

The role of adolescents in dialect levelling¹

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1. Background: Dialect levelling

This project explores the frequently made observation that regional speech in Britain is becoming 'levelled': there is a loss of distinctive, local linguistic features, such as the pronunciation of a particular vowel or the use of a particular grammatical construction, with the result that it is becoming increasingly difficult to 'pin down' a speaker geographically on the basis of their dialect or accent. This process of *dialect levelling* involves the replacement of local features by others with a wider geographical currency. The project takes a holistic approach to the description and explanation of the phenomenon as it is manifested in three urban centres in England. A particular interest of the project is to look at the contribution of the adolescent age group to dialect levelling: this aim derives from recent work, especially that of Eckert, suggesting that adolescents are linguistically the most innovative and, through their peer groups, able to establish new linguistic norms which may diffuse into the wider community.

Previous ESRC-funded projects by the authors^{2,3} and by Newcastle-based colleagues,⁴ as well as work by Continental European dialectologists such as Hinskens (1996), show that the ascendant features in dialect levelling may be existing nonstandard forms spreading from a large population centre, or may be entirely new; alternatively, they may be standard forms adopted into the local varieties. Importantly, as we shall see, different linguistic components (or levels) are involved in levelling in different ways (Milroy, Milroy & Docherty 1997). The stimulus for dialect levelling is generally thought to be contact between speakers of different varieties of the same language occurring as a consequence of geographical and/or social mobility. Thus, in times of large population movements within a language area, we expect dialect levelling to take place at a faster rate than when more stable conditions prevail.

The project develops issues investigated in our two previous projects. The first, the *British Dialect Grammar* (BDG) project (note 2) was a questionnaire-based survey of nonstandard grammar in 87 locations, while the second, the *Milton Keynes* (MK) project (note 3), was a sociolinguistic study of phonetic features in the speech of working-class (WC) children and their caregivers in the new town. The present project extends the scope of

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² 'A survey of British dialect grammar': 1986-88, ESRC ref. C00232264, award holders J. Cheshire and V. Edwards, researcher P. Whittle. (See Cheshire, Edwards & Whittle 1989.)

³ 'A new dialect in a new city: children's and adults' speech in Milton Keynes': 1990-94, ESRC ref. R000232376, award holder P. Kerswill, Research Fellow A. Williams. (See Kerswill & Williams 1994; 2000 forthcoming.)

⁴ 'Phonological variation and change in contemporary spoken British English': 1994-7, ESRC ref. R000234892. (See Milroy, Milroy & Docherty 1997.)

both by (1) applying sociolinguistic methods in not one, but three towns, and in doing so discovering whether differences in mobility in the towns affect dialect levelling, (2) extending the social base by incorporating both middle-class (MC) and WC speakers, (3) investigating grammatical, discourse and phonetic features within a single framework, (4) adding both ethnographic and social psychological dimensions to the explanation of observed linguistic behaviour, and (5) building on results from our previous work and that of Eckert (1988; 1989) suggesting that adolescents lead in linguistic change.

2. Objectives

The stated objectives should be seen against the background of the following four **premises**, alluded to in the proposal and motivating the research:

1. In areas of high population movement, there may be rapid changes in dialect and accent features, including levelling. The speech community is *diffuse*.
2. Membership of a close-knit, stable social network with strong local ties leads to linguistic conformity. This inhibits change, including that manifesting as levelling. The speech community is *focused*.
3. The distance of a town from a metropolis (in this case London) is inversely proportional to the degree to which the town adopts linguistic features from that metropolis (the gravity model: see Trudgill 1983).
4. Language change is most visible through the comparison of adolescents' language with that of adults.

As we detail below, the project met all its five original objectives. The discussion below is brief, and reference will be made to later sections and to published articles.

OBJECTIVE 1. To investigate the hypothesis that phonological and grammatical differences between nonstandard regional varieties of English are decreasing, and that this process may include an increased use of standard forms.

This objective is an over-arching one, and is descriptive in intent. The project addressed it by examining phonological and grammatical variables in two southern towns, Reading and Milton Keynes, and a northern city, Hull (see Objective 2 and Section 3 on the choice of locations). Three vocalic and four consonantal variables were quantified for all or most social groups in the study (viz. three towns, working and middle classes, males and females, teenage and elderly subjects). In addition, 12 nonstandard grammatical features and the focus marker *like* were analysed quantitatively. Analysis showed convergence between the two southern towns for all phonological features, whereas convergence between northern and southern towns was limited to some consonantal features.

OBJECTIVE 2. To compare three contrasting towns in the expectation that the process of dialect levelling will be more advanced in new, rather than well-established communities, and that the influence of London speech will be greater in the south-east than in relatively isolated conurbations, where levelling will follow a more independent path.

Our choice of Milton Keynes and Reading allowed us to test the claim that levelling would be more advanced in new, mobile communities (Milton Keynes) than in older, well-established ones (Reading). This claim was borne out in that Milton Keynes adolescent speech did not contain any localised features, while in equivalent Reading speech some localised features were present. However, individual features are changing at different rates and in sometimes complex ways, and localised London features (such as [ɛ:] for the vowel of MOUTH⁵) may be rejected in favour of less regionally marked forms. Hull, a northern city where local economic conditions give rise to low mobility and strongly localised networks, is developing independently in its vowel system, but is levelling as strongly as the south-east in three of the four consonantal variables studied. (See Tables 1, 2 and 3 for details of the subjects and their parents, which we take as a measure of social continuity and network density.)

A further claim by the Milroys (L. Milroy 1987; J. Milroy 1992) is that it is network characteristics rather than class which account for the levelled, more standard speech of the middle classes. Our choice of towns enabled us to test this claim, since, unlike in Reading, both WC and MC speakers in Milton Keynes are mobile and have open networks (Williams & Kerswill 1997; Kerswill & Williams 1997). Our finding is that, while the Milton Keynes WC speakers are certainly linguistically more levelled than their Reading counterparts, they remain strongly nonstandard and non-RP in grammar and pronunciation. We ascribe this to a lack of social (as distinct from geographical) mobility and to the maintenance of class-based cultural differences surrounding literacy and relationships with schools, authorities and employers (see Kerswill & Williams 1999).

OBJECTIVE 3. To discover whether dialect levelling can also be observed across social groups.

There is some evidence of convergence between the WC and MC in terms of grammar. Changes might involve the loss of a nonstandard regional construction in favour of a standard construction (e.g., a reduction in the use of the Hull zero definite article and a reduction in the use of Reading present tense *-s*).

In phonology, the picture is complex. In terms of lexical incidence, we find both maintenance and loss of older forms – loss invariably leading to the adoption by the WC of a standard English (and MC) form. The strongest maintenance was found in Hull. Thus, many Hull WC teenagers are maintaining forms such as [pʋɛ] for *over*, /aʊld/ for *old*, /fɒl/ for *fell/fallen*, a distinction between the vowel of *eight* [ɛɪt] and *ate* [e:], and /mɛk/ and /tek/ for *make* and *take*. On the other hand, [ɛɪt] in *weight* has been replaced by [e:] (the mainstream vowel in Hull for the FACE set) and the same vowel [ɛɪt] in *right* is now [aɪ] as in PRICE. In Milton Keynes and Reading, /ɔ:/ in *off* and *across* (still used by elderly speakers) has completely given way to /ɒ/, while /ɪ/ in *get* is variably maintained.

In terms of sub-phonemic vowel differences, the overall picture is that there is some levelling between social groups, more so in the south.

OBJECTIVE 4. To provide detailed evidence to corroborate findings from earlier research suggesting that adolescents are innovative in their use of language and are thus likely to be important as agents of change.

⁵ This and other words in small capitals are used mnemonically, following Wells (1982).

This objective relates to the work of Eckert, and to results from the MK project, which showed that older children are more advanced in ongoing changes (specifically, the fronting of GOAT and GOOSE) than younger children. We argued that, as they approach adolescence, children modify their speech to accommodate certain changes. In the present project, we were able to add data for the adolescent group. Our conclusion was that the fronting of GOAT was complete by the age of 12, while the GOOSE vowel continued to be fronted well into adolescence (Figures 2, 3, 5 and 6). We discuss this further in Section 4.

OBJECTIVE 5. To find out whether there are any inherent linguistic or sociolinguistic characteristics of particular linguistic features which make them (a) especially susceptible to change or (b) likely to be adopted as part of the levelling process.

Trudgill (1986) argues that simplicity and the notion of *saliency* help to explain why some changes are adopted by individual speakers sooner than others, where there is contact between speakers of different dialects. We saw earlier that there is a wide disparity in the geographical and social spread of incoming features. Explanations can certainly be found using Trudgill's approach; see Williams and Kerswill (1999) [attached] for a discussion of the features in terms of their sociolinguistic status in Britain.

