

Language and identity in the Cockney  
Diaspora: A sociophonetic and  
variationist study

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## List of Publications

This is a PhD by papers consisting of the following four original manuscripts in order of their appearance in this thesis:

1. Cole, Amanda & Strycharczuk, Patrycja (2019). The PRICE-MOUTH crossover in the “Cockney diaspora”. In Sasha Calhoun, Paola Escudero, Marija Tabain & Paul Warren (eds.) *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences (ICPhS2019) Dynamics of Vowels in Varieties of English Workshop*. Melbourne, Australia. August 2019 (pp. 602-606).
2. Cole, Amanda (forthcoming). Co-variation, style and social meaning: the implicational relationship between (H) and (ING) in Debden, Essex. To appear in *Language Variation and Change*.
3. Cole, Amanda & Evans, Bronwen (2020). Phonetic variation and change in the Cockney Diaspora: the role of place, gender and identity. *Language in Society*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404520000640>
4. Cole, Amanda (forthcoming). Disambiguating language attitudes held towards socio-demographic groups and geographic areas in South East England. To appear in *Journal of Linguistic Geography*.

These papers will be referred to in the body of the thesis by their chapter number

(Chapter 6, Chapter 7, Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 respectively). Section, figure and table numbering resets at the start of each chapter. Differences in formatting and referencing styles between each paper result from the different conventions of each target publication. When citing work in these four chapters, please refer to the final published version of each paper when they become available.

Chapter 6 presents a paper completed in collaboration with Dr Patrycja Strycharczuk. In this paper, I was responsible for research design, data collection, data pre-processing, forced-alignment and extraction of formant values, literature review, background research, and a write-up of introduction, discussion and conclusion sections. Pat conducted the data analysis and visualisation, the production of figures and the write-up of analysis and results. Chapter 8 is a paper written in collaboration with Dr Bronwen Evans. This work is an extension and continuation of my MSc dissertation which was supervised by Bronwen. The analysis, results and conclusions of the paper are entirely re-conceived from my MSc dissertation. In this paper, I was responsible for the collection, pre-processing, management and analysis of data as well as the literature review, background research and write-up of the paper. Bronwen contributed towards the experimental design and gave supervision and guidance throughout the project (i.e., on data collection, analysis). As well as giving writing advice during my MSc, she also gave detailed feedback on drafts of the paper itself.

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## Abstract

This thesis presents four publications exploring variation, change and the social meaning of phonetic features in the context of ongoing linguistic and social change in South East England as related to the Cockney Diaspora. This term refers to the large-scale 20<sup>th</sup> century relocation of white, working-class East Londoners to Essex. Linguistic production data is extracted from sociolinguistic interviews with 119 people from Debden, an estate built in Essex in the late 1940s in order to rehome East Londoners. The vowel system, (H) and (ING) are analysed. Results reveal that Cockney linguistic features were transported to Debden along with the Cockneys who relocated. However, early-stage linguistic change is present in the generation afforded a greater potential for social mobility in the 1980s socio-political changes. Linguistic change emerged abruptly in those born between 1982 and 1990. Although linguistic change is led by women, as a result of the matrifocal nature of Cockney culture, a change in identity is led by young men who unanimously reject a Cockney identity. In general, young Debden speakers are distancing themselves from a Cockney identity, and are shifting away from local dialect features that index Cockney. Instead, they favour “Essex” features which represent broad south-eastern, working-class norms. Some but not all Cockney linguistic features have been re-evaluated as an Essex accent. Thus, linguistic features do not operate independently but collectively take on social meaning such that they may be used in

stylistic projections or experience community-level change. Complementing these results, attitudinal data are collected from 194 individuals aged 18-33 years old in South East England who evaluated audio clips from 102 other young south-eastern speakers. The analysis of this data reveals that the negative evaluations of Cockney have been transplanted into Essex (particularly southern parts) – an area which young people perceive as exemplifying south-eastern, white, working-class speech.

**Key words:** Cockney; Essex; language change; social meaning; Cockney vowel shift; (H); (ING); gender; language attitudes; identity.

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In particular, I dedicate this thesis to my grandad and best friend Billy Cook, an all-singing-all-dancing Cockney who spoke in rhyming slang and inspired in me my fascination for the places you lived, loved and laughed in the East End.



## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Outline of thesis**

In this thesis I present four papers exploring variation, change and the social meaning of phonetic features in South East England in the context of ongoing linguistic and social change, particularly, as a result of the Cockney Diaspora. Firstly, I investigate to what extent Cockney features were transported from East London to the Debden Estate (Debden), Essex, along with the people who relocated as part of the Cockney Diaspora. Debden, the place where I was raised, is a council estate in Loughton, South West Essex close to the North East London border. The estate was built in the late 1940s as part of a government-led slum clearance scheme to de-populate and reduce poverty levels in East London. To my knowledge, there has not been any substantive, previous linguistic research into the English spoken in Cockney outposts in Essex. Whilst Fox (2015: 13) suggested that Cockney may have moved east into Essex, this has not been empirically investigated.

Secondly, I investigate to what extent linguistic change is present in apparent time in Debden and how this relates to socio-historical factors. For instance, I assess to what extent linguistic change in Debden has resulted from the increase in social mobility which occurred in the 1980s as a result of the era's wide-scale social and political changes (see Forman, 1989). I also investigate the distribution of linguistic features by

gender, whether either gender is leading linguistic change, and how this relates to the supposed matrifocal nature of Cockney culture (Cohen, 2013; Young & Willmott 1957). I then analyse how and why the distribution of linguistic features and the starting points, targets and rates of linguistic change in Debden compare to other areas of South East England, including East London.

Thirdly, I investigate the social meaning of south-eastern linguistic features. I explore how people in Debden identify themselves and their accent and how this relates to their sense of place. In particular, I explore the social meaning of individual or collections of linguistic features in Debden and the enregisterment of features as Cockney or Essex (or both). I then relate the differing social meanings of individual linguistic features to the observed rates and targets of linguistic change.

Finally, I investigate how linguistic variation is perceived and evaluated in South East England. I examine how accents associated with certain geographic areas or used by certain speaker groups (e.g. class, ethnicity) in South East England are evaluated in terms of social status, and solidarity judgements.

## **1.2. Research questions**

The questions addressed in this thesis are:

1. Are Cockney linguistic features found in Debden, an outpost of the Cockney Diaspora to Essex?

2. Is there evidence of phonetic change in Debden? If so, is it related to:
  - a. Socio-historical changes, in particular, the increase in social mobility from the 1980s?
  - b. Speaker gender?
  - c. The changes observed in other areas of the South East?
3. What is the social meaning of individual or collections of south-eastern linguistic features and how does this relate to the distribution and rates of change observed for these features in Debden?
4. Is there inequivalence in how the accents associated with certain geographic areas or used by certain speaker groups (e.g. class, ethnicity, gender) in South East England are evaluated on social status and solidarity measures?

Research questions 1 is addressed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. These chapters present sociophonetic data collected through sociolinguistic interviews (consisting of a reading of a word-list, passage and a casual interview) with 119 people in Debden. Of these 119 participants, 68 participants completed the interview in full, and the remainder partook in one or two of these three elements (word list, passage or interview).

Additionally, 116 completed an identity questionnaire (Llamas 2007). Chapters 6 and 8 present the results of a quantitative phonetic analysis of the speech produced in wordlist

and passage readings whilst Chapter 7 explores the distribution of features in the casual speech produced by participants in the interview. Chapter 6 conducts an analysis of dynamic vowel changes in the PRICE and MOUTH vowels. Chapter 7 analyses rates of (H) and (ING) produced in the casual speech of participants. The monophthong system and the PRICE and MOUTH vowels are the variables of interest in Chapter 8. The results of these three chapters are mostly congruent; It seems that what we think of as the Cockney accent did move east to Essex (or at least, to Debden) along with the Cockneys who relocated.

Research question 2 is also addressed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. In these chapters, the distribution of linguistic features is assessed in apparent time. The results reveal that for many, but not all linguistic variables, there has been an abrupt change away from Cockney. These three chapters concord on a remarkably similar time-period for linguistic change: abrupt change is observed in speakers born between 1982 and 1990.

In Chapter 10 of this thesis, I provide a deeper analysis and possible explanations for the linguistic change observed. I discuss firstly, how the linguistic change observed in Debden most likely occurred as a result of the increased potential for social mobility in the 1980s. These social changes may have led speakers/the community to ideologically shift away from Cockney's associations with low social status. Secondly, I explore the gender differences observed in the distribution of linguistic features. In Debden, men

have a higher rate of nonstandard forms compared to women, and women are leading change. Nonetheless, young women are more likely than young men to identify themselves and their accent as Cockney. I discuss how these gender differences may relate to the matrifocal and matrilinear nature of Cockney culture (Cohen, 2013; Young & Willmott, 1957). Thirdly, I examine how as a result of the idiosyncratic demographic, social, cultural and historical background of Debden, linguistic production has taken a unique course compared to other areas of the South East.

Research question 3 is addressed in Chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 explores the differing social meanings of (ING) and (H) in Debden and how this relates to the distributions of these features in casual speech and the rates of co-variation between them. The indexicalities of h-dropping (Cockney heritage) encompass and are superordinate to those of g-dropping (working-class and “improper” speech). As a result, there is an implicational relationship between g-dropping and h-dropping. It is possible to be a g-dropper who does not h-drop, but it is not possible to be an h-dropper who does not g-drop.

In Chapter 8, quantitative attitudinal and qualitative data are extracted respectively from the identity questionnaire and the open interviews. I investigate the way phonetic features are used and labelled in Debden to index place and identity in relation to the community’s specific cultural, social and historical background. This

paper concludes that some but not all Cockney phonetic features have been transposed onto an Essex accent, a change that has been led by women. Features which are considered to be Cockney are in a process of change.

Research question 4 is assessed in Chapter 9. Attitudinal data was collected from 194 individuals in South East England who evaluated audio clips from 102 young, south-eastern speakers. Respondents completed an amalgamation of the draw-a-map and geographic identification tasks, as well as making social status and solidarity judgements about speakers based solely on speech stimuli (a detailed description of attitudinal and perceptual dialectology methods and theory is provided in Chapter 9). Chapter 9 examines how young people in South East England evaluate socio-demographic groups and geographic areas in terms of social status and solidarity judgements. This chapter finds that, firstly, some socio-demographic groups and geographic locations are perceived more negatively than others. East London and southern Essex are the most negatively evaluated areas, and the white, working-class speakers and BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) speakers are the most negatively evaluated speaker groups. Secondly, this chapter finds that southern Essex is strongly associated with white, working-class speech. As a result of the movement of Cockney people and their dialect to Essex, previously negative evaluations of Cockney (Bishop et

al., 2005; Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland 1975) have now been transposed onto Essex.

In summary, this thesis finds that on the whole, Cockney phonetic features did move to Debden along with the Cockney communities who relocated. However, young speakers in Debden are moving away from features that index Cockney and have rejected a Cockney identity. Whilst young women are leading linguistic change, as a result of Cockney's matrifocal nature (women are considered as central to and the upholders of Cockney culture: Cohen, 2013; Young & Willmott, 1957), young men are leading identity change. In this sample of Debden speakers, no young men identify themselves or their accent as Cockney. Instead, young speakers in Debden are increasingly considering themselves and their accent as "Essex". For young people across South East England, Essex has become associated with south-eastern, working-class linguistic norms, and Cockney linguistic features have been re-enregistered as an Essex accent.

## **Chapter 2. Linguistic variation and social meaning**

### **2.1. Social meaning**

This thesis explores language variation and change in the context of the Cockney Diaspora, and contributes theoretically and methodologically to work on social meaning of language. Whilst detailed descriptions of firstly, social meaning is provided in Chapter 7 and secondly, the role of place and identity in linguistic variation is provided in Chapter 8, this chapter also presents a brief over-view of these topics.

Language features hold multi-faceted and varied interpretations in relation to social constructions and interpretations within broad but also local contexts. For instance, much work has demonstrated systematic, social distributions of language features by macro social groups such as ethnicity (Fridland, 2003; Hall-Lew, 2009; Rickford, 1998), social class (Chambers, 2003; Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1974) and gender (Baron, 2004; Macaulay, 1977; Mansfield & Trudgill, 1994; Trousdale, 2000; Trudgill, 1974; Wolfram, 1969). Nonetheless, language does not vary only as a function of time-honoured, macro categories but also as a result of social identities which may only be meaningful within the local area (e.g., “jocks” versus “burnouts” amongst adolescents in Detroit [Eckert, 1999] or “populars” versus “townies” amongst adolescents in Northern England [Moore, 2004]). As a result, Milroy urges sociolinguists to consider the



stratification of linguistic features in relation to “local histories and local social, political and economic conditions” (Milroy, 2004: 167). Social categories are not static, but are fluid, dynamic and take on meaning in the local context

Linguistic features can have “indexicalities”. That is, the ideological relationship between linguistic features and a social group, persona, characteristic or place that they signal (see Eckert 2008; Johnstone, Andrus & Danielson, 2006; Silverstein 2003).

