Multiracial vernacular in London:

Age-grading or language change?

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London………

"a point of arrival" (Bermant, 1975)

"a source of linguistic innovations and their dissemination " (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003)

"the most influential source of innovation in England and perhaps in the whole English-speaking world" (Wells 1982: 301)

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)

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

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Project design: MLE project

- Six age groups: 4-5, 8, 12, 16-19, c.25, c.40
- North London
- female, male
- "Anglo" and "non-Anglo"
- Free interviews in pairs
- Phonological and grammatical analysis
- Perception tests
- Analysis for this paper based on a subset of

| 16 | 8 year olds |
| 13 | 12 year olds |

- If innovations are used by the younger speakers, this suggests **language change in progress.**

- If innovations are not used by the younger speakers, this suggests **age-grading**

was/were variation:

**Pattern 1 (common in British varieties):**

(1)   **we was** doing that for two hours

(2)   that weren't part of the agreement

Pattern 2 (most common elsewhere):

(3)   we wasn't allowed to touch it

Use of WEREN'T in standard WASN'T contexts according to ethnicity
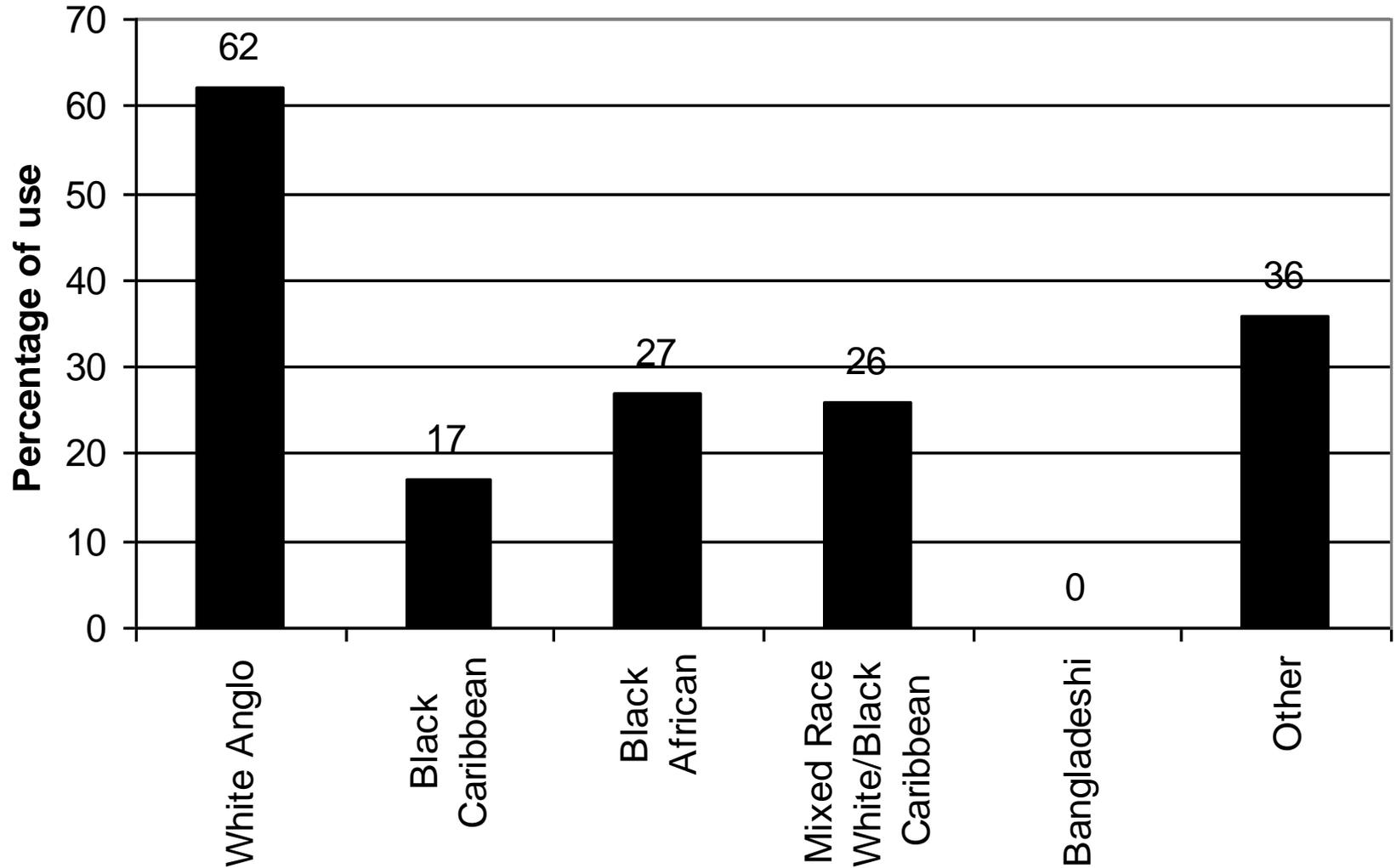
Distribution of *weren't* in standard *wasn't* contexts by Ethnicity among Hackney adolescents
(Cheshire & Fox, 2009)