3. Methodology

The research design employed a 'holistic' approach, the aim being to integrate social and demographic information about the three research sites and ethnographic data on the participants with detailed linguistic analysis. In addition, the researchers' quantitative analysis of the linguistic variables would be complemented by the subjects' own perceptions of their own and other varieties of English.

3.1 Selection of research sites

The three urban centres were chosen for their contrasting demographic profiles (see Table 4 and Objective 2, above).

3.2 Selection of sample

Using the researchers' local knowledge, contact was made with two secondary schools in each town, one of which drew its pupils from local authority housing and could be broadly defined as working class, the other middle class, with pupils from suburbs comprising substantial, privately owned houses. In order to maintain educational comparability, only comprehensive schools were approached initially although in Hull it was necessary to include one selective private school when the targeted comprehensive withdrew from the project.

Written permission was sought and obtained from local education authorities, school heads and parents. In each school, eight male and eight female locally born students in Year 10 (i.e., aged 14 at the start of the school year) were selected using guidance from teachers as to friendship groups, parental occupations and home addresses. Ethnic origin was not taken

into account if the student met the required residence criteria; in the event, six adolescents from minority backgrounds participated. In all, 100 adolescent participants were recorded.

Data on the traditional varieties was obtained by recording 4-6 elderly WC residents who had lived in each area since birth. SED material from sites Berkshire 5, Buckinghamshire 2 and Yorkshire 25 and 28 was consulted.

3.3 Data collection

Recording was carried out in the school years 1996/97 and 97/98. Each adolescent subject was recorded in school on two occasions (92 subjects recorded by AW; 8 subjects by PK). In the first session, subjects in friendship pairs read a word list and a set of sentences, and then participated in an individual and a joint sociolinguistic interview with the friend and the researcher. Details of family background, geographical origins of the parents as well as information on attitudes to school, peer group affiliation and allegiance to youth culture were elicited. In the second session, the respondents, in same-sex groups, were asked to identify ten taped accents, identify as local (or not) 40 nonstandard grammatical features (based on Cheshire et al. 1989) and take part in a discussion on linguistic issues.

In total, approximately 90 hours of tape were recorded using a Sony Professional cassette recorder (WMD6C) and Sony lapel microphones (ECM-144).

3.4 Analysis

- 7 phonological variables. The auditory criteria for transcription of the range of variants for each variable were established jointly by PK and AW: AW carried out the transcriptions, which were verified at intervals by PK. 20-30 tokens of each variable for each subject were transcribed.
- 12 grammatical variables (see Figure 13). The first interviews with the friendship pairs were transcribed orthographically by AG, AW and paid transcribers, creating a database of c. 285,000 words (a new resource not envisaged in the proposal), and analysed for nonstandard grammatical features and selected discourse features using the Summer Institute of Linguistics Concordance General Programmer version 1.71 beta.
- The focus marker *like* is the only discourse variable quantified so far.
- The responses to the dialect recognition and grammar questionnaires were quantified and analysed.
- Ethnographic information for each student was tabulated on sheets, but so far no detailed analysis has been carried out.

4. Results

4.1 Phonological variables

As mentioned in Section 2, the variables could be classified into two types according to their sociolinguistic patterning.

4.1.1 VARIABLES WHICH SHOW LEVELLING ONLY IN THE SOUTH

The first group of variables shows a complex pattern of regional levelling, with few if any signs of North-South convergence. The complexity is visible in the changes in the vowels of MOUTH, PRICE and GOAT in the two southern towns. In both towns, /aʊ/ as in MOUTH is converging on an RP-like [aʊ], moving away from local WC pronunciations such as [ɛɪ] and [ɛɹ] (Tables 5 and 6). The obvious London WC models, [ɛ:] and [æʊ], are being rejected. Thus, this vowel shows both regional levelling (towards a supra-local form) and social levelling (the difference between WC and MC speakers is reduced, in favour of MC forms). However, there are differences between Milton Keynes and Reading. In Milton Keynes, there appear to be three stages in the development of this vowel (Table 5): first, a period of stability in which [ɛɹ] and [ɛɪ] predominated, followed at the height of the Milton Keynes settlement in the 1970s by a period of greater heterogeneity in which [æʊ], the form favoured by the majority of the in-migrants, was dominant. A 're-focusing' finally began with the second-generation migrants (today's children), who are settling on [aʊ]. The discontinuity between the scores of each generation in Table 5 reflects the lack of social continuity in this town, where most children have grandparents originating elsewhere. Table 6 indicates that, in Reading, young WC speakers are similarly rejecting the regionally marked forms in favour of [aʊ]. Significantly, some young speakers retain the old forms of their grandparents in a way that is indicative of the strong social continuity there (as shown in Table 2). Later, we shall see that the social (and to a smaller extent dialectal) continuity found in Reading is not reflected in dialect recognition scores.

The difference between Milton Keynes and Reading is more striking for /aɪ/ as in PRICE. In Milton Keynes, [ɔɪ] or [ʌɪ] can only be heard among the very oldest, pre-New Town speakers, while in Reading they are still to a considerable extent maintained by children (Tables 7 and 8), giving rise, when coupled with the characteristically fronted PALM vowel, to pronunciations such as [lɑ:s nɔɪ?] for *last night*. In both towns, the new target is not an RP variant, but a London-like [aɪ], which is geographically widespread in south-eastern urban varieties.

GOAT and GOOSE: parallel changes and the role of adolescents

The GOAT vowel /əʊ/ is subject to the fronting of the offset, giving pronunciations such as [əɹ] or [əɪ]. The data shows this to be a pan-Southern change, affecting both WC and MC accents to an almost equal extent (Figure 1): levelling in this case involves convergence on an entirely new form. A prediction of the MK project was that new forms would be found in greatest measure in adolescent speech: Figures 2 and 3 plot the original 1991 child data (from Kerswill & Williams 2000 forthcoming; Figure 10) and the adolescent data from 1996. The prediction is only partly borne out: measuring fronting in terms of the reduction of back offsets (black bars), we see that the fronting process does not progress beyond 12 for the girls, or 8 for the boys. We place less reliance on the transcriptions of the +round vs. -round offsets because of the difficulty of hearing this feature; if the data are reliable, then it appears that unrounding does continue into the teens. Yet Milton Keynes and Reading continue to be distinguished by GOAT in the height of its *onset*, which is considerably lower in Milton Keynes (typically [ɐ]) than in Reading, where WC children retain the [ə] of the elderly speakers. Figure 1 shows that the difference between the towns in onset-lowering is less in the MC. It is the WC boys in Reading who have the least levelled onset (if London and

Milton Keynes [ɐ] is to be regarded as the expanding norm): this is a case of RP and more conservative nonstandard speech sharing a feature. Unlike changes affecting MOUTH, where one can observe discrete switching between [ɛʊ]/[ɛɪ] and [aʊ], the fronting of GOAT appears to be a phonetically gradual, Neogrammarian change.

The vowel /u:/ in GOOSE parallels developments in GOAT: it is being fronted throughout the south in a way that is not strongly associated with class or gender, though the WC and females appear to be in the lead (Figure 4; see also Kerswill & Williams (2000 forthcoming) and Torgersen (1997:61) for a discussion of significant age and gender correlations). Figures 5 and 6 show the 1991 and 1996 data for Milton Keynes WC speakers: unlike with GOAT, there is stronger evidence of continued fronting into adolescence, the pattern being clearest for the girls.

Hull: conservative vowels, but is there northern levelling?

In Hull, the vowels we investigated are strongly conservative. Characteristic of Hull is an allophonic distinction between a diphthong [aɪ] before voiceless consonants and a monophthong [a:] before voiced consonants in the lexical set of PRICE. Table 9 shows the distribution of the variants in the Hull sample. Our results show that while the two allophones are merged in MC Hull speech, WC children preserve the complex patterning seen in the older speakers. (For discussion, see Williams & Kerswill 1999.)

A possible case of a vowel converging between Hull and the south is that of GOAT. The characteristic Hull centralisation of the monophthong [o:] appears to be increasing among both WC and MC girls (especially the latter – compare the WC and MC use of the centralised variants ‘cent 3’ and ‘cent 2’ shown in Figures 7 and 8). This centralisation seems to mirror the fronting of the offset of GOAT by their Milton Keynes (if not their Reading) counterparts. However, the distribution is complicated by the fact that MC adolescents divide into two groups, diphthong users and monophthong users (a fact which is masked by the pooled data in Figure 8). Interestingly, few of the diphthongs exhibit the southern fronting. Significantly, the use of a central or front monophthong for GOAT on Tyneside shows a totally different patterning. There, it is a conservative feature strongly retained by younger men (Watt & Milroy 1999), while women are *backing* the vowel towards what Milroy, Milroy & Docherty (1997: 8) call a ‘default or unmarked northern ... [o:]’. If we accept, with them, that women lead in regional levelling, then the divergent tendencies in Hull and on Tyneside call into question the existence of an all-embracing regional levelling in the North of England.