Linguistic features do not operate alone, but they work alongside extra-linguistic features such as clothing and hairstyles to holistically project a certain sense of self in time and place (Eckert, 1998). As a result, linguistic production forms one part of identity establishment which involves choices about who a speaker wishes to align to (see Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, 2008). In this sense, speakers are considered variable, performative and agentic in their linguistic production (Eckert & Labov, 2017). Speakers can alter the way they speak as a function of their interlocutor (Rickford & McKenzie, 2013), or the persona or stance they are projecting at a certain time (Devyani & Rampton, 2015; Podesva, 2008).

Nonetheless, each linguistic feature does not hold social meaning independently (Campbell-Kibler, 2011; Eckert & Labov, 2017; Pharao, Maegaard, Møller, & Kristiansen, 2014; Podesva, 2008; Zhang, 2005). Instead, constellations of linguistic variables take on collective, indexical meanings (Campbell-Kibler, 2011; Pharao et al., 2014). Podesva

(2008) suggests that the respective social meanings of linguistic features combine to create the over-all social meaning of a sociolinguistic style. Eckert (2008) argues that linguistic features do not hold fixed or static meanings but instead they constitute an “indexical field”, that is, a constellation of social meanings which can be activated when the feature is used.

In the context of Debden, the primary research site for this thesis, the previous work on social meaning may mean that speakers use language to project different stances and identities in relation to both Cockney and Essex and the associations held about both these areas and their accents. I explore the varied social meaning of not only individual linguistic features, but the social meaning created by combinations of features which speakers operationalise as reflective of stance or identity.

## **2.2. Enregisterment**

Not only can linguistic features be socially meaningful, but salient features can become enregistered within a linguistic variety (Agha, 2003; Johnstone, 2016). According to Agha (2007:81): “Enregisterment refers to processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population”. Thus, enregisterment is the process by which linguistic features come to be associated with locally meaningful social practices or

social groups who engage in these practices (cf. also Johnstone 2014). Enregistered linguistic features become overtly linked with accent or dialect labels. For instance, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Received Pronunciation (RP) became de-localised and associated with social status (Agha, 2003). In contrast, as a result of increased awareness through geographic mobility, linguistic features in Pittsburgh became enregistered as “Pittsburghese” and indexed localness (Johnstone et al., 2006).

Geographic mobility and globalisation have been amply linked to dialect levelling as a “powerful linguistic force” in contemporary speech communities (Chambers 2002:117). For instance, in recent decades, there has been a migration to and rapid expansion of cities. These cities have subsumed what were previously out-lying villages where local features in these “villages” have been lost. For instance, in Berlin, a local variety in the outskirts of Berlin, “Plattdeutsch”, is disappearing and Standard German is becoming increasingly prevalent (Gessinger, 1999). However, in addition to dialect levelling, globalisation and migration can lead to the creation of new varieties/ types of variation. For instance, as will be discussed in Section 5.3, in East London, high rates of immigration and subsequent linguistic and cultural diversity has led to the emergence of an innovative variety of English: Multicultural London English (MLE, Cheshire et al. 2011).

Whilst geographic mobility can result in language change, be that dialect levelling or the emergence of new varieties or variation, it can also lead to increased maintenance of regional variation. Globalisation and migration can create the environment for increased awareness of regional dialects through increased exposure to varieties. As a result, local linguistic features can become salient and reach third-order indexicality at which point there is increased social awareness of a feature and it is draws pop-cultural attention. As a result, these linguistic features can be enregistered which can lead to subsequent maintenance of these features, as was found for Pittsburghese (Johnstone et al., 2006).

When linguistic features are enregistered, non-linguists can discuss, interpret and perform speech in what Johnstone refers to as “talk about talk” (Johnstone, 2009: 160). The more salient a linguistic feature is, the more likely it is to hold social meaning, and thus, to become enregistered. When features move to what Silverstein terms “third order indexicality” they can become enregistered. Silverstein’s three orders of indexicality (2003) is expanded from Labov’s (1971) distinctions between indicators, markers and stereotypes. Whilst these processes are envisioned differently, they share a common process. Firstly, ‘linguistic indicators’ or ‘first-order indexicality’ refers to simple correlations between linguistic features and demographic groups. Following this, a linguistic variable can become a ‘marker’ or acquire ‘second-order indexicality’. Hereby,

a variable shows stylistic variation such that a single speaker can use different variants in different contexts. The meanings of these forms are often shaped by ideologies around class and correctness. Linguistic features can then become “stereotypes” such that they are incorporated into “third-order” indexical use. Hereby, they draw overt social commentary and become a resource for agentive, performative and stylistic variation in identity work. At this stage, individuals begin to interpret language practices as showing an inherent nature of speakers (Woolard, 2008).

In this thesis, I explore the degree and configurations of social meaning attached to linguistic features associated with different linguistic labels such as “Cockney” or “Essex”. I explore the meaning of these labels in Debden as well as how the meaning varies across groups. For instance, I investigate whether as a result of the movement of Cockneys to Essex, linguistic features enregistered as “Cockney” will not be maintained by younger generations who might not identify with Cockney or East London. In addition, I explore how speakers in Debden negotiate and operationalise linguistic features and their associations in order to reflect identity and belonging.

### **2.3. Place**

Increased attention to language production in relation to local dynamics and identities has led to more research into the construction and interpretation of place in relation to

physical and linguistic boundaries. In variationist work there has been a movement away from the hunt for the illustrative “authentic” speaker in a “community-as-demography” approach to defining places (Lacoste, Leimgruber & Breyer, 2014; Smakman & Heinrich, 2017). Instead, many scholars have sought to understand place in relation to complex social dynamics and symbolisms. Moore and Montgomery define place as “symbolic, socially constructed, and culturally defined, as much as it is physically delimited” (2017: 5). Speakers often orientate their linguistic output towards the places with which they identify and affiliate. For instance, there is a stark, linguistic isogloss along the Scottish-English border despite high rates of travel and contact across the border (Watt, Llamas, Docherty, Hall & Nycz, 2012). Similarly, Llamas (2007) observed changing linguistic correlates in the town of Middlesbrough depending on the changing official county in which the town belonged.

In this approach, linguistic features are an outward projection of belonging and boundary-marking, such that they root speakers within geographic areas. However, not only do speakers operationalise their speech to project belonging and community-affiliation towards official, geographic labels, but speakers may also use specific labels to define their speech in line with their projection of identity or belonging (see Montgomery & Moore, 2017). This is reminiscent of work in the field of sociology which has expanded on Bourdieu’s concept of “the power of naming” (1991: 239). This refers to

the process in which a person gives their address as one place and not another whilst both may be legitimate and truthful representations of where they live.

Watt (2009) provides an example of “the power of naming” in a community in Essex. Building on the notion of “elective belonging” (Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2005), Watt coins the phrase “selective belonging” to reflect the ways in which people selectively reveal their community affiliations through their social practices. A middle-class community, which he calls “Woodlands”, is geographically located within an area largely formed of council housing which he refers to as “Eastside”. The residents of Woodlands operate selective belonging through a process of “middle-class disaffiliation” whereby they disassociate with Eastside in their practises and their discourse. When asked where they live, residents give their address as “Woodlands”, and not “Eastside”, despite both being legitimate labels for where they live. Furthermore, residents of Woodlands choose to shop at shops located in only the Woodlands area of Eastside and they drive their children to further-afield schools. Residents of Woodlands operate a process of boundary making in their distinction between the two places which is peppered with notions of morality and taste.

Following this, we may also expect speakers to be selective in the labels they provide to define their own speech or that of others in line with projections of community-affiliation. This thesis explores to what extent Debden’s official, geographic

location in Essex and not London, and participants' sense of belonging and identity will influence not only the linguistic features used in the community but also the social meaning of these features as well as how they are labelled and evaluated. Results reveal that because Debden is officially in Essex, young people have re-interpreted local Cockney features as an Essex accent. In addition, because Debden is officially located in Essex, young Debdenites orientate their speech and identity towards more broad south-eastern linguistic features and not MLE as found in London. Therefore, the concept of place and belonging in the community seems to influence the direction and extent of linguistic change observed.



## **Chapter 3. The Cockney Diaspora**

### **3.1. Defining Cockney**

A Cockney has typically been considered as a person who is from the traditional East End of London and is born within the sound of the Bow Bells. The latter condition is perhaps best considered as more mythological than a hard-and-fast criterion. Indeed, the Bow Bells are found in St Mary-le-Bow church in Cheapside, the City of London, and not in the East London district of Bow as is often assumed. This limits the extent to which the bells can theoretically be heard in much of London's East End. It seems more plausible, then, that a Cockney is best understood as a person from/born in the East End of London. However, this criterion is also not always easy to interpret.

Traditionally, the area considered to be the East End was directly to the east of the City of London, north of the River Thames, south of Victoria park and west of the River Lea, but it has since expanded (Fox, 2015). The official geographic delimiters of East London and the neighbouring county of Essex have been re-shaped. The London Government Act 1963 saw the areas that now constitute the boroughs of Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Havering, and Barking and Dagenham transferred from Essex to Greater London. Therefore, there has been an expansion in what could be considered East London and perhaps also, the East End. Following this, in modern times, we may require a wider scope of which areas of East London are "Cockney".

Nonetheless, Cockneys are typically not only defined by their geographic location and origins. For instance, being working-class and White British, are often the main criteria employed in academia to distinguish Cockneys from other groups of East Londoners (Cheshire & Fox, 2009; Hudson and Holloway, 1977; Watt, Millington, & Huq, 2014; Wells, 1982). Not only are Cockneys widely considered to be white, working-class, but they are often depicted as epitomising and essentialising the white working class. For instance, in 1825, the projected founding of University College London (then The University of London) received criticism for plans to admit students from middle-class families living in London who could not afford to send their sons (not yet daughters) to Oxford or Cambridge. The university was comically dubbed “The Cockney College”. In 1825, a poem published in the popular periodical *John Bull* suggested that the university might even start accepting Cockneys who they implicitly suggest, are the lowest possible class and by token of this, supposedly the least entitled to education.

*Come bustle, my neighbours, give over your labours,  
 Leave digging and delving, and churning:  
 New lights are preparing to set you a staring,  
 And fill all your noddles with learning.  
 Each Dustman shall speak, both in Latin and Greek,  
 And Tinkers beat Bishops in knowledge –  
 If the opulent tribe will consent to subscribe  
 To build up a new Cockney College*

(*The Cockney University*, John Bull, 10 July 1825)

The perception of Cockneys as the epitome of the working class is still relevant. Dodd and Dodd (1992) consult a range of film and TV productions to demonstrate that the North of England and East London are routinely depicted in line with a range of working-class stereotypes which they believe are, in essence, contrived and interpreted by the wealthier and more powerful classes:

*What kind of thing do you imagine when you are promised a film, TV drama or a book which deals with 'traditional' working-class experience? Have you been schooled to expect the world of the Hovis advert with unemployment thrown in: cobbled streets, hunched figures, northern accents, children in oversize cloth caps and a brass band playing somewhere in the distance? Perhaps you carry around gendered images, either of male working-class labourers, coal miners, ship builders, steel workers—or of the working-class housewife, beloved of northern comics, with or without teeth, on the doorstep in her pinafore, having a laugh with her neighbour. Or coming south, it may be the world of Minder or EastEnders that comes more immediately into focus: the labyrinthine street-world of east London, small-time crooks, cockney wit or 'er indoors.*

(Dodd & Dodd, 1992: 116)

The stereotyped perceptions of working-class Cockney culture centre on rigid gender roles; women are strong, kitchen matriarchs whilst men are depicted as absent from the home and semi-criminal. The association between the East End and criminality was heightened through East London's infamous Kray twins. Ronald Kray (Ronnie) and Reginald Kray (Reggie) were twin brothers who operated an organised crime gang, "The Firm", in the 1950s and 1960s which was implicated in armed robbery, protection rackets and murder. Further links between Cockney and criminality lie in the supposed origins of Cockney rhyming slang (a form of argot used at least to some extent, by some Cockneys) (Coleman 2010). In the popular imagination, the slang arose amongst Cockneys to facilitate criminal behaviour such that police officers would not be able to understand them. Nonetheless, the factual evidence for this common assumption is essentially non-existent.

