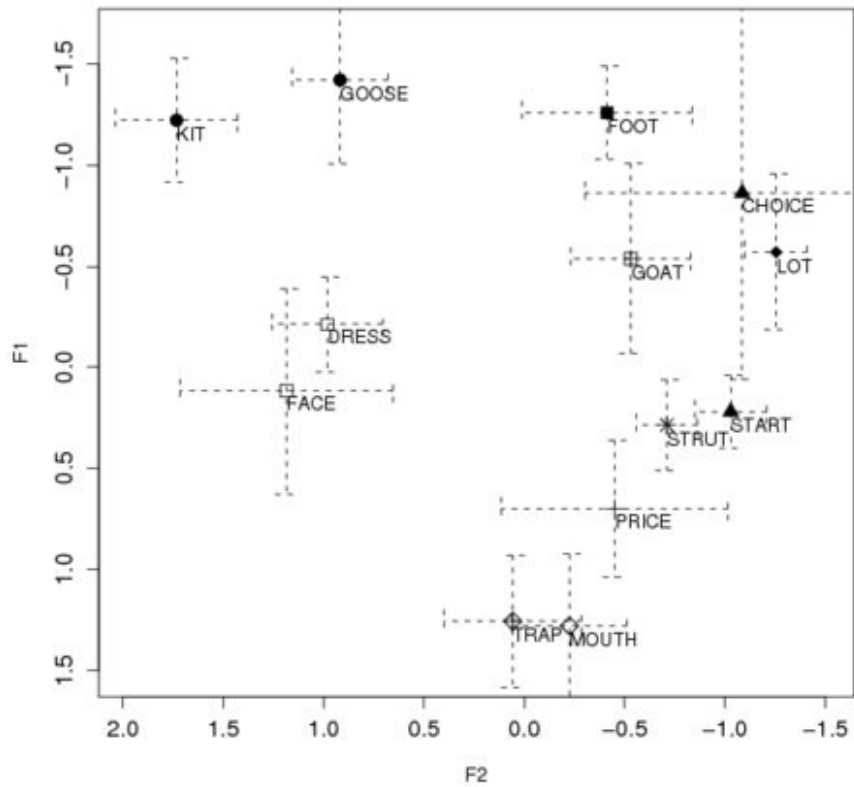


ANGLO SPEAKERS AGED 8

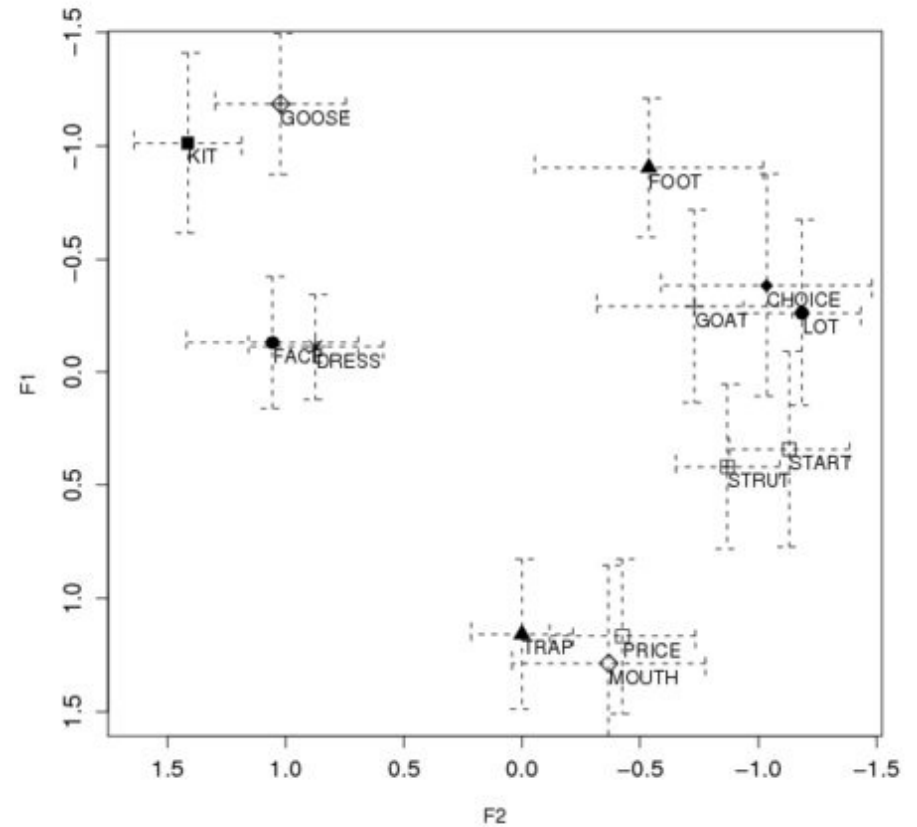


NON-ANGLO SPEAKERS AGED 8

MLE 12 year olds



ANGLO SPEAKERS
AGED 12



NON-ANGLO SPEAKERS
AGED 12

Summary of results for 4–12 year olds

- There is clearly movement towards MLE, with GOOSE getting fronter, FOOT getting backer, FACE being raised and GOAT being backed and raised
- But, seen as groups rather than individuals, none of the preadolescent age cohorts, even the Non-Anglos, uses the full-fledged MLE vowel system as instantiated by the late-teen Hackney adolescents.

Age grading?

- The age grading pattern resembles that of the incrementation model: there is an adolescent peak
- Similar to the New Town of Milton Keynes, where the older children were diverging from the migrant parents' speech, forming the new dialect
- But a difference from the standard incrementation model in the two high-contact situations: the much greater heterogeneity among the 4 year olds
 - Due to non-native status of the parental generation
 - Such heterogeneity is not characteristic of lower-contact communities: e.g. Philadelphia, Buckie, Newcastle

Overall conclusions – 1

- The difference between low-contact and high-contact speech communities is one of degree
- In high-contact speech communities, change may well proceed by incrementation
- Even in high-contact cases, phonetic/phonological change may be Neogrammarian and structurally highly ordered
 - However, the direction of change may be 'unnatural', reflecting the language and dialect contact which preceded it
- Labov's existing speech community model only variably fits large urban areas, with subsections needing to be recognised as separate speech communities.

Overall conclusions – 2

- Sociolinguistic characteristics of minorities are highly variable
 - Basic divide between North America and North-West Europe
- In North America, minorities fit into existing change patterns, in some instances leading, in others lagging. Quantitative effects are rather small. (Caveat regarding many African American groups)
- In NW Europe, the minorities do not straightforwardly fit into existing change patterns, but innovate away from existing changes, rather than either being in the lead or lagging behind
 - In some cases, these changes are radical
 - In some cases, too, the majority variably take up these innovations

Take-home message

- Non-homogeneous, high-contact speech communities have more characteristics of non-contact speech communities than predicted
- The 'non-contact' tenet is called into question
- Even in language and dialect contact, Neogrammarian change is possible, but often in non-canonical directions
- Need to recognise non-uniform variation and evaluation as a characteristic of a speech community