While this pattern is mainly characteristic of vowels, one consonant, /h/, can also be included in this category. The treatment of initial /h/ in lexical words shows few signs of levelling – indeed, there is divergence. All three towns are in traditional ‘h-dropping’ areas, and the main differentiating factor is class. However, in the south, there is widespread *adoption* of [h] among WC speakers, at least in interview style, while, in Hull, the WC adolescents maintain the same level of use as their grandparents’ generation (Figure 9).

4.1.2 VARIABLES WITH RESPECT TO WHICH HULL SHOWS CONVERGENCE WITH THE SOUTH

Quantitative analysis shows a distinction in the patterning of consonantal and vocalic variables. T-glottalling and TH-fronting are reported as spreading throughout the country, and it is not surprising that we find broadly similar gender and class patterning in Hull and in the

two southern towns (Figure 9), despite the fact that all the features are relatively new to Hull. When this data is combined with that of J. Milroy (1996), L. Milroy et al. (1997), J. Milroy et al. (1994) and Llamas (1998 and pc), we get a picture of the gradual diffusion northwards of these originally southern consonantal features. Thus, among young speakers, the Midland city of Derby shows the ‘southern’ pattern of T-glottalling and TH-fronting, as do the Northern urban centres of Hull and Middlesbrough, with males and WC speakers showing greater usage of the nonstandard forms. On the other hand, in the far northern conurbation of Tyneside (50 kms north of Middlesbrough) there is only incipient TH-fronting and a gradual, female-led introduction of glottal replacement (J. Milroy et al. 1994). Among older people in both Hull and Middlesbrough, we find the remains of earlier systems, in the latter with Tyneside-style glottal reinforcement. In Hull, there is no record of glottal reinforcement, but clear evidence of released [t] in medial and final positions. Figures 10 and 11 compares the use of [ʔ] by elderly speakers in Milton Keynes and Hull, respectively. The scores are considerably lower for Hull than for three of the four MK speakers, and they in fact conceal considerable use of [r] and [ɹ]. Though the data thus far analysed is not conclusive, it would not be fanciful to suggest that the data for Tyneside, Middlesbrough and Hull show levelling with respect to /t/, in each town starting from different sets of variants and distributions.

For a discussion of reasons for the differential adoption of different phonological features by Hull teenagers, see Williams & Kerswill (1999) (attached).

4.2 Grammatical variables

Although it was not the initial intention to carry out quantitative analyses of grammatical features, there were sufficient tokens of 12 variables for quantification. The need for a full orthographic transcription, combined with the problems of the half-time researcher, means that the grammatical analysis is not as far advanced as that of the phonological data. A more refined analysis, taking account of the linguistic and non-linguistic factors affecting each feature is now under way. However, it is possible to report that the following non-standard features, found to be common to many urban English dialects (see Cheshire et al. 1989) do indeed occur in the speech of the WC groups in all three towns: negative concord, nonstandard *was*, relative *what*, and *them* as demonstrative adjective. Nonstandard preterite forms are also common: Figure 13 and Table 10 show the frequency indices for *come* and *do*, but other nonstandard preterite forms are shared by WC speakers in the three towns, including *give* and *run*. Other nonstandard forms attested in the interview data in all three towns include absence of plural marking (e.g., *it cost three pound*), *never* as past tense negator, and the perfect participles *sat* and *stood* (e.g., *she was sat over there*, *she was stood on the corner*).

As might be expected in a new town, the Milton Keynes WC group used only the common core nonstandard features, whereas the Reading and Hull adolescents used features which were ‘marked’ in that they have a regional distribution, but these occur less frequently than the common core forms. These marked forms are: zero article in Hull, and verbal *-s* and the related nonstandard *has* and *does* in Reading. This suggests to us that, for these features, levelling is occurring on the dialect-standard dimension (for example, the reduction in the use of nonstandard *has* and *does* is a move towards the standard English system). It does not necessarily ensue that there is an increase in the use of standard forms. Nonstandard forms

used sporadically by speakers in the MC groups included *ain't*, preterite forms, nonstandard *don't*, verbal *-s* in Reading, and negative concord in Hull.

Although some levelling does seem to be occurring in Hull, a number of distinctive grammatical features remain, including right dislocation ('he's got a real nice chest him'), the negative BE paradigm (present: 3rd singular [ɪnʔ], [a:ʔ] elsewhere; preterite: all persons singular and plural: [wɒnʔ]), and the conjunction *while* for 'until'. In addition, negative concord in Hull seems to be organised differently from negative concord in Reading and Milton Keynes. In Hull there appears to be what at present we see as a lexical constraint: in clause tags such as 'or anything', e.g., 'he didn't even have to take methadone or anything to get him off it' or 'they don't know what they're doing or anything', the item in the tag is never negative. In Reading and Milton Keynes, on the other hand, negative forms such as 'nothing' occur variably in the tag.

Even so, adolescents in Hull, like adolescents in Milton Keynes and Reading, are adopting some features not heard from the elderly speakers in the three towns. These include *innit* as a clause final tag, in utterances such as 'that's the trouble with teachers innit' (replacing older 3rd singular [ɪntɪʔ]); and *like* as a focus marker, as in 'I'm like real tired when I get in', and *like* as a marker of reported speech and thought, as in 'and he's like wow that's great'. Table 11 shows that this use of *like* spreads across the social class groups and across the three towns, occurring more frequently in Hull than in Milton Keynes and Reading. A useful point of comparison which indicates the rapid spread of this feature is the speech recorded for Cheshire's 1982 study in Reading, where a small number of 'embryonic' tokens of focus *like* occurred: in the Orts Road boys' group there was 1 token of focus *like* per 8498 words.

Further analyses of grammatical variables have been planned; see Annexe 4.

4.3 *The social psychology of dialect levelling*

In addition to the focus on adolescents, a further innovative feature of this project is the use of social psychological and ethnographic methods to complement the quantitative approach reported on so far. These methods fall into three groups: an ethnographic investigation of adolescents' attitudes to language and social groups, a dialect recognition experiment, and a questionnaire investigating the recognition of nonstandard features.

Kerswill & Williams (1997) is an attempt to bring out the relationship between attitudes to particular language varieties, attitudes to social groups, and use of particular features by the same individuals. In the interview sessions, when participants were invited to discuss aspects of teenage culture, it was language issues which evoked the strongest feelings. These were framed in terms of in- versus out-group, usually with reference to a hierarchical class structure. Thus, strong own-group allegiance was expressed, along with scorn for 'posh' people (and occasionally disdain for 'common' people), as well as an anxiety about sounding 'country' (see Annexe 5 for quotes). We argued that adolescents' self-identifications and linguistic use do not stand in a one-to-one relationship (in particular, use of [ʔ] for /t/ was occasionally 'over-reported' in Trudgill's (1972) sense), and that this is evidence of the complexity of the language change processes of which they are part but not fully aware. Yet the uniformity of the language attitudes in the northern and southern schools suggests that part of the mechanism of levelling lies in these subjective parameters.

The dialect recognition experiment (fully reported in Kerswill & Williams forthcoming) was designed to test the notion of focusing (Le Page) in speech communities which are stable or which are subject to levelling, the main hypothesis being that speakers in a stable community will be more successful at recognising voices from their own community than will people in levelling communities. The methodology, similar to that of Preston (1996), involved playing taped extracts of samples of speech from each of the three towns and from elsewhere. The rate of own-community recognition was high in Hull (Figure 14), leading us to claim that accurate dialect recognition is an integral part of focusing in a stable speech community. In Reading and Milton Keynes, where there is rapid linguistic change, dialect recognition was much less reliable (Figures 15 and 16). In the southern towns, judges did not recognise elderly local speakers, but identified their age peers more accurately. This suggests a discontinuity in the speech communities across three generations, a finding which is expected in the new town of Milton Keynes, but is more surprising in Reading, where there is a high degree of social continuity in WC communities. Dialect recognition patterns can be considered a measure of the rapidity of change within a speech community.