There is evidence spanning centuries that Cockneys have been depicted in line with these pre-mentioned, recurrent themes. Gerwin consults an array of popular culture sources spanning centuries and finds that Cockneys are routinely portrayed as firstly, having links with crime and poverty. Secondly, she suggests that the Cockney shibboleth is best described as "playful rogue" who possesses the characteristics: self-assertive, cunning, frank, shrewd, cheery and full of pluck (Gerwin, 2018). Additionally, as mentioned, Cockney women are often portrayed as central to Cockney families. Cockney

communities are often depicted as close-knit webs of family and kinship. In these descriptions of Cockney culture, generations of women bring children up together and constantly pop in and out of each other's houses throughout the day (Young & Willmott, 1957). In contrast, Cockney men are portrayed as semi-criminal, brutishly masculine and even violent towards their wives who are kept as prisoners to childbearing (e.g. Booth, 1889; Bosanquet, 1896; Reeves, 1913; Young & Willmott, 1957).

For instance, in 1909, a group of feminist women belonging to the Fabian Women's group and living in the wealthy London districts of Kensington and Hampstead conducted research into working-class East Londoners. The women regularly travelled to the East London area of Lambeth to interview forty-two working-class families about their everyday lives. One of these women, Maud Pember Reeves, wrote the group's findings into a book in 1913. She depicts the lives of the East London families as rigidly gendered where women are trapped by their oblivious and often callous husbands in cycles of pregnancy, childbirth and poverty:

*The separation of interests soon begins to show itself. The husband goes to the same work – hard, long, and monotonous – but at least a change from the growing discomfort of the home. He gets accustomed to seeing his wife slave, and she gets accustomed to seeing him appear and disappear on his daily round of work... Her economies interfere with his comfort, and are irksome to him, so he*

*gets out of touch with her point of view... He makes his wife the same allowance, and expects the same amount of food. She has more mouths to fill, and grows impatient because he does not understand that, though their first baby did not seem to make much difference, a boy of three, plus a baby, makes the old problem into quite a new one.*

(Reeves, 1913: 155 as cited in Young & Willmott, 1957: 18).

Following a plethora of such work depicting Cockney families in a similar light, in 1957, Young and Willmott state:

*We cannot ignore historical evidence, all the more so since the notion still survives that the working-class man is a sort of absentee husband, sharing with his wife neither responsibility nor affection, partner only of the bed.*

(Young & Willmott, 1957: 19).

Nonetheless, it is vital that we take into consideration that almost all, if not the entirety, of this work was not conducted by the working class. In this sense, some of this research may reflect the middle- and upper-classes' perceptions and evaluations of the working class as much as it describes objective truth. Nonetheless, whilst there is room for questioning the methods and the interpretation of some of these studies, there are recurrent descriptions of Cockney as being a matrifocal and matrilocal culture. Hereby,

matrifocal means that women are considered as central to and the upholders of Cockney culture and matrilocal means that people strive to live near their female relatives (for instance, mothers, grandmothers).

However, it is not clear to what extent depictions of Cockney culture as having strict gender roles and in particular, being matrifocal reflect modern-day Cockney communities. Much of the research into the social, cultural and familial lives of the white, working class in East London was conducted prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, recent work by Cohen (2013) in the Isle of Dogs, East London suggested that Cockney communities continue to be matrifocal and that a Cockney identity is matrilinear. Cohen found that although young women still identified as Cockney, the erosion of job succession from father to son in dock workers meant young men no longer felt a strong sense of Cockney identity.

Following this, it is possible that despite living in Essex, all generations in Debden identify as Cockney as reflective of their Cockney heritage and culture. Nonetheless, a Cockney identity most likely encompasses a wide range of social and cultural expectations. Equally, a Cockney accent may index expectations about a speaker's character in line with the recurrent depictions of Cockney: e.g. working class, highly conservative, semi-criminal etc. In line with Cohen's (2013) findings, it is possible that firstly, a Cockney identity is matrilinear in Debden. Secondly, young women may also be

more likely than young men to identify their accent as Cockney. Thirdly, it is possible that young women may be more likely to use Cockney linguistic features as they may more readily wish to index “Cockney” with their speech. This thesis finds evidence to support the former two but not the latter claim.

### **3.2. Relocation and slum-clearances**

The “Cockney Diaspora” refers to the large-scale, twentieth century push and pull of the traditional white working class (or Cockneys) out of London and into the surrounding areas, in particular, to Essex which borders North-East London (Fox, 2015; Cohen, 2013; Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014; Young, Gavron & Dench, 2011). Whilst the Cockney diaspora was in operation for much of the twentieth century, often the term is used to refer to the large-scale post-World War II dispersion of Cockneys from East London. For instance, between 1901 and 1981, the population of the East London borough of Tower Hamlets fell dramatically from 600,000 to 140,000 (Fox, 2015: 5). Whilst the Cockney Diaspora occurred as a result of many inter-related factors, the extreme poverty and over-crowding of East London played a large part.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, East London had high levels of poverty and over-crowding as demonstrated in the *Poverty Maps of London* (see Booth, 1889). These maps were assembled by social researcher and cartographer, Charles Booth. These



detailed and thorough maps span 17 years and illustrate the levels of poverty across London by allocating each street (or section of a street) to one of seven classes. East London had the highest representation of what Booth has labelled “lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal” as well as “very poor, casual. Chronic want” compared to other parts of London. Putting aside Booth’s conflation of poverty and criminality, his maps demonstrate the extreme levels of poverty experienced in many parts of East London at this time. High levels of poverty in East London continued throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was a major determining factor in the mass relocation of East London’s residents into the London suburbs or surrounding counties.

As a result of the high levels of poverty in East London, the surrounding suburbs became associated with “bettering oneself”, particularly after World War II when much of East London was bomb-damaged, resulting in an even more acute shortage of adequate housing (Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014). As a result, affluent or aspirational East Londoners sought to move outwards. As put by Willmott and Young, “the move outward is also a move upwards” (1967: 15). The mass relocation out of East London was catalysed by the de-industrialisation of the area and the consequential reduction in factory and manual work. For instance, the closure of the London docks in the 1960s devastated some East London communities such as the Isle of Dogs where the unemployment rate was 17.8% by 1981 (see Cohen, 2013). As a result, many East

Londoners, particularly those from the Isle of Dogs, moved to Tilbury in Essex where there was a thriving dockland industry (Cohen, 2013; Fox, 2015).

Whilst many East Londoners electively and independently sought to relocate from East London, many also relocated as part of a series of government-led slum clearance programmes. Whilst the majority of these programmes ran between the 1920s and the 1960s (Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014: 126), to a lesser extent, the programmes ran into the 1970s (for instance, my mother, her parents and sister were relocated in 1973). The programmes sought to reduce over-crowding and improve living conditions in East London by relocating large numbers of people to the London peripheries and beyond. The policies received criticism for leaving families with few viable options other than relocating (Young & Willmott, 1957). Although some have criticised the validity of their claims (e.g. Clapson 1999; Lawrence 2016, 2019), Young and Willmott (1957) have suggested that the dispersion of East Londoners to purpose-built housing estates and new towns disrupted community ties. In particular, the authors believe that relocation had negative impacts on the emotional wellbeing of women.

These so-called slum-clearance programmes saw the construction of many purpose-built satellite towns such as Basildon and Harlow in Essex, and Stevenage in Hertfordshire, as well as large purpose-built council estates. The largest of these estates is the Becontree Estate in Dagenham which at the time of construction was in the

county of Essex. The Becontree Estate was built between 1921 and 1935 for families of East London soldiers who had served in World War I (Fox, 2015). By completion, the estate comprised 24,000 homes and is still considered to be the largest municipal housing estate in Europe (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, 2014).

One of the most ambitious de-population programmes was the 1943 London County Plan (Abercrombie and Forshaw, 1943). The Debden Estate, where much of the research for this thesis was conducted, was constructed as part of this plan. This plan sought to depopulate and reduce poverty in East London which had been exacerbated by World War II. The plan aimed to provide each 1,000 people with four acres of open space by relocating residents to spacious new towns and estates (Abercrombie and Forshaw, 1943). In order to achieve this, around 40% of East London's population would need to be relocated (Fox, 2015: 10). So as to create more open space in East London, vast swathes of buildings in East London were demolished. Instead, the population of East London was to be relocated into the suburbs and the surrounding counties. Originally, it was estimated that around 500,000 people would be relocated from East London, but this number was superseded by the subsequent Greater London Plan in 1944 (Abercrombie, 1944). In total, more than a million Londoners moved out to "overspill" towns or estates in the post-war period (Lawrence, 2019: 72).

The Greater London Plan 1944 divided London and the surrounding countryside into four rings: Outer Country, Green Belt, Suburban and Inner (Figure. 3.1). In the Outer Country areas, New Town developments were erected (such as Harlow and Basildon in Essex). East Londoners were also dispersed to existing towns in Essex such as Chelmsford and Witham (Fox, 2015: 11). In the Green Belt Ring, new build estates were constructed such as the Debden Estate and the Harold Hill Estate which were, at that time, both in Essex.

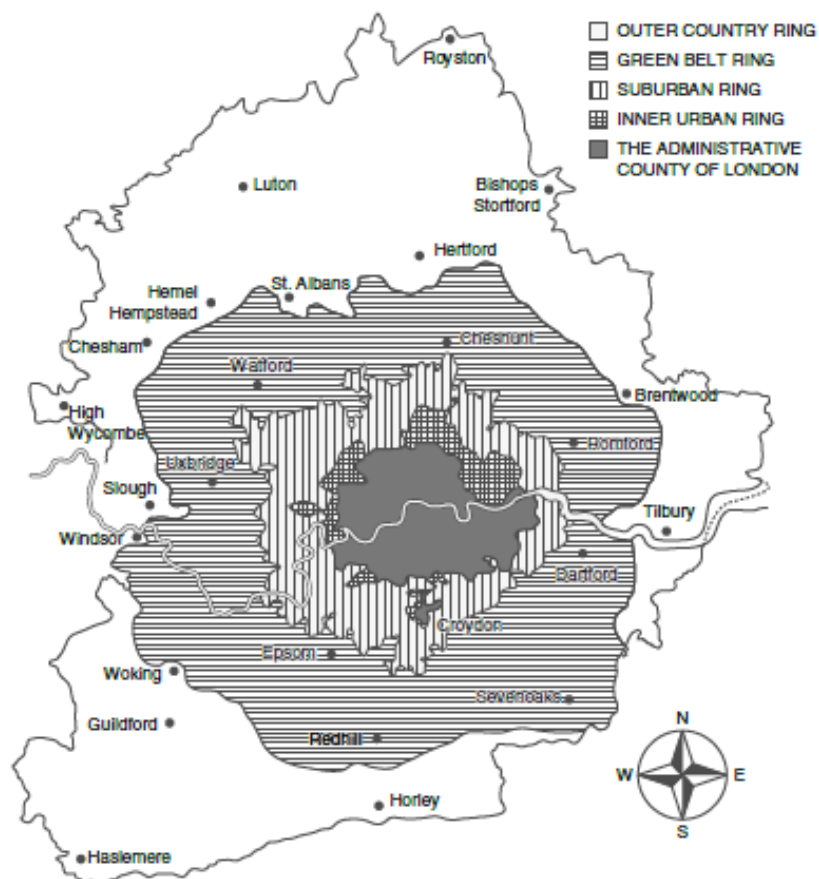


Figure 3.1. The four rings of the Greater London Plan 1944 as reproduced from Abercrombie (1944) and cited in Fox (2015: 11).

In summary, the government-led slum clearance programmes as well as the plethora of other inter-related factors that I have mentioned in this chapter resulted in a wide scale dispersion of East Londoners into the London peripheries and surrounding counties throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3.3 Demographic changes in East London**

The population of East London decreased persistently throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century until 1981, when it began to rise once more as a result of high rates of immigration, particularly from Bangladesh (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Cohen, 2013; Forman, 1989; Fox, 2015; Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014). Civil unrest between then West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as well as changes to immigration laws led to a dramatic increase in immigration rates to East London. Whilst there were already many male workers from these countries in London, many then sent for their families who joined them in East London where they settled (Fox, 2015). As a result, the largest ethnic group in the East London Borough of Tower Hamlets is Bangladeshi, representing 32% of the population, followed by White British who constitute 31% of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Whilst East London has always been a centre for immigration, rates of immigration were not previously experienced on such a scale. The ethnic minority population in London grew by 57% between 1991 and 2001 (Butler & Hamnett, 2011). These demographic changes have meant that whilst

previously, the border between outer East London and Essex was most strongly demarcated by social class, it is now increasingly a border of ethnicity (Butler & Hamnett, 2011: 8).

Although the population of East London began to increase once again in 1981, white, working-class East Londoners continued to move outwards. In modern times, the displacement of the working class from East London results, in part, from the gentrification of the area. It is widely agreed that gentrification includes: “an influx of capital and resultant social, economic, cultural and physical transformation and displacement” (Brown-Saracino, 2010: 13). That is, those of a higher class move into an area that is occupied by those of a lower class. This results in social and economic transformations to the landscape and the culture which lead to the total or partial displacement of the pre-existing residents.