Use of WASN'T in standard WEREN'T contexts by ethnicity
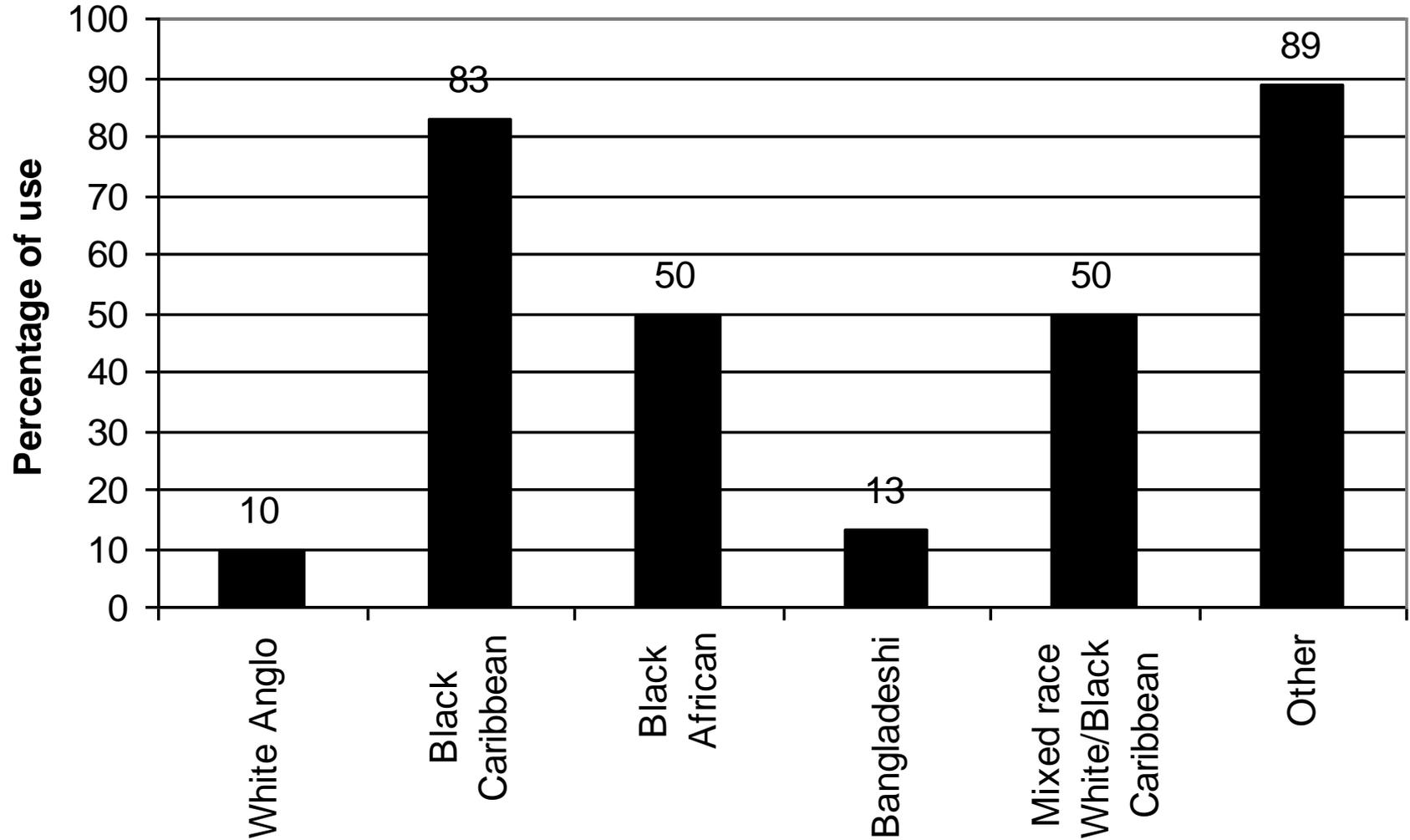
Distribution of *wasn't* in standard *weren't* contexts by Ethnicity among Hackney adolescents

(Cheshire & Fox, 2009)

	Hackney 16-19 year olds	N. London 8-12 year olds (subset of 29 speakers)
POSITIVE CONTEXTS nonstandard *was*	42% (N = 261/615)	66% (N = 182/275)
NEGATIVE CONTEXTS		
Overall leveling to *wasn't*		72% (N = 61/85)
nonstandard *wasn't*	46% (N = 18/39)	61% (N = 14/23)
nonstandard *weren't*	41% (N = 89/220)	25% (N = 15/62)

Summary of *was/were* variation

- Preliminary results indicate that the **was/wasn't** pattern is in the lead

- Language change in progress?