In the group discussions, judgements were sought concerning the existence of 40 nonstandard grammatical features in local speech, presented in example sentences in a questionnaire. Table 12 groups responses by town and class, and according to whether they reflect the maintenance of regional distributions or levelling. In each case, the recognition scores tally with our knowledge of the local varieties concerned; particularly interesting is the difference between clause-final and clause-medial (focus marker) *like*, the former being widespread in older speech in Hull and to a lesser extent in the south. Table 13 compares recognition scores with actual linguistic indices for nine of the variables in Figure 13. It shows four different patterns of association. Pattern 1 shows stable non-standard features which are levelling throughout the country (cf. Cheshire et al. 1989); Pattern 2 shows features which maintain regional distributions; Pattern 3 shows a feature, nonstandard *what*, which is infrequent in use and not well recognised; and Pattern 4 shows two features which are localised to one town only but are clearly salient, even though their frequencies are low.

The scope of the project was wide ranging, aiming to combine techniques from ethnography and perceptual dialectology with quantitative analysis of three linguistic levels. In addition, it had a wide geographical and social base. Despite the time constraints which inhibited in-depth use of the ethnographic data, the project has demonstrated the importance of integrating complementary methodologies in the investigation of language variation.

5. Activities

The project has been presented at a number of conferences, in this country and abroad. JC, PK and AW have all been invited to speak on the project at overseas meetings, JC as a keynote speaker on two occasions (Annexe 6). In addition, two international conferences have been organised at Reading on the theme of the project: the **First UK Language Variation Workshop** (April 1997) and the Final Open Conference of the European Science Foundation Network on **the Convergence and Divergence of Dialects in a Changing Europe** (September 1998).⁶ PK was the UK representative on this network, and presented a paper on the project at its meeting in Heidelberg in 1997, as well as teaching on a summer

⁶ See <http://www.linguistics.rdg.ac.uk/research/seminars.html> and <http://www.esf.org/diala.htm>.

course organised by the network for European PhD students in Málaga in 1998. His involvement with the network has served to publicise the project throughout Europe, and he is now on the organising committee of the new **International Conference on Language Variation in Europe**, the first meeting to be held in Barcelona in 2000. PK and AW have given a number of radio and television interviews on the project.⁷ Newspaper articles citing the project have appeared in the *Sunday Times*, *Yorkshire Post* and the *Reading Evening Post*.

6. Outputs

The project has already resulted in five publications (see REGARD return), covering all aspects of the project.

We have obtained permission from the ESRC Data Archive and from Qualidata *not* to deposit our data with them. We made this request because we did not obtain permission from the subjects to lodge data they provided in such a way.

7. Impacts

The project, together with its two predecessors and the Newcastle-based project, forms part of a larger research initiative in the UK on urban dialect change. Our work is widely cited by scholars currently working on dialect change and dialect levelling in this country, the continent and the USA.

We engage with a wider public by contributing to the so-called 'Estuary English debate', providing concrete information on southern varieties. PK has presented dialect change issues at regional study days for English Language 'A' level students in Bristol, Street (Somerset) and Sheffield. AW has presented the project to 'A' level students in Hull and Milton Keynes and to teachers in Reading.

8. Future research priorities

PK is currently completing a research proposal, with Clive Upton (Leeds), for a project on dialect change covering a wider geographical area and using new methods of data storage and retrieval.

With the large datasets we now have, a range of further analyses is planned (Annexe 4). PK has obtained a Reading University Research Endowment Trust Fund grant to carry out an instrumental study of vowel changes in south-eastern England, using existing data from Milton Keynes, Reading and new data from Ashford, Kent.

We have already contacted Dr Sali Tagliamonte with a view to comparing grammatical variation in our transcribed corpus with that in her much larger corpus of York speech (R000221842).

⁷ Radio 5 (Late Night Live), Thames Valley FM, Radio 4 (You and Yours, Word of Mouth), Radio 2, Capital Radio, Three Counties Radio, Meridian Television, Yorkshire Television.

Annexe 1: References

Items marked ‘*’ arose directly from this project.

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Annexe 2: Tables

Table 1: Birthplace of Hull subjects and their parents

		Working class			Middle class		
		Born	Mother's birthplace	Father's birthplace	Born	Mother's birthplace	Father's birthplace
Girls	1	Hull*	<i>Withernsea</i>		Hull	Hull	Hull
	2	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*			
	3	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Hull	East Riding	Barnsley
	4	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Hull
	5	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	East Riding	East Riding
	6	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	<i>Hull</i>	Canada
	7	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Nuneaton	<i>Hull</i>	Nuneaton
	8	Hull	Hull	Spain	Hull	Hull	Hull
Boys	1	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	<i>Hull</i>	Hull	Hull
	2	Hull	Hull	<i>Hull</i>	Birmingham	Kurdistan	Wales
	3	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	<i>Hull</i>	Manchester	<i>Hull</i>
	4	Hull	Hull	Hull	Manchester	Manchester	Wales
	5	Chester	<i>Hull*</i>	Lincs.	<i>Hull</i>	East Riding	East Riding
	6	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Hull
	7	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Hull	Hull
	8	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Manchester	<i>Hull</i>
% born in Hull		93.7	93.7	86.7	80.0	53.3	53.3

* indicates individuals born on the estate where they currently live.

Table 2: Birthplace of Reading subjects and their parents

		Working class			Middle class		
		Born	Mother's birthplace	Father's birthplace	Born	Mother's birthplace	Father's birthplace
Girls	1	Reading	Reading	Reading	<i>Reading</i>	Barbados	Barbados
	2	Reading	Reading	Reading	Warrington	Yorkshire	Yorkshire
	3	Reading	Guyana	Guyana	Reading	Essex	Essex
	4	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading		
	5	Germany	India	Reading	I. of Wight	Reading	I. of Wight
	6	Reading	Cambridge	Reading	Ascot	London	Portsmouth
	7	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Tadley
	8	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Watford	Yorkshire
Boys	1	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
	2	Reading	Reading	Reading	Slough	Reading	Somerset
	3	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Wolverhampton	London

4	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Sussex	Hastings
5	Reading	Reading	Reading	Hillingdon	Hastings	Reading
6	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Newcastle	Newcastle
7	Reading	Reading	London	London	London	London
8	Reading	Reading	Ireland	Reading	Germany	Devon
% born in Reading	93.7	81.2	81.2	62.5	26.7	11.8

Table 3: Birthplace of Milton Keynes subjects and their parents

		Working class			Middle class		
		Born	Mother's birthplace	Father's birthplace	Born	Mother's birthplace	Father's birthplace
Girls	1	Scotland	Scotland	Scotland	M. Keynes	Newbury	St. Helena
	2	M. Keynes	Halifax	London	<i>M. Keynes</i>	London	Leeds
	3	Luton	Portsmouth	Watford	Oxford	Oxford	Oxford
	4	London	London	London	M. Keynes	Lowestoft	Bletchley
	5	M. Keynes	Bletchley	Bletchley	Cranfield	Leicester	Bucks.
	6	Lancashire	Lancashire	Liverpool			
	7	Blackpool	London		Glasgow	Inverness	Inverness
	8	Bletchley	Stevenage	Ireland	M. Keynes	Kenya	Kenya
Boys	1	M. Keynes	Bletchley	Bletchley	Birkenhead	Birkenhead	Birkenhead
	2	London	Essex	London	London	Luton	Luton
	3	M. Keynes	London	London	Kent	Manchester	Dorset
	4	M. Keynes	Gt. Yarmouth	Ireland	Aylesbury	Poland	Manchester
	5	Newbury	Newbury	Tadley	Northampton	Newport Pagnell	Newport Pagnell
	6	Ireland	Halifax	Ireland	Bristol	Bristol	Manchester
	7	M. Keynes	London	London	Northampton	Newcastle	'North'
	8	M. Keynes	London	Jamaica	Brighton	Northants.	Leicester
% born in MK		50.0	12.5	13.3	26.7	0	6.7

Note: For ease of identification, 'Milton Keynes' and 'Bletchley' are printed in bold type (Bletchley lies within the borough of Milton Keynes).

Table 4: Summary of demographic characteristics of Reading, Milton Keynes and Hull

	<i>New Town?</i>	<i>Close to London?</i>	<i>Population 1991</i>	<i>Population change 1981-91</i>	<i>% skilled manual+unskilled*</i>	<i>Unemployment*</i>
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HULL	no	no (340 kms)	254,000	-8.7%	63.0%	12.02%
READING	no	yes (60 kms)	129,000 (not counting Wokingham)	-5.1% (increase with Wokingham added)†	42.8%	4.25%
MILTON KEYNES	yes founded 1967 (pop. 44,000)	yes (70 kms)	176,000	+39.2%	44.9%	4.75%

*1991 Census, taken from *BBC Constituency Guide 1997*

† The neighbouring borough of Wokingham has seen a population increase of 20.1% in this period. A substantial portion of the in-migrants work in Reading and live in new districts contiguous with Reading.