Gentrification in East London was first observed in the late 1990s. The city differed from other UK metropolitan centres in that professional, managerial and graduate populations were not moving outwards to the suburbs. Instead the population decline in inner London was amongst skilled manual and routine non-manual workers (Butler & Robson, 2003). Internal migration to London was most prevalent in the highly educated who were from country towns and suburbs, despite showing a reluctance to live there (Butler & Robson, 2003).

Gentrifiers have been welcomed through governmental policy such as the regeneration of brownfield sites and the construction of new-build “luxury” apartments (Davidson & Lees, 2010). In these instances, whilst gentrifiers do not move into what were previously working-class homes, the process results in both exclusionary and cultural/social displacement of the working class, who are displaced as they cannot afford house-prices or rent. In social/cultural displacement, the social and demographic transformations to an area can result in the erosion of working-class community and customs. This leads working-class residents to feel “bereavement, dislocation and disassociation”. As a result, working-class residents who are able to, often relocate from the area (Davidson & Lees, 2010: 406).

The gentrification of East London has limited the availability of affordable housing, particularly social housing. For instance, the London Docklands Development Corporation was formed in 1981 with a principal aim of extending the City of London into what was a predominantly working-class area (see Imrie & Thomas 1999). The re-generation project saw the creation of Canary Wharf which has become one of the largest financial centres in the UK but made no provision for the working-class community in the area. In the year prior to the 1981 re-generation project, 83% of housing was rented through the local authorities, compared to only 26% of the 24,000 new homes that were constructed.

As a result of the limited availability of social or affordable housing, Young, Gavron and Dench (2011) suggest that race relations have been aggravated in East London. The authors believe that these tensions have been exacerbated by poor governmental housing policies, particularly, as the white, working class feel they have been disfavoured in housing allocation comparative to the Bangladeshi population. Both racial tensions and the inaccessibility of affordable housing are factors provoking the ongoing movement of the white, working class outwards from East London (Young et al., 2011).

In summary, as a result of many inter-related factors, the Cockney Diaspora has been in motion since at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, although the reasons and rationale have evolved, there is evidence that the white, working class continue to relocate from East London outwards into the surrounding counties, particularly, to Essex. As a result, in modern times, Essex and not East London is South East England's epicentre of the white, working class.

### **3.4. East Londoners in Essex**

#### **3.4.1 Essex Girl and Essex Man**

There have long been ties between the two distinct but bordering areas: East London and Essex. For instance, as part of the Fresh Air Fund (FAF), between 1892 and 1939,



children from slums in East London were brought to Loughton in Essex (the town where Debden is now situated) (Wilkinson, 2000). The Shaftesbury Retreat in Staples Road, Loughton, was purchased by the Ragged School Union (RSU) so that poor children from London could enjoy days out in Epping Forest. Up to a thousand or more children were brought to Loughton for six days a week between June and September each year (Wilkinson, 2000). As recalled by local historian, David Wilkinson, the Fresh Air Fund was not always welcomed by Loughton's residents:

*The children were often dirty. Passengers complained of filthy trains, and sometimes, as the children walked through Loughton, a water cart had to follow them to cleanse the road. Their language was often obscene, and they were sometimes wantonly destructive.*

(Wilkinson, 2000: 2).

As well as the Fresh Air Fund, from the 1920s, more affluent East Enders began to seek holidays in East Essex's coastal towns (Cohen, 2013). Essex's coast became an aspirational outpost for both holidaying and relocation. For instance, on Essex's Southern coastline, Canvey Island was heavily promoted as a holiday destination for Londoners throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The area's population has since grown to over 40,000, up from around 300 people at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Canvey Island Town

Council, 2020). Similarly, in 1928, Jaywick Sands was developed as a resort on the Northern Essex coast for East Londoners who were encouraged to buy small plots of land and self-build properties. Nonetheless, as a result of the post-war housing shortages, many of these houses became permanent residences for the East Enders who owned them. Unfortunately, the lack of both suitable housing and employment opportunities led to Jaywick becoming England's most deprived area in terms of poverty, crime, education, housing and unemployment (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2010; 2015).

As well as along Essex's coastline, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in-land, southern Essex saw the erection of many housing developments targeted at East Londoners. Essex received a large proportion of the government's purpose-built towns and estates that were constructed in order to ease poverty and over-crowding in East London. To name a few of these developments: the Becontree Estate in Dagenham, the Harold Hill Estate in Romford, the Debden Estate in Loughton (the research site for this thesis), the Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey, and the new towns of Harlow and Basildon in west and south Essex respectively. These new towns and estates were initially, almost entirely populated by working-class Londoners.

Although at conception, these communities in Essex were easily identifiable as working class, they experienced great social change at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the

1980s, Thatcherite policies sought to eradicate traditional class distinctions and encourage aspiration and mobility. The establishment of neoliberalism moved away from redistributive policies and saw an extension of market rule (Forman, 1989). As a result of Thatcher's house-owning democracy as well as Essex's proximity to London, the county began to prosper. Many residents of council estates in Essex participated in the government's Right to Buy scheme which enabled them to buy their own homes at greatly reduced rates. Furthermore, some working-class people (particularly men) in Essex began commuting to the City of London for work (Biressi & Nunn, 2013, 2014; Rye, 2015).

As the working class in Essex began to occupy increasingly middle-class domains, "Essex Man" and "Essex Girl" iconographies emerged. The "Essex Man" iconography was first termed by Simon Heffer, a columnist for the telegraph in 1990. This iconography depicts men in Essex as tasteless, ambitious, cocky, flashy, unintelligent, ignorant, highly conservative, consumeristic and brash. With the addition of increased consumerism and middle-class ambition, many of these iconographies do not differ greatly to the pre-mentioned perceptions of Cockney men as ignorant and conservative. "Essex Girl" iconographies largely share the "Essex Man" traits but with the addition of being obsessed with image and shopping and sexually promiscuous (or at least, the difference is that Essex Girl but not Essex Man is derided for her apparent

sexual promiscuity) (Biressi & Nunn, 2013, 2014; Rye, 2015). The Collins Dictionary defines “Essex girl” as:

*A young working-class woman from the Essex area, typically considered as being unintelligent, materialistic, devoid of taste, and sexually promiscuous.*

(Collins Dictionary, 2018).

These associations were propagated firstly, through the Essex Girl jokes which were prevalent throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Biressi & Nunn, 2013) and secondly, through the media. For instance, writing in 2001, Germaine Greer (one of the major voices of second wave feminism) intends to satirically subvert the associations of “Essex Girl” by suggesting these women supposedly encompass and epitomise feminist values of confidence, assertion and sexual liberty. Nonetheless, she does not deny the legitimacy of the supposed associations with Essex women:

*The Essex girl is tough, loud, vulgar and unashamed. Her hair is badly dyed not because she can't afford a hairdresser, but because she wants it to look brassy. Nobody makes her wear her ankle chain; she likes the message it sends. Nobody laughs harder at an Essex girl joke than she does: she is not ashamed to admit what she puts behind her ears to make her more attractive is her ankles. She is*

*anarchy on stilts; when she and her mates descend upon Southend for a rave,  
even the bouncers grow pale.*

(Greer, *The Guardian*, 5 March 2001).

The interplay between the male and female iconographies (“Essex Man” vs “Essex Girl”) suggests that “bettering oneself” for Essex males mostly comes in the form of their work whilst Essex females remake themselves in terms of fashion, image and home (Biressi & Nunn, 2014). The highly gendered distinction between the stereotyped perceptions of Essex men and Essex women (or “girls” as they are frequently referred to) is reminiscent of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century research which considered Cockney culture as having rigid gender roles.

The stereotyped perceptions of Essex have also been propagated through TV shows and thus, made available to audiences across the UK. For instance, the popular BBC situation comedy *Birds of a Feather (BOAF)* which aired between 1989 and 1998 follows the lives of two Cockney sisters. After their husbands are imprisoned for armed robbery, the two women relocate from East London to live in Chigwell (Loughton’s neighbouring town) in Essex. The show centres on their uncouth and coarse faux pas which horrify middle-class Chigwell residents (see Rye, 2015). The title of the show is derived from the idiom “birds of a feather flock together”, suggesting that those with

similar characteristics or backgrounds congregate. Hereby, presumably, Cockneys congregate and proliferate in Essex.

It seems the stereotyped portrayals of Essex men and women do not represent indigenous Essex populations, but instead, East Londoners (and their descendants) who have relocated to the county. This is supported by the popular “Basildon Man” and “Basildon Woman” iconographies which were synonymous with “Essex Man” and “Essex Girl” (Biressi & Nunn, 2013). As already mentioned, Basildon was also a new town construction which was inhabited almost entirely by East Londoners. This demonstrates that stereotyped and negative perceptions of Essex are centred around East Londoners who now live in the county.

More recently, the ongoing ITV docusoap *The Only Way is Essex* (commonly referred to as *TOWIE*) first aired in 2010. *TOWIE* follows the lives and relationships of young people living in south-west Essex who are portrayed as epitomising popular perceptions of these Essex iconographies. The *TOWIE* “cast” are highly materialistic, and obsessed with image, fashion and beauty. *TOWIE* repeatedly reminds audiences that the show is set in Essex as the cast members repeatedly mention Essex in their interactions, and the show’s title itself refers to the county (Biressi & Nunn, 2014). Despite some overarchingly similar themes, *TOWIE* differs to *BOAF* as the cast are not from East London but are instead, the children and grandchildren of this generation and have been

raised in Essex (Biressi & Nunn, 2014). However, their East London heritage is drawn on frequently throughout the show. For instance, a grandmother to two of the young “cast members”, Nanny Pat (2012), wrote an autobiography detailing her humble childhood in East London which includes a recipe for the traditional Cockney food, jellied eels.

Whilst many East Londoners in Essex have harnessed middle-class ambitions in the neoliberal economy, they are derided for these pursuits. This is ironic as “Essex Man/Girl” are actually harnessing fundamentals of the neoliberal self which “calculates about itself and works upon itself in order to better itself” (Du Gay, 1996: 124 as cited in Allen and Mendick, 2012: 460). The emergence and proliferation of these iconographies represented an unease as once rigid class distinctions began to be challenged (Biressi & Nunn, 2013). The derision of East Londoners in Essex has reassured the middle-class populations that while the working classes may climb the ranks in terms of their jobs, their housing status and their lifestyles, their true nature will continue to be perceived as working class (Rye, 2015). Indeed, as previously demonstrated, the Collins Dictionary requires that an “Essex Girl” is working class which is indicative of wider popular opinion. Previous research has demonstrated that although the *TOWIE* cast are wealthy and their lifestyles and pursuits are aspirational and glamorous, the individuals are largely considered working- or lower-class (Nunn & Biressi, 2014). This is likely related

to their socio-cultural practises which mark them out as having working-class heritage, language being one of these factors.

### **3.4.2 Chavs**

As mentioned, the social and political changes of the 1980s brought increased educational and employment opportunities as well as increased rates of homeownership and wealth in some previously working-class communities in Essex. Nonetheless, social mobility was not guaranteed for East Londoners in Essex. Instead, there was an increased potential for social mobility that was not available to all. Some working-class individuals, families or communities of Cockney descent in Essex (e.g. Jaywick) have either been excluded from the neoliberal economy or have not wished to participate in it. The “Essex Man” and “Essex Girl” iconographies are not applied to the white working class in Essex who have not scaled the class hierarchies.

Instead, in the late 1990s, the term “chav” emerged to describe and characterise socially marginal groups in the working class who are perceived as a type of under-class. Hayward and Yar (2006) summarise a wide range of popular culture references to show that chavs encompass the following traits:



*Groups of young people, clad predominantly in sports apparel, who engage in minor forms of unruly behaviour in and around town centres, entertainment zones and certain fast-food outlets.*

(Hayward & Yar, 2006: 15).

Moreover, chavs are associated with council housing. For instance, the etymology of the term has been erroneously interpreted in public imagination as the acronym “[C]ouncil [h]oused [a]nd [v]iolent” (Hayward and Yar, 2006: 16). Council estates and council housing have been re-branded as epicentres for the undeserving poor (McKenzie, 2013). In reality, according to the OED, the term most likely derives from Romani čhavo, meaning ‘unmarried Romani male, male Romani childmale child’ (s.v. chav, n.).