- Preliminary results suggest that non-Anglos are leading the change

Quotative expressions

(1)   *then she just **said** "shhh uhm . this is a quiet area"*

(2)   *and then they **think** "oh yeh let's pick on that one"*

(3)   *and his girlfriend **goes** "ah can I have a lollipop?" and he **goes** "no"*

(4)   *yeah **<ZERO>** "mum can I have nine pound" **<ZERO>** "what for?" **<ZERO>** "game"*

(5)   *yeah and **he's like** "what's your name?"*

(6)   ***this is her** "go away go away"*

(7)   *and I **told** my mum "mum can you make a dress?"*

Distribution of Quotatives (*Linguistics Innovators* project)

	Hackney elderly	Hackney adolescents
Say	70.8% (261)	27.4% (351)
Think	4.1% (15)	12.8% (164)
Go	4.6% (17)	11.7% (150)
Zero	18.9% (70)	15.1% (193)
Be Like		24.4% (313)
This is (subject)		4.8% (61)
Tell		1.9% (24)
Others	1.6% (6)	2% (26)
TOTAL N	370	1282

Implicational scale for the use of *SAY, GO* and *BE LIKE*

	SAY	GO	BE LIKE
Nisha (5)	√		
Tamila (5)	√		
Neelan (5)	√		
Kenneth (5)	√		
Rachel (5)	√		
Talullah (8)	√		
Kareen (8)	√		
Ikram (8)	√		
Derya (8)	√		
Saddiki (8)	√		
Dafne (8)	√		
Uzay (8)	√		
Rasgur (5)	√	√	
Din (5)	√	√	
Nandita (8)	√	√	
Junior (8)	√	√	
Loiuise (8)	√	√	√
Wahid (8)	√	√	√
Madeleine (8)	√	√	√
Dumaka (8)	√	√	√
Howard (8)	√	√	√
Lydia (8)	√	√	√
Mahir (8)	√	√	√
Catherine (12)	√	√	
Scarlett (13)	√	√	√
Christopher (13)	√	√	
Sadik (11)	√	√	√
Barry (12)	√	√	√
Meg (12)	√	√	√
Abigail (13)	√		√
Henry (12)	√	√	√
Darren (12)	√	√	√

	Hackney adolescents (*Linguistic Innovators*)	MLE 12 yr olds	MLE 8 yr olds
SAY	27.4% (351)	21.7% (112)	38.7% (183)
THINK	12.8% (164)	1.4% (7)	0.6% (3)
GO	11.7% (150)	25.6% (132)	31.9% (151)
ZERO	15.1% (193)	16.3% (84)	1.9% (9)
BE LIKE	24.4% (313)	26.0% (134)	17.5% (83)
THIS IS (SUBJECT)	4.8% (61)	2.5% (13)	5.1% (24)
LIKE		5.0% (26)	0.4% (2)
TELL	1.9% (24)	0.2% (1)	1.7% (8)
OTHERS	2% (26)	1.9% (7)	2.0% (10)
TOTAL N	1282	516	473

Contribution of internal and external factors on the use of *BE LIKE*

	Hackney adolescents			MLE 12 yr olds			MLE 8 yr olds		
Input	.30			.32			.10		
Total N	1282			516			473		
	FW	%	N	FW	%	N	FW	%	N
Sex									
Male	.42	20	655	.46	22	366	.06	1	140
Female	.59	29	627	.60	37	150	.76	24	333
81									
Range	17			26			70		
Grammatical person									
First	.51	28	521	.60	46	105	.68	28	118
Third	.49	30	507	.48	28	292	.43	14	335
Second	.52	26	42	.28	15	13	.74	33	6
Range	3			32			31		
Tense/Aspect									
Present	.47	29	191	.42	26	80	.49	17	85
CHP	.41	29	176	.44	25	141	.46	15	74
Simple past	.52	32	522	.60	47	149	.50	21	262
Habitual *would*	.67	51	35	.68	50	2	-	-	-
Habitual *will*	.57	41	42	.50	38	8	.99	67	3
Range	26			26			53		
Content									
Direct speech	.54	25	1050	.50	26	471	.46	18	363
Internal dialogue	.26	13	198	.59	33	15	.70	50	2
Non-lexicalised sounds/gestures	.78	57	21	.40	25	20	.61	16	108
Range	52								

This is + subject

Quotative functions:

*(1) and then **this is the man** . "you gonna get fired"*

*(2) **this is the boy** "boom"*

Non-quotative functions:

*(3) he's sitting on a chair **this is him** like he's drunk or something*

*(4) I been on it **this is me** I'm scared I'm like this...it go slow and then I say "yeah"*

*(5) this is the **this is the boy falling asleep** he went "<sound effect>"*

*(6) alright right this is **this is me knocking at the door** yeah and I'm knocking at the door yeah and **this is the dog** "<makes gesture?>". he just went and **this is the dog** "woof woof woo"*

THIS IS + SUBJECT	12 year olds	8 year olds
quotative uses	87% (N13)	48% (N 24)
non-quotative uses	13% (N 2)	52% (N26)

Conclusions

• Preliminary results for *was/wasn't* and quotatives *BE LIKE* and *THIS IS* + *SUBJECT* indicate language change, not age-grading

• Bilingual and monolingual speakers are equally important in models of language variation and change because their patterns of acquisition are the same

•The multilingual backgrounds of young people in metropolises like London contribute to a complex **'feature pool'** (Mufwene, 2001) from which innovations can emerge

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