Table 5: Percentage use of variants of /aʊ/ (MOUTH), Milton Keynes Working Class, interview style

	[ɛʊ]	[ɛɪ]	[ɛ:]	[a:ʔ]	[æʊ]	[aʊ]
SED informants	✓					
Elderly (2f, 2m)	63.2	25.6	9.8	0	1.2	0
Women age 25-40 (1991 data ⁸ ; n=48)	0	0	11.7	17.2	38.6	31.5
Girls age 14 (n=8)	0	0	0	5.9	4.7	88.8
Boys age 14 (n=8)	0	0	0	12.3	3.8	83.1

Table 6: Percentage use of variants of /aʊ/ (MOUTH), Reading Working Class, interview style

⁸ This data is from the Milton Keynes project (1990-4).

	[ɛ̥ʊ]	[ɛɪ]	[ɛ:]	[a:ʔ]	[æʊ]	[aʊ]
SED informants	✓					
Elderly (2f, 2m)	53.5	38.1	3.3	0	4.1	0.7
Girls age 14 (n=8)	0	2.3	0	8.0	0	90.4
Boys age 14 (n=8)	3.8	3.2	0	5.7	0	87.1

Table 7: Percentage use of variants of /aɪ/ (PRICE), Milton Keynes Working Class, interview style

	[aɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌɪ]	[Δɪ]
Elderly (2f, 2m)	0	0	24.4	56.6	15.3	3.4
Girls (n=8)	25.4	44.6	29.2	0.5	0	0
Boys (n=8)	1.0	38.0	60.0	0	0	0

Table 8: Percentage use of variants of /aɪ/ (PRICE), Reading Working Class, interview style

	[aɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌɪ]	[Δɪ]
Elderly (2f, 2m)	0	12.4	47.8	21.8	1.7	15.7
Girls (n=8)	2.8	21.2	45.1	21.1	4.3	5.1
Boys(n=8)	0.6	19.1	63.7	13.7	2.7	0

Table 9: The PRICE vowel with following voiceless and voiced consonants, Hull speakers

(a) with following voiceless consonant, e.g. *bright*

	% [aɪ] ~ [aɪʰ]	% [a:]
WC elderly (n=4)	100	0
WC girls (n=8)	100	0
WC boys (n=8)	100	0
MC girls (n=8)	100	0
MC boys (n=8)	100	0

(b) with following voiced consonant, e.g. *bride*

	% [aɪ] ~ [aɪʰ]	% [a:]
WC elderly (n=4)	0	100
WC girls (n=8)	25.7	74.2
WC boys (n=8)	17.5	82.5
MC girls (n=8)	100	0
MC boys (n=8)	95.0	5.0

Note: Each adolescent read the following words: *bright, knife, lighter, bike, whiter; bride, five, pint, smile, wider*. Scores for the elderly are derived from the interview data; 20 tokens per speaker were transcribed.

Table 10: Raw data for 12 nonstandard grammatical features, Working Class adolescents

	neg.con cord	n-s was	n-s were	n-s don't	pret. come	pret. done	n-s relatives	n-s them	zero article	verbal -s	n-s has	n-s does	n-s does
HULL	46 (68)	54 (69)	7 (224)	7 (28)	24 (33)	1 (13)	13 (51)	3 (12)	70 (738)				
MK	31 (92)	13 (63)	4 (6)	17 (36)	21 (37)	5 (9)	3 (95)	5 (9)					
READING	16 (43)	13 (45)	9 (25)	21 (33)	14 (17)	8 (24)	2 (52)	4 (6)		72 (594)	2 (38)	3 (18)	3 (18)

NB: Format: frequency of nonstandard feature (frequency of standard + nonstandard tokens)

Where the total number of observations is less than 5, no figure is entered.

This data is displayed graphically in Figure 13.

Table 11: Frequency of *like* as focus marker

Group	No. speakers analysed	No. of words	No. of tokens of <i>like</i>	No. of words for 1 token of <i>like</i>
Hull WC girls	8	16214	175	92.65
Hull WC boys	8	17199	179	96.1
Total Hull WC	16	33413	354	94.4
Hull MC girls	4	23600	412	57.3
Hull MC Boys	8	19302	264	73.1
Total Hull MC	12	42902	676	63.5
MK WC girls	4	11447	92	124.4
MK WC boys	0			
Total MK WC	4	11447	92	124.4
MK MC girls	8	24045	245	98.1
MK MC boys	8	27875	166	167.9
Total MK MC	16	51920	411	126.3
Rdg WC girls	8	15012	98	153.2
Rdg WC boys	8	14274	135	105.7
Total Rdg WC	16	29286	233	125.7

Rdg MC girls	4	14675	88	166.8
Rdg MC boys	2	4379	31	141.3
Total Rdg MC	6	19054	119	160.1

Table 12: Dialect maintenance and dialect levelling mirrored in recognition scores (percent) for grammatical features

1. *Regional distribution maintained:*

Item No.	Feature	Reading		Milton Keynes		Hull	
		WC	MC	WC	MC	WC	MC
1	verbal -s 'I likes'	100	13	0	0	0	0
12	right dislocation	0	51	0	0	62	100
13	1 st sing neg BE 'I aren't'	0	0	0	0	94	86
35	<i>while</i> = 'until' 'wait while 9'	0	0	6	0	100	75
40	<i>again</i> = 'next to'	0	0	0	0	12	25

2. *Evidence of levelling in the south:*

16	tag <i>innit</i>	56	28	50	0	0	0
25	levelling to <i>weren't</i> 'he weren't'	100	100	81	100	25	0
29	neg aux <i>have</i> 'ain't'	100	100	75	100	25	0

3. *Evidence of recent complete levelling:*

39	loss of clause final <i>like</i>	0	13	0	0	13	25
11	adoption of focus marker <i>like</i>	100	100	75	100	94	100
31	loss of 'that there' (dem.) in Hull	0	13	11	0	0	12
27	levelling to <i>was</i> 'was you?'	94	88	100	20	100	100

Table 13: Association between recognition scores (percent) and WC linguistic scores (percent) for selected grammatical features

Pattern 1. Moderate to high nonstandard score, high recognition rate in all towns:

Item No.	Feature	Reading		Milton Keynes		Hull	
		WC	MC	WC	MC	WC	MC
7	neg concord	94	100	69	100	94	100
	<i>ling. score</i>	37		34		67	
3	n-s come	75	63	88	100	81	71
	<i>ling. score</i>	82		57		73	
32	n-s them	50	63	81	100	100	88
	<i>ling. score</i>	67		56		25	

Pattern 2. High nonstandard score, high recognition rate, individual towns:

MK and Reading:									
20	pret. done	100	100		69	100		31	100
	<i>ling. score</i>	36			56			8	
Hull:									
27	n-s was	94	87		100	20		100	100
	<i>ling. score</i>	29			21			78	

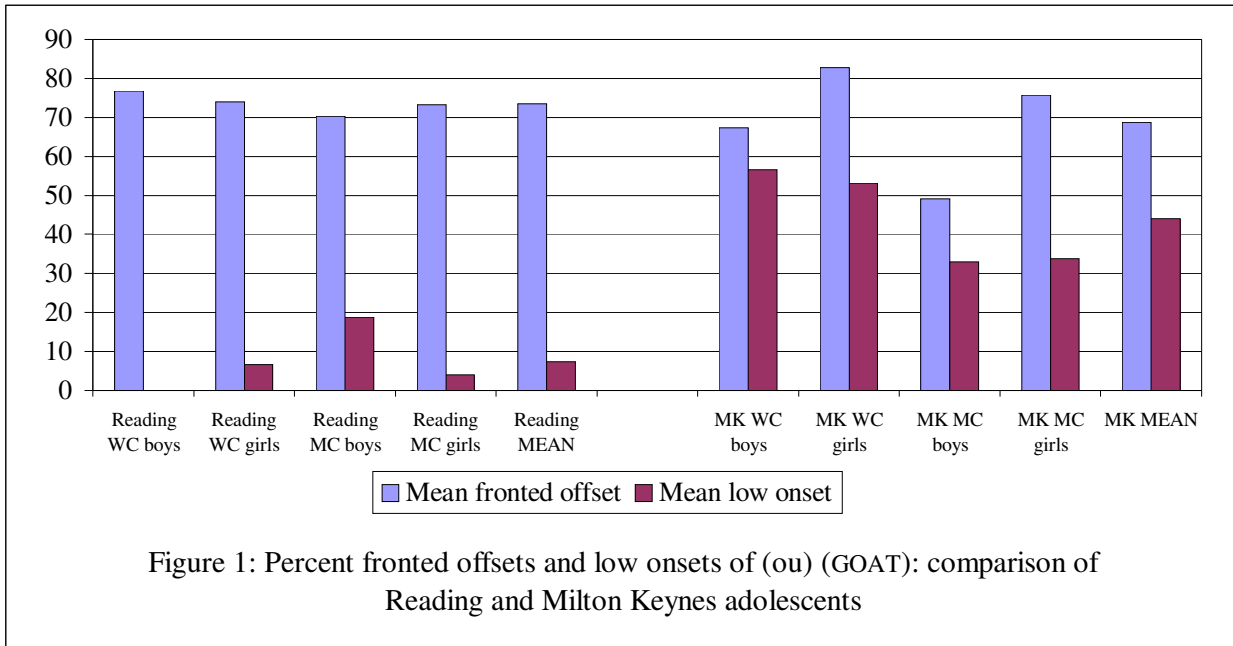
Pattern 3. Low to moderate nonstandard score, low recognition rate in all towns:

10	n-s relatives	25	50		0	0		6	0
	<i>ling. score</i>	4			3			26	

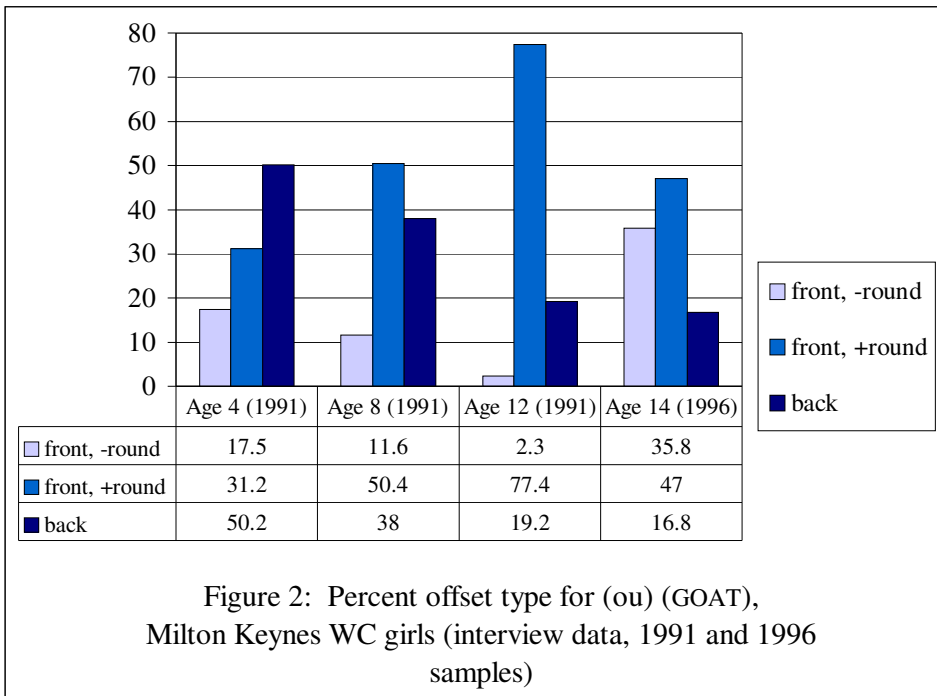
Pattern 4. Low nonstandard score, high recognition rate, individual towns:

Hull:									
9	zero def. article	6	38		50	0		69	100
	<i>ling. score</i>	0			0			9.5	
Reading:									
1	verbal -s	100	13		0	0		0	0
	<i>ling. score</i>	12			0			0	

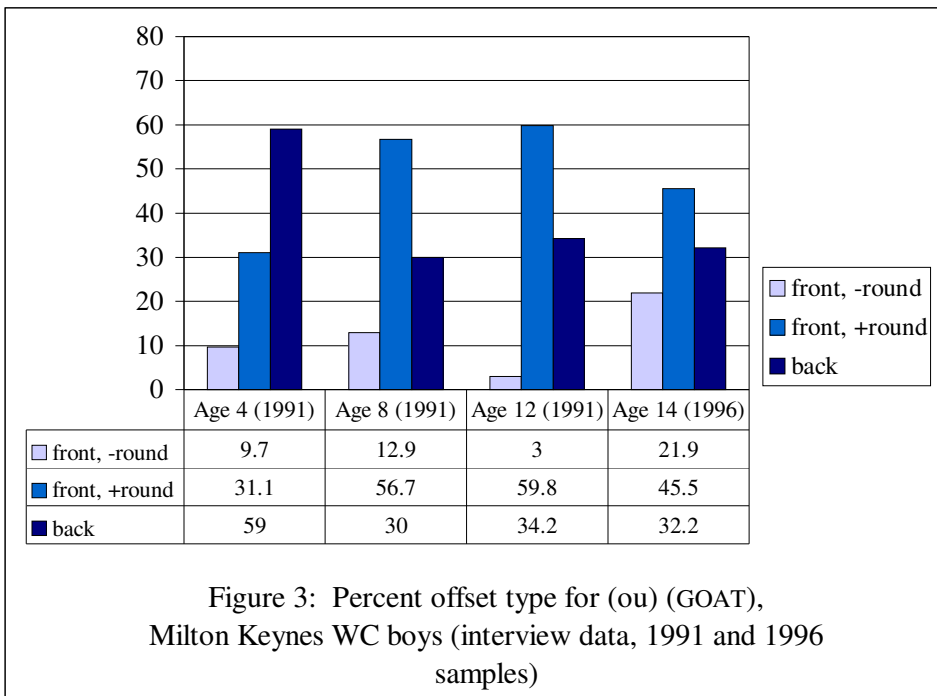
Annexe 3: Figures

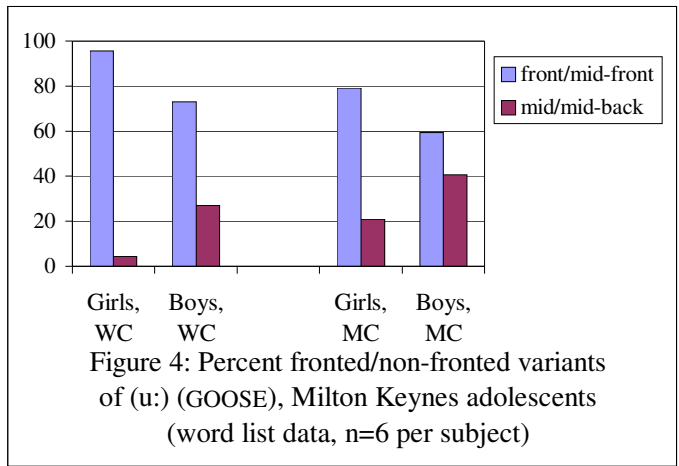


NB: Fronted offsets = [ʏ], [ɪ]
 Non-fronted offsets = [ʊ]
 Low onsets = [ɐ]
 Non-low onsets = [ə]

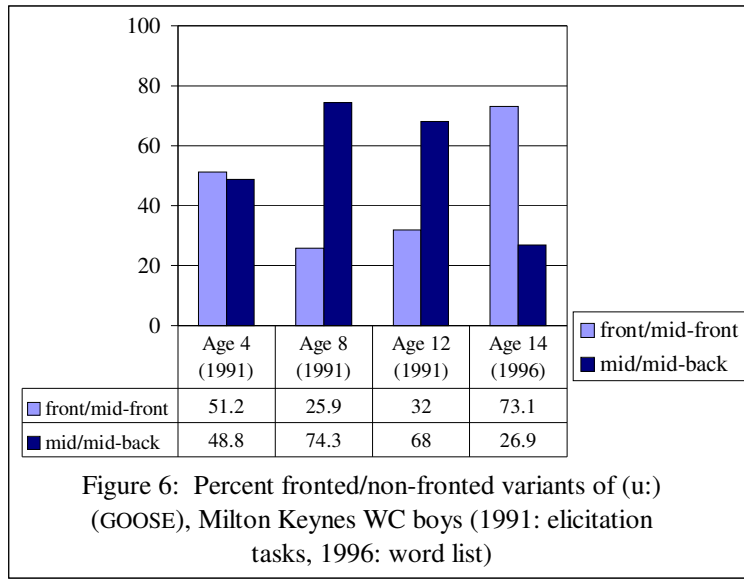
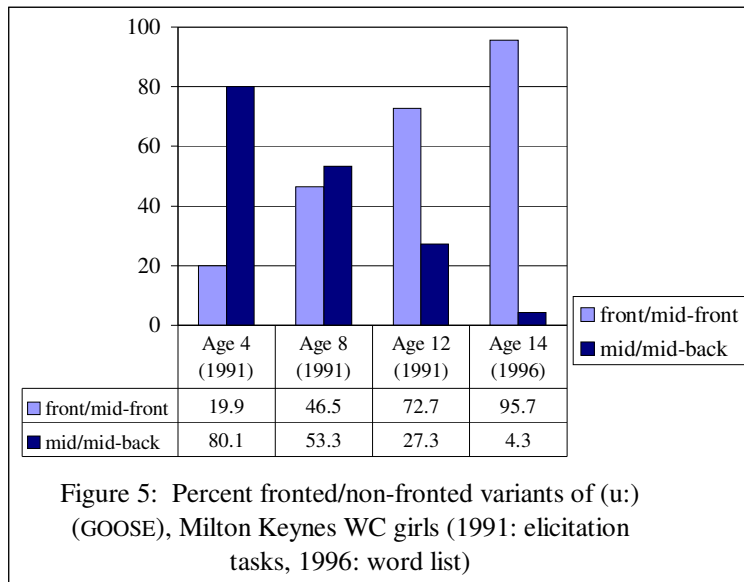