Portrayals of chavs on TV e.g. the Gallagher family in *Shameless* (Channel 4, 2004 – 2013); *People Just do Nothing* (BBC, 2014 – 2018); Wayne and Waynetta Slob in *Harry Enfield and Chums* (BBC, 1994-1997); school girl Lauren Cooper in *The Catherine Tate Show* (BBC, 2004-2009); Vicky Pollard in *Little Britain* (BBC, 2003-2007) and in books e.g. *The Little Book of Chav Speak and Chav!* (Bok, 2004); *The Chav Guide to Life* (Bok, 2006); *A User’s Guide to Britain’s New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004);

*Baby Names for Chavs* (Wileman & McGreechan, 2018) routinely portray chavs as lazy, unintelligent, ignorant, argumentative, sexually promiscuous and with links to criminality.

Chavs are associated with many different working-class areas of England, and the supposed accent of chavs (sometimes termed “chavspeak”) is not rooted in any single linguistic variety. Instead, it incorporates a range of stereotyped non-standard, working-class linguistic features from across the British Isles (Bennet 2012; Cole & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, under review). In the context of South East England, portrayals of south-eastern chavs frequently depict them as using Cockney-like features regardless of where in the South East they are from which marks them out as lower-socio-economic class (Cole & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, under review). Further, Bennet (2012) demonstrated the enregisterment of “chavspeak”. He shows that whilst “chavspeak” is often stylised as incorporating a number of well-established linguistic stereotypes of non-standard and working-class English, most notably, the variety incorporates features of Cockney (Bennet, 2012). As well as using many Cockney features, chavs are portrayed as communicatively incompetent. That is, the way they speak is often described as “screeching” or “white noise” (19).

As I demonstrate in the following chapter, both perceptions of “Essex Girl/Man” and “Chav” iconographies are relevant to how Debden is socially and linguistically perceived and evaluated.

## **Chapter 4. Research site: The Debden Estate**

### **4.1. Relocation from East London to Debden**

As part of the Greater London Plan, construction began on the Debden Estate (or Debden) in the late 1940s (see Abercrombie, 1944). The Debden estate was built in the town of Loughton in Essex after John Maitland sold Loughton Hall along with 644 acres of land to the London County Council in 1944 (Powell, 1956). Following this, the estate was constructed by the London County Council and originally populated almost entirely by East Londoners. By 1953, Debden was comprised of 4,321 homes and had an estimated population of around 15,000 people (Powell, 1956). Whilst Debden is not an official location and falls entirely under the jurisdiction of Loughton, it is widely referred to in the local area. Throughout this thesis, I use the term “Debden” to refer to the area that originally constituted the London County Council estate and “Loughton” to refer to the remainder of the town.

Of the participants I interviewed, the vast majority of those who were old enough to recall relocating to Debden in the 1950s or who retold the experience of their parents/grandparents, describe the principal reason for relocating as the search for a “better life”. Participants reported that they moved in order to escape poverty and pollution, and access spacious and modernised housing. For nearly all participants,

relocating was, at least in part, positive as it signified an alleviation of poverty.

Nonetheless, a minority reported feeling lonely or isolated in Debden.

Young and Willmott criticised the governmental policy which saw many families and couples relocate from East London and Debden (1957). They believed it disrupted family ties and impeded working-class culture. Whilst they acknowledge that moving to Debden represented an alleviation in poverty for nearly all who relocated, they believed that East Londoners did not have viable options to stay in East London. In *Pie 'n' Mash and Prefabs: My 1950s Childhood* Norman Jacobs recalls his life growing up in an East London prefab (prefabricated house). Jacobs humorously recalls when his neighbours were offered housing in Debden that they felt they could not refuse:

*The first to receive and offer of a house was No. 1, who were offered nineteenth-century council-owned house in Debden. After going to view the property, they complained to us that the bedrooms were too small and there was no room for a wardrobe, it stood in two acres of its own ground in the middle of nowhere, obviously had a mouse infestation and was probably haunted. They added that they had accepted the offer on the spot.*

(Jacobs, 2015).

Loughton (/laʊtən/), where Debden is situated, is located in south-west Essex in the Epping Forest District, and borders the towns of Chingford (East London), Theydon Bois, Chigwell, Waltham Abbey and Buckhurst Hill (all in Essex). The town is found within London's orbital motorway the M25 and directly west of the M11 motorway. As detailed in Chapter 2, the official East London-Essex border was expanded dramatically into the county of Essex in the 1960s. As a result of this expansion, in modern times, Loughton is approximately five miles from the London border and 12 miles from the City of London (i.e. London Liverpool Street) (see Chapter 8 more details).

Although Loughton is now a town with a population of over 30,000 people (Office for National Statistics 2016), prior to the construction of Debden, Loughton was a small, rural village in the idyllic Epping Forest. When the building of the London County Council (LCC) Debden Estate was announced, there was strong opposition from Loughton's largely middle-class population. Many residents were troubled by the proposed destruction of Loughton's surrounding countryside and the impact on local flora and fauna. For instance, in his book *Unto the Fields*, naturalist, writer and Loughton resident, Donald Gillingham describes and documents Loughton's local wildlife. He laments the construction of the Debden Estate which he feels is destroying local countryside:

*The war was not over. A new invasion has begun – all the more tragic because, perhaps, necessary. It had begun insidiously when surveyors went out like a fifth*

*column and drove in red and yellow stakes. I had heard rumour of the project, mind you, for the L.C.C. [London County Council], desperate for new houses for the bombed homeless of East London, were acquiring great blocks of land in the urban and rural areas, but I was not prepared for the reality. Lorry after lorry of the War Department came ripping and clanging along quiet Borders Lane, covering it with a slime of mud, and turned into one of the fairest meadows, there to dump their loads of brick and rubble from the ruins of London until in time an enormous pile formed like the beginning of a jerry-builder's Cheops, a monument to the new age.*

(Gillingham, 1953: 284).

As well as concerns over local countryside and wildlife, Loughtonians (people from Loughton) were concerned about the cultural and social impacts on their town. Loughton was a rural, mostly middle-class village. Many residents were, therefore, disconcerted by the influx of working-class Cockneys who were most accustomed to the hustle and bustle of East London life. A local Loughton historian recalls:

*I'm told there were comments sometimes subdued, but certainly not always, that this would be a threat, that Debden would simply become an imported slum, but I was too young to take much notice. Funny though, I certainly recall that, later on,*

*reaction had turned completely the other way, and there was jealousy, quite a lot in fact, because the Debden dwellers had nice new houses, not slums at all, while many Loughtonians still lived in their small unmodernised terraces. I do remember a fair amount of the years from about 1948, when the influence of the rapidly growing Debden Estate was being felt in the rest of Loughton. You don't add 40 or so new roads, more than 4,000 houses and about 15,000 newcomers in less than 10 years without some problems.*

(Carter, 2006: 38).

Whilst Carter does not expand on what “problems” ensued after the construction of Debden, personal communication and qualitative interviews with Debdenites (people from Debden) reveals that there was (and still is) a cultural divide between Loughton and Debden. The Londoners who moved to Debden were often referred to as the “Townies” or “Londoners”, whilst those from Loughton (or “Lousy Loughton” as termed by some Londoners) were referred to as the “Locals”. A plethora of stories, anecdotes and folklore recount frictions and misunderstandings between the “Londoners” and the “locals”.

For instance, a female participant in her 60s who was born to East London parents in Debden recalls meeting a “local” boy at a dance in Loughton when she was a

teenager. She recounts that when his family found out she was from “the estate”, their relationship could no longer ensue. Others recall stories of being denied service in shops in Loughton in the very early years of the estate. My dad recalls that when he was a boy (c. 1970) he was playing with some friends on the fields between Debden and Loughton where they met some “local” boys. My dad was taken aback when the Loughton boys informed them that their parents did not allow them to talk to children from “the estate”. These stories are only anecdotal, and others recall instances of comradery and mutual respect between Loughton and Debden. However, it seems that there was certainly a social and cultural divide between Loughton and Debden.

At this time, Debden and Loughton were also divided along socio-economic lines. Whilst on the whole, Loughton was a prospering, middle-class village, the Debden Estate was easily identifiable as working-class. At least until the late 1970s, Debden’s residents were almost exclusively employed in blue collar work, had limited educational attainment and all lived in housing that was owned by the local authority. Many were employed in the factories which were constructed on the edge of Debden in order to provide employment for the working-class community. In particular, many were employed at the Bank of England Printing Works which was constructed in the 1950s and to this day, prints English bank notes. In this sense, Debdenites’ lives did not differ greatly to when they lived in East London. Prior to moving to Debden, most working-class East



Londoners (particularly men) were employed in factories, docks or other manual work (Young & Willmott, 1957).

Whilst many Debdenites relocated from East London as part of the Greater London Plan, many others located at later points to join family or friends<sup>1</sup>. Whilst nearly all the 119 participants interviewed as part of this thesis were from East London, they had re-located to Debden at varying timepoints. For instance, two participants re-located as recently as 2015. Whilst many re-located to Debden as they had family or friends there, others stated that they chose to move to Debden as they felt comfortable and identified in the area. In Young and Willmott's study of Debden they state:

*Altogether we found that a third of the Greeneleigh [Debden] couples had relatives on the estate in 1955 – nine out of forty-one had parent or sibling on the husband's side or the wife's, and a further five had more remote relatives living there. Once one member of a family has made the move, he is a magnet for the others. It was easy enough to understand the people who already had relatives on the estate: they moved partly so that they could be near them.*

(Young & Willmott, 1957: 125).

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<sup>1</sup>As testament to this point, in my own family, relocation from East London to Essex spanned from 1951 to 1999. By 1999, no members of my extended family lived in East London and all had died in East London or had relocated to Essex.

## 4.2. My family's relocation to Essex

On my dad's side, my grandparents were relocated from Dalston, East London, to the Debden Estate in approximately 1950. They were very poor and relied on parish bread for food. As was traditional for working-class East Londoners at the time, they each had their teeth pulled out with pliers at the butchers at the age of 21 so as to prevent future medical costs. They rented a room in East London with no running water and with cockroaches in the walls. They were delighted when they were offered council housing on the Debden Estate. They were offered the housing as my grandad, who was a bus conductor for Transport for London (and part-time window cleaner), was offered a transfer to work on the new Debden bus routes. My nan worked as a home machinist, sewing slacks from home. My dad was born in the late 1950s in their council house.

On my mum's side, my mum lived with her sister and parents in a single room which her family rented in Hackney, East London. When my mum was a toddler, in 1963, They were then offered council housing in a prefab (prefabricated house) on Fish Island, Bow. The prefab ("The Little Hut" as they called it) was small and inadequate for a family of four and their pets. Although the council had said that the family would be placed in the housing for, at longest, a year, after ten years, in 1973 the family were relocated to Essex.

My mum's parents did not want to leave East London, but they were informed that their prefab was to be demolished to make way for new developments in the area. They were offered a house in the Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey, Essex (approximately 5 miles from Debden). In Essex, my nan was lonely and felt isolated from her family and friends. Fortunately, several of their friends and neighbours from East London were moved to the same estate. The family also "put in" (applied for council housing) for my great nan to be moved from Hackney to the same estate, and two years later this was realised. My grandad commuted from Essex to East London where he continued to work as a black cab driver, and my nan found work in a factory in Essex. My mum moved to Debden after she met and married my dad. Me and my sister were then raised and schooled in Debden. Therefore, I consider myself to be a community insider in Debden.

#### **4.3. Modern-day Debden (and Loughton)**

To this day, there is some level of separation between Loughton and Debden. For instance, Debden and Loughton have separate schools, churches, markets, stations, high roads, and festivities. Debden has several yearly festivities including "Debden Santa Fun Run" and "Jessel Green Community Fun". The latter is an evolution of "Debden Day" which ran until the mid-2000s which was, in turn, an evolution of the "Debden Fair" which ran yearly from the early 1950s.

There is also evidence of an ongoing socio-economic divide between the two halves of the town. On the whole, Loughton is a very affluent area; it is situated in what is referred to locally as the “golden triangle”. This refers to the three highly affluent neighbouring towns of Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Chigwell. Epping Forest District (where Loughton is situated) was recently considered by the Essex County Council to be “affluent, with few areas of deprivation” (Essex County Council, 2016: 4). One of the two deprived areas mentioned in the Essex County Council report was the Debden Estate.

Two of Debden’s three wards (the third overlaps parts of Loughton), Loughton Broadway and Loughton Fairmead, have a higher percentage of children living in low income families (23.2% and 22.0% respectively) and long-term unemployment (both 14.2%) than the rest of England (Essex County Council, 2016: 11). Loughton Broadway also has significantly worse levels of income deprivation, child poverty, older people deprivation and unemployment than the rest of England. In contrast, the Loughton Forest ward on the traditional side of the town has significantly better levels than the rest of England on all these measures (Essex County Council, 2016: 20).

The differences between Loughton and Debden are also apparent in terms of educational attainment. According to the 2011 Census, in Loughton Broadway ward, the most frequently selected highest level of qualification was “no qualification” (30%). In contrast, the highest level of education most frequently reported in Loughton Forest

Ward (39%) was a level 4 qualification (university degree, equivalent and higher) and a comparatively much lower percentage (13%) of this ward reported having no qualification (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

Politically, Debden has a history of far right and nationalistic political affiliation among some members of the community. Most council seats in Debden were traditionally held by the Labour Party, but in 2004, the community swung towards the far-right British National Party (BNP) who held all three wards in Debden for two terms until 2012. This classified Debden as one of the BNP's nation-wide strongholds. Debden is also situated in a Brexit stronghold. In the EU referendum, all constituencies in Essex voted to leave (The Electoral Commission: EU referendum results), and Epping Forest District, where Debden is situated, voted 63% in favour of leaving. These results are not available at a ward level, but we can predict that Debden had a high Leave vote, in proportion with the remainder of the district.

According to the 2011 census, Debden is not a highly multicultural or multilingual area. In the Loughton Broadway Ward, in 95.2% of households, every person aged 16 or over spoke English as a main language, and 89.5% of individuals were born in England (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Anecdotally, it seems that levels of immigration have increased since this census, particularly from the 'A8' East European countries which entered the European Union in 2004.

Since 2008, Debden has experienced many structural and demographic changes. This is largely as a result of a re-development project which has seen two key changes in Debden. Firstly, the construction of new-build, luxury apartments in Debden which seems to directly encourage a new demographic into the area and secondly, the provision of new, chain retail which has compromised the viability of Debden's local traders. From personal communication and the interviews conducted in Debden it seems that many working-class residents are relocating further into Essex (or beyond) as a result of both exclusionary and cultural/social displacement (Davidson & Lees, 2010: 406). Whilst as of yet it is not clear how either gentrification or immigration has influenced the demographics of Debden in recent years, this may be illuminated in the next UK Census.

#### **4.4. Social mobility in Debden**

In terms of traditional, sociolinguistic measures of class (e.g. Chambers (2003:41): "occupational, educational, and economic similarities"), Debden continues to be identifiable as a working-class community. However, in comparison to the early decades of the estate, there is now increased variability along traditional class-markers in Debden. As a result of the socio-political changes of the 1980s, like many council estates in Essex, Debden experienced considerable change. As a result of Thatcher's Right-to-Buy scheme, many Debdenites purchased their homes from the local authority

in the 1980s. Whilst the entirety of housing in Debden was previously owned by London County Council, presently a minority of property in Debden is owned by the local council. In 2011, in Debden's "Loughton Broadway" ward, 37.7% of housing was socially rented and 49.3% was owned (either outright or with a mortgage) (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

Furthermore, the expansion of employment and educational opportunities in Debden afforded some members of the community increased social mobility. The most thorough descriptions of employment and educational patterns in the early years of the estate comes from Young and Willmott's (1957) work. Whilst they do not quantify the employment type of their informants, they state that "nearly all" were manual workers (171). In order to analyse the potential for "movement between classes", Young and Willmott ask their Debden informants to list the occupation of their brothers and their sisters' husbands. Of the 458 data points provided by informants on their siblings' (or their husbands') employment, 402 were employed in "manual" work (87.7%) compared to 56 in "professional and clerical" work (12.3%). On average, Debdenites had much lesser contact with their relatives who worked in professional or clerical work (an average of 17 visits a year) compared to those who worked in manual work (an average of 41 visits a year) (171). These results are not necessarily an accurate indication of social class in 1950s Debden as firstly, the siblings (or their husbands) may not have lived in Debden.

Secondly, informants' sisters may have married men from different social classes.

However, the high prevalence of manual work in this sample provides some indication of the socio-economic status of Debdenites' families at this time.

It is not straightforward to compare Young and Willmott's results to modern-day employment data. The range of employment in Debden as ascertained in the 2011 Census is not easily divisible into "professional/clerical" or "manual". However, in 2011, the two most prolific forms of employment in the Loughton Broadway ward (amongst both men and women) fall under the bracket of manual work: "repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles" (17.2%) and "construction" (13%). This suggests that on employment data, Debden has largely remained a working-class community. However, there is much greater variation in employment type than that reported in Young and Willmott's study. The next most prolific forms of employment were "Education" (11.54%) and "Human health and social work activities" (8.06%). Additionally, there were people employed in what could be considered professional or clerical roles: "Professional, scientific and technical activities" (6.26%); "Public administration and defence, compulsory social security" (5.34%); "Financial and insurance activities" (5.03%); "Information and communication" (2.98%).

There has also been an over-all increase in educational attainment in Debden. Of the 119 participants who were recruited as part of this thesis, all but two of those aged



<30yrs held GCSEs (qualification completed between the ages of 14-16), some had completed A-levels (a qualification completed between the ages of 16-18), two participants held undergraduate degrees (25yrs male; 26yrs male), or participants were still in education (one participant was in the process of completing a university degree and all those aged <18yrs were still in education). In contrast, of those aged >30yrs, one participant had an undergraduate and a postgraduate degree (59yrs, female), another participant completed a bachelor's degree in her 70s (91yrs, female), two participants (both 60yrs, male) had completed Higher National Certificates (HNC: further education courses which are often vocational), some had completed A-levels, GCSEs or O-levels (predecessors to the GCSE qualification, also taken between ages 14-16yrs) but many had no formal qualifications, particularly those aged over 55yrs. This concords with Young & Willmott's results from the 1950s. Only 4% of the people of all ages in their sample stayed at school until they were sixteen years old (Young & Willmott, 1975: 174).

In my data, the majority of participants aged >55yrs who held formal qualifications had attended grammar school. Grammar schools are non-fee-paying schools which supposedly recruit the most intellectually able children as selected by the 11-plus examination. Young and Willmott assert that the post-war educational reforms coupled with the opportunity for full employment gave manual workers' children the chance of attending grammar schools in the 1950s. In turn, a grammar school education

provided the opportunity for children to get non-manual jobs after they left (Young & Willmott, 1957: 174). However, the authors make no mention of the possibility for

Debden children to pursue further education even if they attended grammar school.

Although there was no grammar school in Debden, there was one available in Loughton as well as other grammar schools within commutable distance from Debden.

Whilst in 1950s Debden, attending grammar school was the key determiner of an individual going on to work in non-manual work, rates of grammar school attendance were very low (Young & Willmott, 1957). Nonetheless, there had certainly been some increase since 1930s East London when attendance was “extremely rare” and many working-class children were kept at home as they “had no boots” (Young & Willmott, 1957: 175). Young and Willmott assert that if a Debden child attended grammar school this could supposedly lead to the individual and their family being derided and isolated by other members of the community. According to these authors, Debden adolescents who attended grammar school had to make constant linguistic and cultural adjustments as they moved between their local friendship and kinship groups and their school peers.

*...the Bethnal Green [East London] girls soon became bilingual (for they would have been as much criticized for speaking Cockney at school as they would for ‘putting on airs’ and speaking ‘posh’ at home, they were liable even so to feel awkward and inferior.*

(Young & Willmott, 1957: 178).

In general, educational attainment did not notably improve in Debden between the 1950s and 1970s. As mentioned, in my data, a majority of participants aged 55yrs or older at the time of recording (i.e. born in or before 1962) had no formal qualifications. Several participants in this age-bracket who attended Debden comprehensive schools (most often, Fairmead School) reported firstly, that in the 1960s and 1970s, their teachers presented them with the 11-plus exam one day with no explanation of what the test involved or of the vital role the test held in ascertaining their future education and employment. Secondly, participants reported that as recently as the 1970s, at the age of 16 they met with an employment officer who questioned them on their interests so as to ascertain the most suitable factory or manual employment for the adolescent to be placed in.

Changes in educational attainment in Debden appear to have occurred most dramatically at some point in or after the 1980s. In modern times, higher levels of education are available to young people in Debden. In the 2011 Census, 30% of those in Loughton Broadway ward report “no formal qualification” as their highest level of education. This figure is not reflective of rates of education for young people in Debden as it is skewed by the older generations. In the census, 16.5% of those in Loughton Broadway ward have a qualification at “Level 4 or higher” (equivalent to qualifications

taken beyond compulsory schooling such as college courses or higher national certificates) (Office for National Statistics, 2016). As previously mentioned, of my sample in Debden, nearly all speakers aged <30yrs had at least GCSEs, many had A-levels and three held degrees (or were currently in the process of studying).

In summary, it is not simply the case that Debden has ceased to be a working-class community. Instead, there is increased variation in education, employment and home-ownership rates across the community which occurred most notably as a result of the socio-political changes of the 1980s.

#### **4.5. Evaluations and perceptions of Debden (and Loughton)**

Debden is a stigmatised area which is routinely depicted as the inferior and poorer part of Loughton. Debden is described as the epicentre of “chav” on *Urban Dictionary* (a crowdsourced online dictionary where members of the public can add words and their own definitions which can be ranked by other members). The most highly ranked definition of “Debden” on *Urban Dictionary* includes:

*Fast becoming Chav capital of Essex (That's saying something). There are a few differences between Debden and the considerably richer Loughton that Debden is attached to, like a fungus growing off a tree... When walking through the streets of Debden you will hear the distant mating calls of the chavs from either*

*Pyrls Lane, or "The Browadway" [sic], this mating call variate from the different tribes of Chav, but usually consists of "Brap" or "Innit", however if you incade the male Chavs mating ritual with other Chavs, you may confuse them and they may start trying to mate with you buy making contact with you face with their hands whilst screeching "You starting blud?" Common names for Debden are: Screbden, Shithole. Common names for the residents: Debdenites, Screbdenites, Chavs, Scum.*

(*Urban Dictionary*, 2006. See

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Debden>)

Whilst, this definition evaluates the entirety of Essex as chavvy, Debden supersedes all other parts of the county. The supposed characteristics of a typical Debdenite are strongly evocative of the previously mentioned "chav" iconography (as detailed in section 3.4.2). The definition evokes some common conceptions of "chav": unintelligent, animalistic, hostile, using inarticulate and incoherent language.

In contrast, Loughton seems to be most notably associated with the stereotyped perceptions of Essex. The top-rated definition of "Loughton boy" on *Urban Dictionary* states:

*They think they are Gods gift, have huge egos, awful banter, enjoy monthly spray tans, worry way too much about their hair*

(*Urban Dictionary*, 2016. See

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=loughton%20boy>).

This definition evaluates young men in Loughton in line with several key facets of “Essex Man/Girl” iconographies: obsession with self-image, fashion and beauty (as detailed in section 3.4.1). The perception of Loughton as an epicentre of the “Essex” lifestyle has been heightened and propagated through the TV show *TOWIE*. Whilst the show is filmed in various parts of south-western Essex, the towns of Brentwood and Loughton feature most predominantly. Several scenes have been set in the women’s clothing shops on Loughton Highroad which were previously owned by *TOWIE*’s cast members (e.g. Bella Sorella, and Jessia With Love). As a result, *TOWIE* has made perceptions of Loughton available to a wider audience. Epping Forest District’s official tourist board Visit Epping Forest have sought to capitalise on this by encouraging associations between Loughton and an “Essex” lifestyle (or at least, *TOWIE*). They introduce the town as: “Loughton is the place for cafe culture and designer shopping, made famous by a certain television lifestyle show!” (Visit Epping Forest, 2020).

Whilst Loughton has become associated with *TOWIE* and the resultant connotations of high-end shopping, designer clothes and beauty treatments, Debden has very scarcely appeared on any episode of *TOWIE* and is not readily associated with the show. Instead, TV and film depictions of Debden portray the estate in line with key facets of “chav” iconography as well as the most reoccurring associations held about Cockney men (as mentioned in section 3.1): violent and criminal. To my knowledge, Debden has featured in three separate films and TV shows all of which have portrayed the area in a somewhat similar vein: *Hot Money* (Directed by Terry Winsor, 2001); *Danny Dyer’s Deadliest Men* Season 1 Episode 7: Dominic Negus (Bravo, 2008-2009); *Alan Davies’ Teenage Revolution* (Channel 4, 2010). These three productions portray Debdenites (particularly men) as criminal, and to some extent, also thuggish and violent. I will address each production in turn.

The film, *Hot Money* is inspired by what is commonly referred to as the “Loughton incinerator thefts”. Between 1988 and 1992, four employees (all living in Debden) of the Bank of England’s incinerator plant stole over £600,000 through regular thefts. In 1998, the workers were arrested and convicted. In *Hot Money*, the characters meet at a bar to celebrate the success of their ongoing, regular thefts. The film draws attention to the group’s Debden heritage as they toast their own success by declaring “let’s hear it for the Debden mob!”.