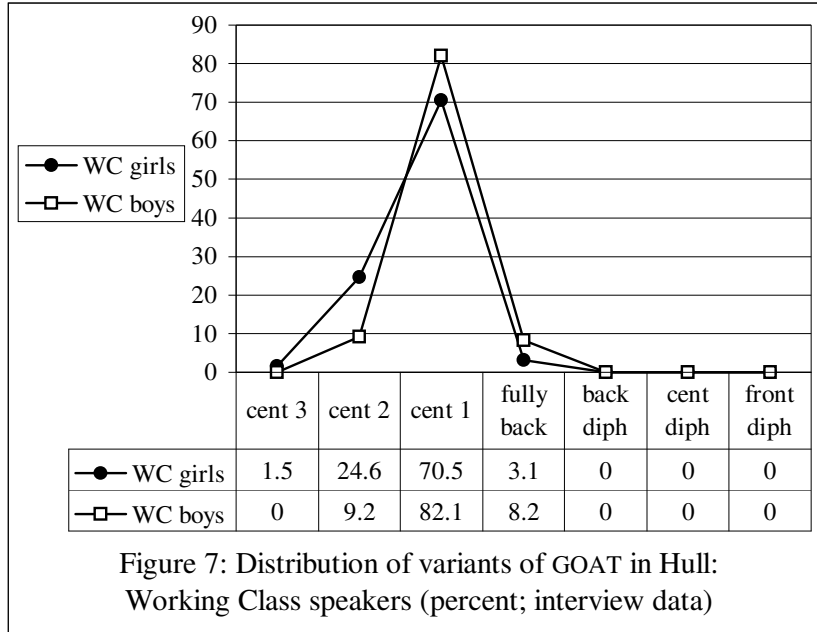
NB: ‘front, -round’ refers to vowels of the type [əɪ]
‘front, +round’ “ “ “ [əʏ]
‘back’ “ “ “ [əʊ]



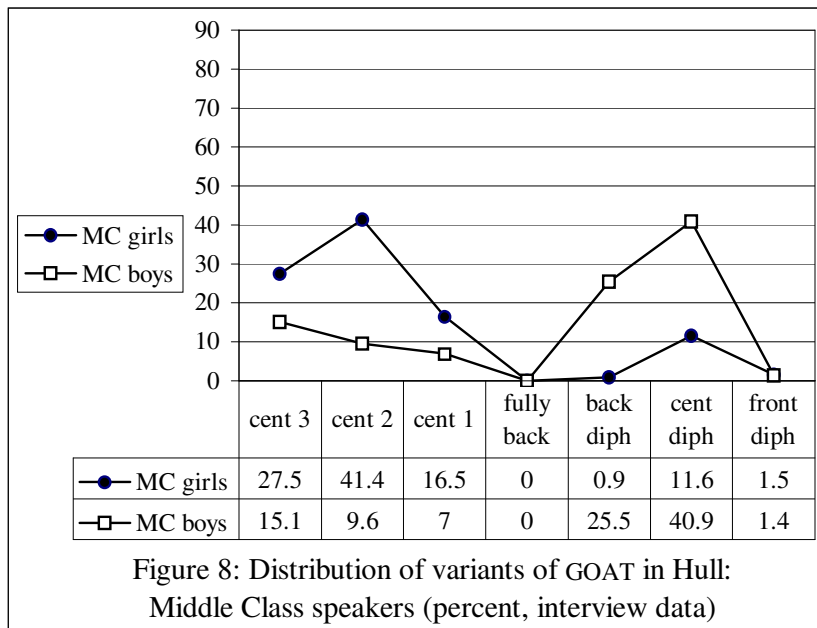


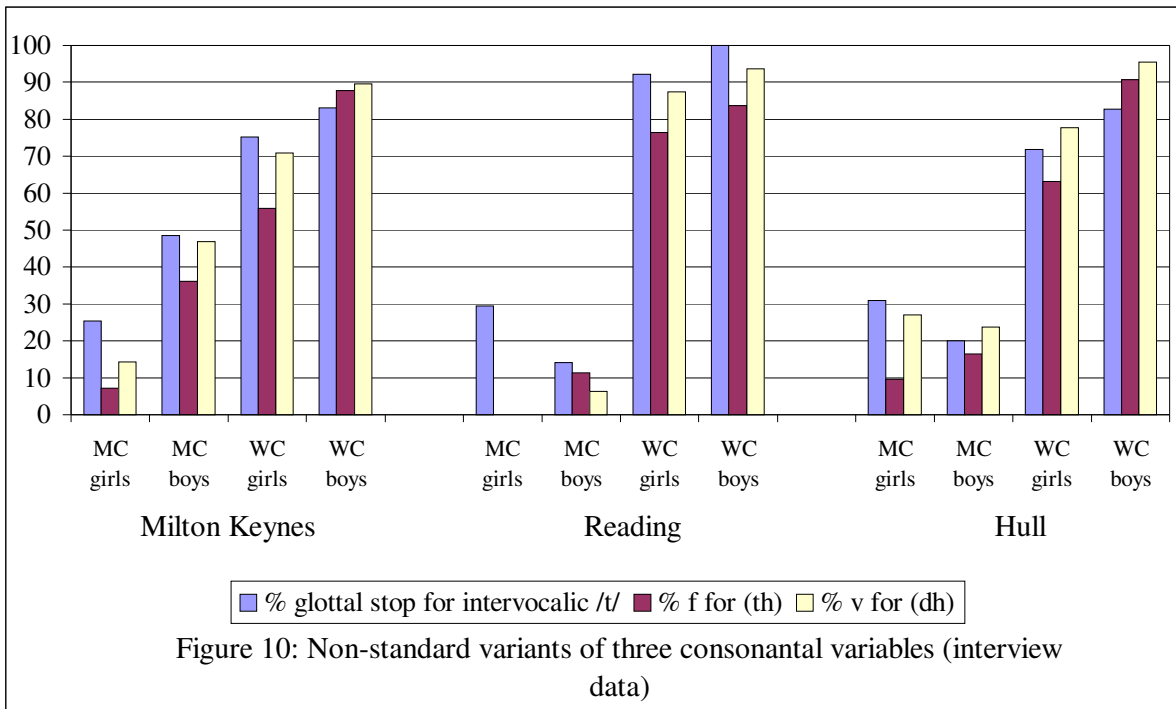
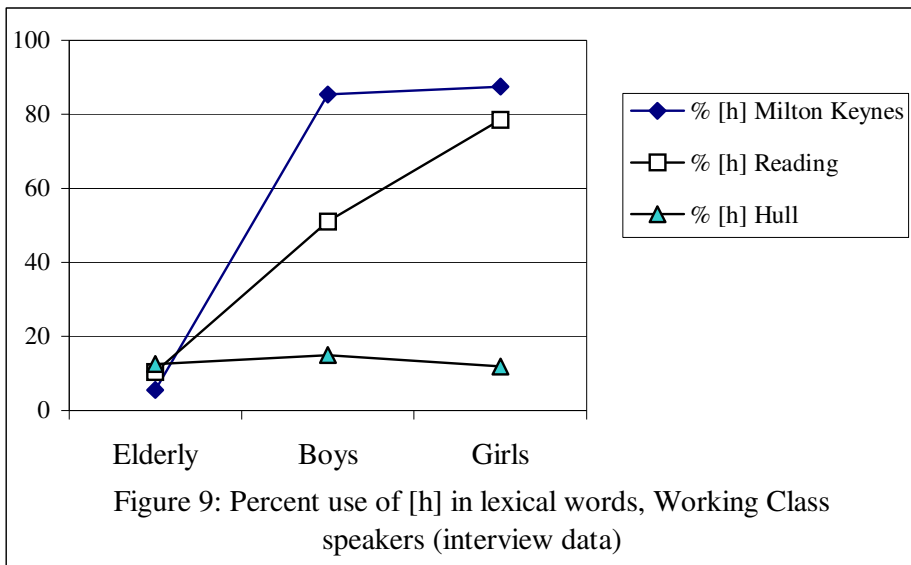
NB: 'front/mid-front' refers to [ɪ], [ɪ:] and [ʏ:].
'mid/mid-back' refers to [ʌ].