In the TV documentary series, *Danny Dyer's Deadliest Men*, East Londoner, TV personality and previous Debden resident Danny Dyer meets with dangerous and violent men from across the UK. In one episode he meets Debdenite Dominic Negus in a Debden Pub, The Gunmakers Arms. Danny discusses with Dominic and his gang their previous crimes and their time in prison. For instance, in the below extract, Danny discusses a particular criminal incident with the gang's "Lieutenant" Jimmy:

*Jimmy: Well I went round someone's house – couple of brothers' houses in Loughton. They owed my pal a bit of money so he said to me "you go and collect the debt" he said "and you get half of the money" so uh, I went round there with one of my pals.*

*Danny: Bit of dough was it?*

*Jimmy: Thirty grand it was. I started walking up the road - all of a sudden, police cars everywhere. Machine guns and everything. The old bill. Anyway, nicked me, handcuffed me and uh, nicked me for demanding money with menaces. And uh they give me fourteen years.*

In the third depiction of Debden on film/TV, actor and comedian Alan Davies revisits Loughton where he grew up in the 1980s. He provides a personal history of the area as he revisits local sites. In the documentary, Alan visits the Debden Estate to "find



out what had happened to some of the skinheads who had terrorised some of my teenage years". In the since demolished Debden pub, Sir Winston Churchill, he meets a member of the "notorious" gang "The Debden Skins". The former gang member admits that in the 1980s, the Debden Skins used to deliberately instigate violence and go to ethnically diverse areas of East London to commit race-based hate-crimes. Alan concludes:

*The Estate and the affluent end of Loughton where I grew up, the contrast has never been starker really. Everything about the pubs and the houses and the parks and everything about it. It's two different towns. Different country almost.*

As reported in local newspapers, the TV show received negative critique from many Debden residents for focussing solely on The Debden Skins and their ideologies and behaviours. Local newspaper the *The Ilford Recorder* spoke with the then landlord of the Sir Winston Churchill pub, James Cosentino who said he was not told his pub would be linked to the racist gang in the show. Cosentino stated:

*I wasn't happy. It made my pub look bad. We're a family-orientated pub, open to everyone. That guy's never drank in this pub*

(Coombes, *The Ilford Recorder*, 17 Sept 2010).

In summary, these three film/TV productions of Debden have all focussed on events or residents that depict a certain portrayal of the estate. Whilst Loughton as a whole is depicted in line with Essex Man/Girl iconographies, as proliferated in the TV show *TOWIE*, Debden is portrayed in line with chav iconographies and, in particular, the recurrent depictions of Cockney men: unintelligent, violent and criminal.

## Chapter 5. Language variation and change in South East England

### 5.1. Cockney

As well as being the name of a group of people, “Cockney” also refers to the variety of English they speak (Wells, 1982). Cockney differs to Received Pronunciation (RP) in a number of ways. In terms of consonants, the main features that occur in Cockney but not RP are: (1) l-vocalisation in coda-position (where RP has dark-l such as in the words “milk”, “bell”); (2) th-fronting (/θ/→[f] in all positions such as “thing”, “cloth” and /ð/→[v] such as in “brother” but when not in onset position of stressed syllables such as “though”); (3) h-dropping (elision of /h/ in words such as “happy”, “house”); (4) t-glottalling (/t/ → [ʔ] such as in “water”, “but”, but not when in onset position of stressed syllables such as in “atomic”) (Mott, 2012; Sivertsen, 1960).

In terms of the vowel system, one of the most defining phonetic features of Cockney is diphthong shift (Labov 1994; Mott, 2012; Wells, 1982: 310).<sup>2</sup> Research spanning decades has found a shifted diphthong system in Cockney speakers (Kerswill; Torgersen & Fox, 2008; Labov, 1994; Mott, 2012; Sivertsen, 1960; Tollfree; 1999). These studies have found that in Cockney, the *ɔ*-diphthongs, MOUTH and GOAT are rotated clockwise, compared to RP in which they are [aʊ] and [əʊ]. In contrast, the *ɪ*-diphthongs FACE, PRICE and CHOICE show an anti-clockwise movement compared to the RP [eɪ], [aɪ]

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<sup>2</sup> Vowels are referred to in this thesis using Well’s (1982) lexical sets.

and [ɪ]. Cockney speakers have a fronted MOUTH vowel, whilst PRICE has a backed and raised onset, GOAT has a lowered onset, FACE has a very open onset and CHOICE has a raised onset. The fronted and somewhat raised onset of MOUTH and the backed and raised onset of PRICE can lead to a crossing of their trajectories which has been termed the “Cockney PRICE-MOUTH crossover” (Wells, 1982: 310).

As well as diphthong shift, there is a shift in the short vowels in Cockney (see Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox, & Torgersen, 2008; Labov, 1994; Tollfree 1999). Bauer (1979) posits that the chain shift first began with a fronting of STRUT to [ɛ] to [a] which in turn, led to a fronting and raising of TRAP to [ɛ] ~ [æ] (and a corresponding raising of DRESS to [e]) and a centralising of KIT towards [ɪ ~ i̯] and diphthongisation of FLEECE with a centralised onset.

## 5.2. South East England

The major dialect boundary in England which has been observed by linguists and identified by non-linguists in perceptual dialectology tasks is between the north and the south of England (Trudgill 1990). The two major linguistic isoglosses which are often seen as determiners of northern or southerner speakers is the FOOT-STRUT split and BATH broadening which are found in the South but not the North. Within the south of England, the major sub-division of accents is between the South West and the South East

(Altendorf & Watt, 2008: 194-195). This section focusses on the accent varieties found in South East England.

Often, the accents spoken in South East England have been considered to occur on a continuum between Received Pronunciation (RP) and Cockney (Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Wells, 1982). Whilst London English is the variety of south-eastern English which is furthest from RP, Cockney is the most “basilectal” variety of London English (Wells, 1982: 302). Wells makes a distinction between a “Popular London” accent and Cockney. Whilst he considers Cockney to be spoken by white, working-class East Londoners (or indeed, Cockneys), Popular London is a working-class accent that is present across many different parts of London (Wells, 1982: 302). Compared to Cockney, a Popular London accent is linguistically closer to RP. For instance, whilst Cockney has the most shifted vowel system, Popular London speakers have a somewhat shifted system.

The linguistic continuum between RP and Cockney parallels the class continuum. Whilst Cockneys are often considered to epitomise the working class in South East England (e.g. section 3.1), RP is the variety spoken by the higher classes of speakers (Agha, 2003; Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Hughes, Trudgill & Watt, 2012; Wells, 1982). Not only is RP spoken in South East England, but often, higher-class speakers across Britain speak RP (Wells, 1982). In Britain, as speaker class increases, geographic linguistic variation decreases (Agha, 2003; Badia Barrera, 2015; Milroy, 2001; Mugglestone, 2003)

This is best demonstrated in Trudgill's (1974: 41) triangle model of the relationship between status and accent in Britain. In this model, as speaker status increases, there is less regional variation in pronunciation and the more likely a person is to speak RP.

Indeed, in Britain, social class is central to language ideology (Milroy, 2001).

England's standard variety, RP, has long been imagined as the correct and neutral variety (Agha, 2003; Badia Barrera, 2015; Mugglestone, 2003). As a result, speakers of RP are bestowed with more favourable evaluations (e.g. Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland, 1975; Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985).

This works to constantly affirm and reproduce the class system. In contrast, the Cockney variety of English has been shown in a wide range of studies to be very negatively evaluated (Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland 1975). The negative evaluation of the Cockney accent coupled with the variety's history of innovating and influencing other varieties of English led Wells to consider Cockney as "overtly despised, but covertly imitated" (Wells, 1994: 205).

The term "Estuary English" was coined by Rosewarne (1984) and adopted into popular parlance. Estuary English has been described as a spectrum ranging from the standard variety, Received Pronunciation (RP), to Cockney that is found across South East England (Rosewarne, 1984; Wells, 1997). This work suggests that across the South East, the highest social classes speak a more RP-like variety, whilst the lowest social

classes use more geographically marked features (including traditional dialect features) but also more Cockney-like features. In this sense, Estuary English can be considered a form of dialect levelling, understanding the phenomenon as broadly referring to a reduction in marked local features and an adoption of diffusing features (e.g., Kerswill & Williams, 1999). Whilst the term “Estuary English” is relatively recent, the influence of Cockney (and London) accents on the remainder of South East England as well as the relative dialect levelling across the region is not new. This is summarised by Wells who states:

*Estuary English is a new name. But it is not a new phenomenon. It is the continuation of a trend that has been going on for five hundred years or more – the tendency for features of popular London speech to spread out geographically (to other parts of the country) and socially (to higher social classes).*

(Wells, 1997: 47).

Wells (1992, 1997) considers Estuary English to share some features of Cockney such as t-glottalling in word-final position, vocalisation of pre-consonantal /l/ and yod-coalescence in stressed syllables, but to not have other features of Cockney such as h-dropping in content words, monophthongisation of the MOUTH vowel, th-fronting or intervocalic t-glottalling.

Estuary English was so named as it was perceived as being found most strongly along the Thames Estuary (Rosewarne, 1984), a stretch of water that runs eastward from the edge of London to the North Sea, delineating the county borders of Essex and Kent. It is no coincidence that firstly, the largest 20th century council estate erected to house Cockneys, the Becontree Estate, was built along the Thames Estuary. Secondly, the Tilbury Docks, where many East Londoners now work as a result of the closure of the London Docks (Cohen, 2013; Fox, 2015), is located on the Thames Estuary. However, the name is largely mis-leading as it suggests firstly, that the variety is new, and secondly, that the variety is confined to the banks of the Thames Estuary when, in fact, it is found across South East England (Altendorf & Watt, 2008).

Whilst Estuary English is envisioned as a linguistic continuum between RP and Cockney, in modern times, it is more appropriate to compare the accent in Debden to Standard Southern British English (SSBE) and not RP. Whilst RP is a class-marked variety that is found in the speech of higher-class speakers across Britain, the term “Standard Southern British English” (SSBE) has emerged more recently to refer to the broader regional standard in South East England. RP has been influenced by Cockney features in what Wells refers to as the “Cockneyfication of RP” (Wells, 1994). For instance, t-glottalling in coda-position before obstruents and l-vocalisation in pre-consonantal positions (3). As a result, the regional standard in South East England has



diverged from traditional descriptions of RP. The term SSBE has emerged to describe a variety which is considered RP's "successor dialect" (Kettig, 2016: 1) or is best described as "modern RP" (Fabricius, 2008: 8).

Dialect levelling towards SSBE variants has been observed in several communities in South East England. For instance, in both the south-eastern towns of Milton Keynes and Reading, Kerswill and Williams observed dialect levelling towards SSBE in the vowel systems of young speakers (Kerswill & Williams, 2000, 2005; Williams & Kerswill, 1999). Milton Keynes differs to Reading in that it was a new town constructed to ease the over-population of London. After Milton Keynes's construction in the 1960s, in the period 1967-1988, 76.2% of those who migrated to the town had moved there from other areas in the South East, and of those, half were from London (Kerswill & Williams, 2000: 78). Although Milton Keynes and Reading do not share similar historical backgrounds, in both these towns, there was a shift away from local variants (which most closely resembled the London vowel system) towards supra-regional variants found in SSBE (Kerswill & Williams, 2000, 2005; Williams & Kerswill, 1999). These changes are not simply reflective of dialect levelling towards majority variants. Whilst SSBE is the standard variety, it is not the majority variety in South East England. Therefore, the linguistic change in these communities represents a shift towards a socially and regionally unmarked form (Kerswill & Williams, 2005).

### 5.3. East London

Whilst change towards SSBE has been observed in some of London's satellite towns, in parts of London, a new and innovative variety of English has emerged: Multicultural London English (MLE). As previously mentioned, from 1981, for the first time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, East London's population began to rise again as a result of high rates of immigration (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Cohen, 2013; Forman, 1989; Fox, 2015; Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014). The subsequent high rates of cultural and linguistic diversity led to the emergence of MLE in North and East London (Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill & Torgersen, 2008; Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox, & Torgersen, 2011; Fox, 2015; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008). It is also likely that MLE is spoken in other areas of London such as South and West London, but research is yet to confirm this.

MLE is found most strongly in the speech of ethnic minority, young speakers and to a lesser extent, in the speech of White British speakers who have dense social networks with ethnic minority speakers (Fox, 2015; Cheshire et al., 2011; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008). MLE has been found in the inner-city, East London boroughs of Tower Hamlets (Fox, 2015) and Hackney, as well as to a lesser extent, in Havering, an outer city borough, previously part of Essex (Cheshire et al., 2011; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008). The MLE productions of young speakers in East London contrasts with the descriptions of the vowel system in older speakers in both Havering and Hackney which

corresponded closely with traditional Cockney productions (Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008).

Features found in MLE have also been reported in other areas of England. For instance, th-stopping – a feature of MLE - was found amongst adolescents in Manchester who identified with a “street” identity that was made available through participation in grime culture and music (Drummond, 2018). This work suggests that there may be value in identifying a possible Multicultural Urban British English (MUBE) as an overarching version of MLE (Drummond, 2018: 174).