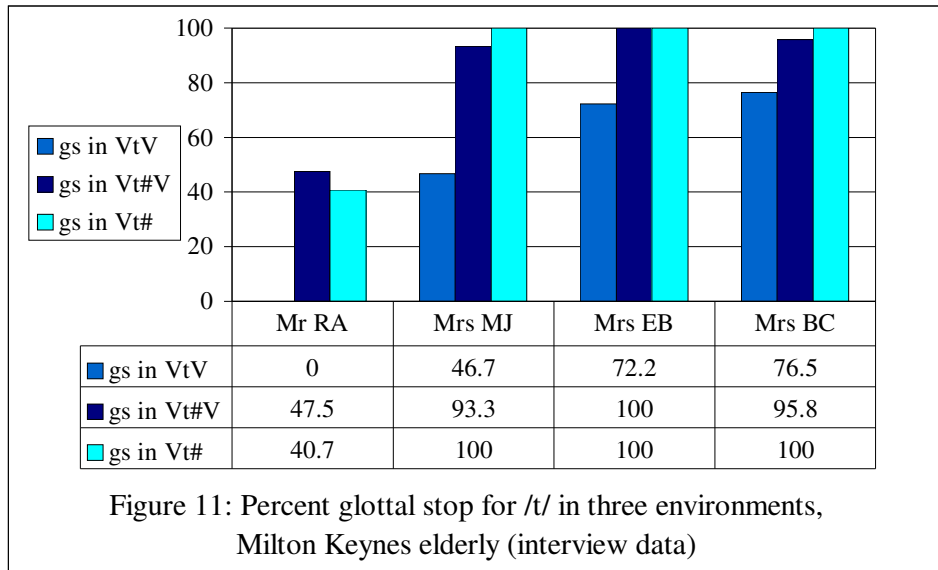


Key: 'cent 3' = [ɜ:] (central vowel) 'back diph' = [ou]
 'cent 2' = [ɔ:̥] 'cent diph' = [əʊ]
 'cent 1' = [ɔ:] 'front diph' = [əʏ]
 'fully back' = [ɔ:]





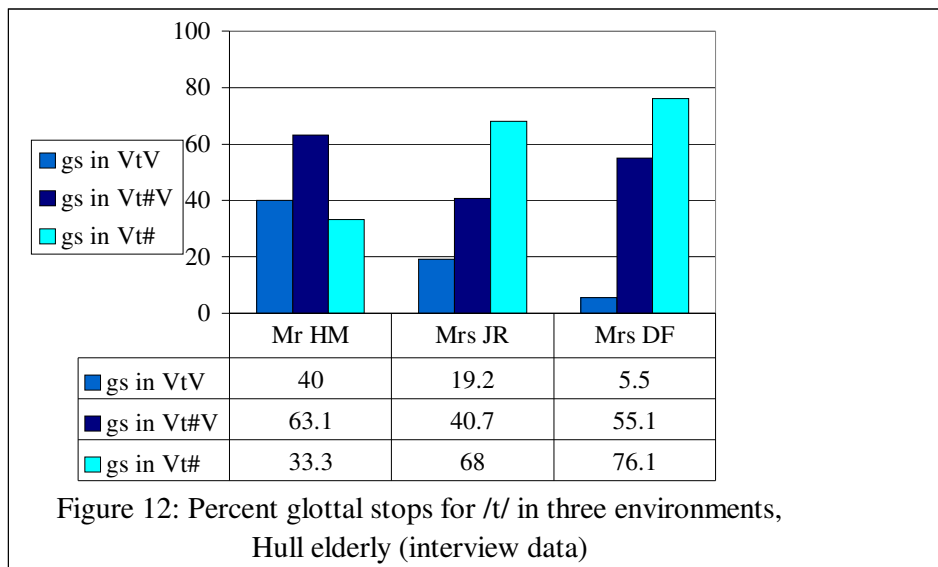
NB: (th) = fronting of /θ/ to [f]
 (dh) = fronting of non-initial /ð/ to [v]
 (Together, these are referred to as 'TH-fronting'.)



NB: VtV = intervocalic, e.g. *water*

Vt#V = intervocalic before a word boundary, e.g. *a lot of*

Vt# = postvocalic before an utterance-final pause, e.g. *Bridge Street*



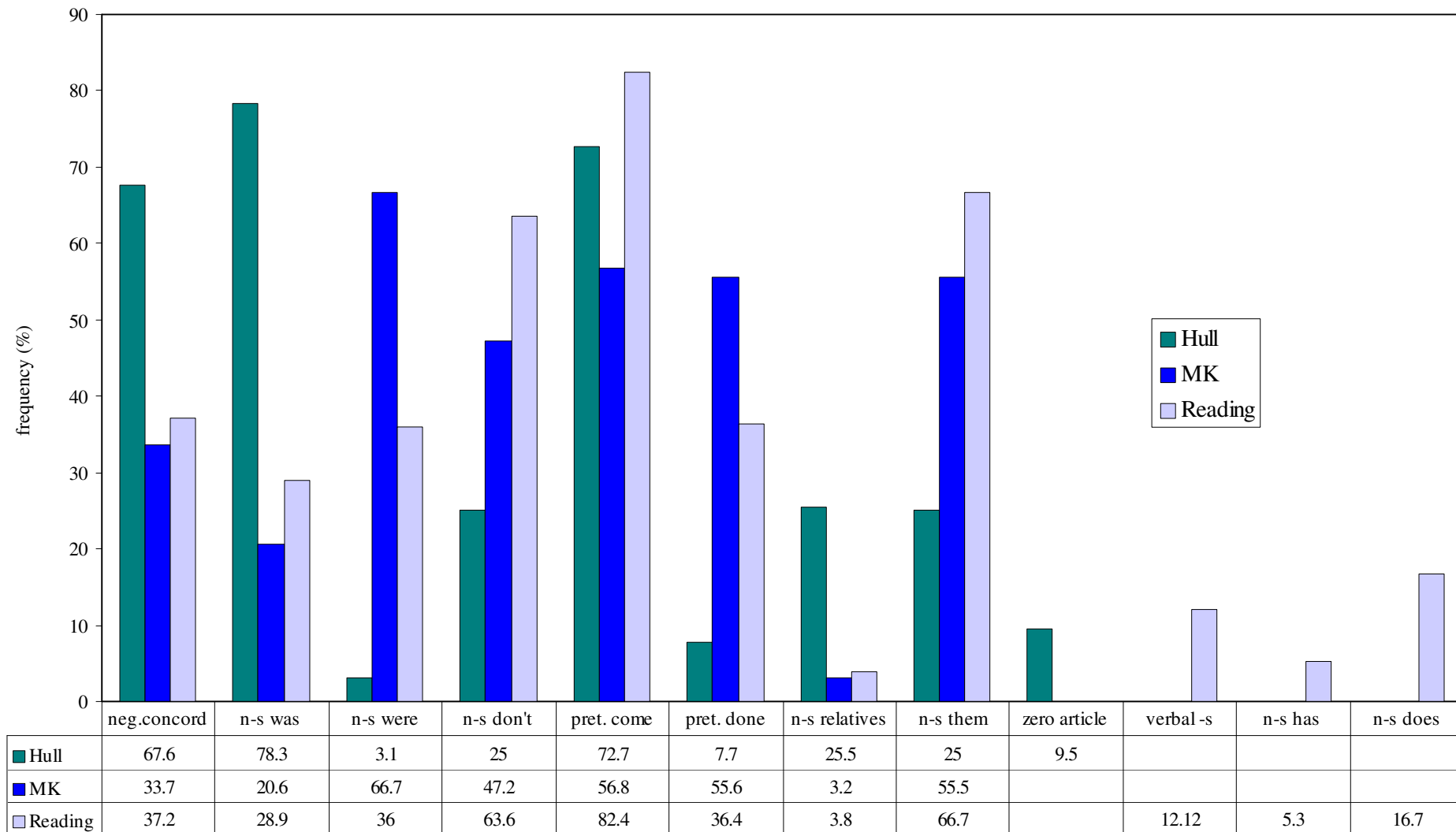


Figure 13: Frequency indices for nonstandard grammatical features