Much like Cockney, MLE is negatively evaluated as “incorrect” and as a form of both “broken language” and “language decay” (Kircher & Fox, 2019). MLE includes some features of Cockney, but many features from other languages and non-British varieties of English (Fox, 2015). For instance, like Cockney, MLE includes t-glottalling and l-vocalisation but differs from Cockney in that it does not include h-dropping or th-fronting (Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox & Torgersen, 2008). As will be explored in Chapter 8, a key component of MLE is an innovative vowel system which differs from the traditional Cockney vowel system (Fox, 2015; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008). MLE does not share Cockney’s shifted diphthong system.

It has been suggested that MLE has displaced traditional Cockney which may shortly be no longer present in London (Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox 2015). Despite the

wealth of research into MLE in East London, to my knowledge, there has been no substantial work on the language used in the “Cockney” communities who relocated from East London to Essex.

#### **5.4. Essex**

Traditionally, the English spoken in Essex has been considered an East Anglian variety or a more general, south-eastern variety. For instance, in early dialectological work, Ellis referred to a mid-eastern dialect area which contained the counties of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire (now in present day Cambridgeshire) and Essex (1889). The Survey of English Dialects in 1960s, considered Essex to share many linguistic similarities with parts of Suffolk and Norfolk, whilst on some features south-western Essex was grouped with London (Orton, 1962). Similarly, Wright divided England’s East into five distinct speech zones. One contained south-western Essex and another contained the remainder of Essex (1968:4-5).

In 2008, Trudgill suggested that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, partly as a result of the influence of London English, there has been a reduction in the geographic areas which speak East Anglian English. He considers Norfolk and Suffolk and north-eastern Essex to constitute East Anglian Essex, with the exception of some urban areas in North Essex, for instance, Colchester which is most strongly influenced by London (Trudgill, 2008; see also Ciancia, 2020). Prior to this thesis, there is pre-existing but mostly anecdotal

evidence that that there has been some level of importation or transplantation of Cockney linguistic features to Essex. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that there has been a distinct lack of research into the Essex accent. There is little known about the development of traditional Essex phonological features in recent decades. That is, there are little insights into specifically how Essex phonology is changing or developing, as a distinct phenomenon from the influence of a London accent in Essex.

Although in recent years, there has been a reduction in many traditional East Anglian features (Trudgill, 2008), the traditional East Anglian variety of English had a number of distinctive features which differed to Cockney. A shifted vowel system is found to some extent in traditional East Anglian English but the shift is nowhere near as advanced as observed in Cockney. Based on Trudgill's (2008) description of East Anglian English, this variety shares several phonetic features with Cockney: raised DRESS [e] and TRAP [ɛ]; fronted onset for MOUTH [æu]; yod-dropping and t-glottalling (see Trudgill, 2008). Further, whilst there is limited evidence that previously, some areas of Northern Essex were rhotic (Amos, 2011), like Cockney, it seems that all of Essex and much of East Anglia is now non-rhotic.

The following phonetic differences are observable between traditional East Anglian and Cockney: STRUT is fronted in Cockney but is [ʌ] in East Anglian; LOT is backed in East Anglian to [ɑ~ɒ] but not Cockney; KIT is centralised in Cockney but is [ɪ]

in East Anglian; NURSE is lowered in East Anglian to [e] but not Cockney; START is fronted in East Anglian to [a:] but backed in Cockney; clear /l/ is heard in all positions in East Anglia whilst in Cockney, coda-position /l/ is vocalised (Trudgill, 2008). Unlike Cockney, h-dropping is not a feature of East Anglian English (Hughes et al., 2012: 71)

In modern times, the English spoken in Essex, particularly the south-western parts, may be closer to Cockney than traditional East Anglian. This is perhaps not surprising given the large-scale relocation of East Londoners into this area throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whilst there has not been linguistic research into this phenomenon, there is much anecdotal evidence of the influence of Cockney on Essex accents. For instance, the Essex County Records Office which is run by Essex County Council released a CD in 2012 titled: *How to Speak Essex: 20th Century Voices from the Essex Sound and Video Archive* (Essex County Records Office, 2012a). The CD includes extracts of speech from different areas of Essex produced by speakers born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or first-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Essex Records Office believe it is increasingly important to document and make the public aware of the “Essex” accent as they believe it is in decline. In a description of the CD, the Essex Records Office state:

*The decline of the Essex dialect and accent, and the seemingly unstoppable spread of the London accent, has been discussed and mourned a great deal in recent times. When people think of the language of Essex they are most likely*

*these days to think of 'Estuary English' rather than a soft and lyrical rural accent akin to that heard still in other parts of East Anglia.*

(Essex Records Office, 2012b).

The increasing influence of London English on the varieties spoken in Essex has also been detailed in a range of British Newspapers. For instance, *The Guardian* has also run articles on the transplantation of a Cockney accent to Essex. In 2013, they ran an article titled: "*Obviously ... the only way is Essex if you want to hear nouveau cockney. Reem*" (Nunn, *The Guardian*, 2 Aug 2013). In this article, Nunn suggests that the traditional Cockney dialect has evolved into the Essex variety as a result of the movement of East Londoners into Essex. It is clear that this journalist considers an "Essex" accent to be the variety of English spoken by East Londoners (and subsequent generations) who have settled in southern Essex on the London periphery, not indigenous Essex communities. Indeed, the article's title makes reference to the pre-mentioned reality TV show, TOWIE, which is set in South West Essex. The article also describes the social backgrounds of "Essex" speakers, making reference to the working-class families in Essex who have scaled the class hierarchy:

*The nouveau riche of Essex were satirised by Birds of a Feather. Now we have a class set we've never seen before: the offspring of the nouveau riche – the first people of this class who were born into money. Their working-class parents toiled*

*hard (or deftly ducked and dived) for their fortune. Towie depicts their children coming of age in a very different way: without necessarily having to go out and immediately work for their money. Or if they do, they have more options about what they do for employment, and when they start it.*

(Nunn, *The Guardian*, 2 Aug 2012).

Similarly, in 2017, the British Tabloid Newspaper *The Sun* ran an article titled: *CHEEKY GUIDE TO ESSEX LINGO: We share need-to-know Essex lingo, after experts and EastEnders legend June Brown declared Cockney accents are brown bread* (Pharo, *The Sun*, 20 April 2017). This article suggests that the Cockney accent is dead (or is “Brown Bread” in Cockney Rhyming slang) and instead, is better understood as an “Essex” accent. The article states:

*COCKNEY accents are brown bread, EastEnders legend June Brown reckons – with her co-star Danny Dyer now even using Essex speak. The 90-year-old – Dot Branning in the BBC soap – says in upcoming Radio 4 show ‘The Lost Cockney Voice’ that language used on reality show Towie is ‘the Cockney of the times’.*

(Pharo, *The Sun*, 20 April 2017).

In 2013, Levon and Holmes-Elliott investigated the role of gender and social class on the frontness of /s/ amongst cast members of *TOWIE* and another scripted reality show, *Made in Chelsea* (MIC). The authors introduce the *TOWIE* accent as: “based in



Essex, east of London and representing a more traditional working-class, east end, Cockney accent" (2013: 113). Despite, firstly, the *TOWIE* cast's wealthy and aspirational lifestyles and, secondly, the fact that they have been raised in Essex not East London, they are perceived as representing the working class (and to some extent, Cockney) both socially and linguistically.

The authors find that /s/ is substantially fronted in *TOWIE* women when speaking to other women. They believe that for *TOWIE* women, /s/-fronting is a symbolic resource used in the creation of "hyper-feminine" versions of self by exaggerating biologically-based sex differences in linguistic production. They believe gender presentation is important for the *TOWIE* cast who have strict gender divisions in their lifestyles and hobbies. For instance, *TOWIE* women render themselves "normatively feminine" through plastic surgery, hair extensions, make-up and dressing in short form-fitted clothing and high-heeled shoes as well as working in normatively feminine occupations such as beauticians and stylists. These descriptions of Essex are reminiscent of previous work on the rigid gender roles in 20<sup>th</sup> century Cockney culture (Young & Willmott, 1957; Reeves, 1913), as well as the gendered distinctions between "Essex Girl" and "Essex Man" iconographies (Biressi & Nunn, 2014)

In summary, although all of South East England and East Anglia has been influenced by London linguistic features throughout centuries, in recent decades, the

variety spoken in Southern Essex has been most strongly influenced by Cockney linguistic features. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Cockney features have been transplanted into Essex where they have been re-interpreted as an Essex accent. I investigate this claim through an analysis of language variation, change, and the social meaning of linguistic features in an outpost of the Cockney Diaspora: Debden.

**Chapter 6.**

## The PRICE-MOUTH crossover in the “Cockney diaspora”

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates two dynamic vowel changes in a variety of Southern British English, in the context of social changes affecting a specific speech community. We present apparent-time data from a community of Cockney speakers, rehoused from London to Essex in the 1950s. Our interest is in tracking the potential loss of a traditional Cockney feature, the PRICE-MOUTH crossover. We find that the crossover is reversing in apparent time, showing an abrupt change towards regional standard in speakers under 28 years of age, which we link to historical policy changes, and a following shift to social class attitude. We also find that while the formant values shift noticeably in apparent time, the changes largely preserve the trajectory shape.

**Key words:** Cockney; PRICE-MOUTH crossover; apparent-time; dynamic changes; the Debden Estate

## **1. Introduction**

The southeast of England has seen much linguistic change over the last 50 years. For instance, a large number of traditional East London families relocated to London's suburbs and peripheries, in particular, Essex (Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014). The term "Estuary English" was first coined in the 1980s to reflect the variety spoken in London's home-counties as a levelled continuum between the most basilectal of London varieties,

Cockney, and Received Pronunciation (RP) (Wells, 1982). More recently, parts of the South East have shown dialect levelling processes, including a movement towards RP vowels (Kerswill & Williams, 2005). At the same time, East London has become highly culturally and linguistically heterogeneous which has led to the emergence of a new variety, Multicultural London English (MLE) (Cheshire et al., 2011; Fox, 2015; Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox & Torgersen, 2018; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008).

This paper explores selected changes affecting traditional London working-class speech features, focusing on the PRICE and MOUTH vowels. These vowels have been shown to differ substantially in traditional Cockney from RP (Sivertsen, 1960; Wells, 1982). In addition, they have also undergone recent changes in inner and outer London, and in the southeast of England. In what is often described as “True Cockney” (Wells, 1982) the MOUTH, and to a lesser extent, the PRICE vowel, are described as nearly or fully monophthongal (Sivertsen, 1960; Wells, 1982). The PRICE vowel has a retracted onset in Cockney compared to RP, while the MOUTH vowel has a fronted onset leading to what has been termed the PRICE-MOUTH crossover (Wells, 1982).

Recently, in inner North and East London, and to a lesser extent, in outer East London, young people have shown a movement away from traditional Cockney variants. Instead they favour the MLE forms, which like Cockney, have narrow diphthongs and even monophthongal realisations. However, these MLE vowels do not have the backed and

fronted onsets that are found in Cockney PRICE and MOUTH vowels respectively. They are also lowering and centring (Cheshire et al., 2011; Fox, 2015; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008). Outside of London in the South East, young people in Milton Keynes and Reading have been shown to favour diphthongs that more closely resemble RP (Kerswill & Williams 2005). Therefore, the PRICE-MOUTH crossover is in an advanced process of reversal, or it altogether absent in young speakers in London and the peripheries.

The community of interest for this study is the Debden Estate which was constructed in the town of Loughton, Essex as part of government housing act, The Greater London Plan (Abercrombie, 1944). This plan envisioned several post-war, purpose-built, London County Council (LCC) Estates in London's suburbs and peripheries to depopulate East London which was over-populated and had high levels of poverty. The original population of Debden was therefore almost entirely formed of traditional East Londoners who moved to the estate and would have spoken a form of Cockney. While Debden is found in the town of Loughton in Essex, it is often considered part of Greater London due to its proximity to central London (it is within London's orbital motorway the M25 and is on Transport for London Underground Central Line).

Since the oldest generations in Debden grew up in East London, we expect them to produce the traditional Cockney PRICE-MOUTH crossover. However, we may not observe this in younger generations, in line with more widespread south-eastern changes. Indeed,

this is what we find, comparing the average trajectories for the PRICE and MOUTH vowels for the most extreme age groups in our data set: speakers over 73, and speakers between 14 and 16 years of age (Figure 1; note that the groups are not balanced for speaker sex, and hence the vowels spaces are of different size). For both age groups, PRICE and MOUTH are crossed, as expected in Cockney. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the onglides for PRICE and MOUTH are coming closer together along the F2 dimension in apparent time, shifting towards the RP standard.

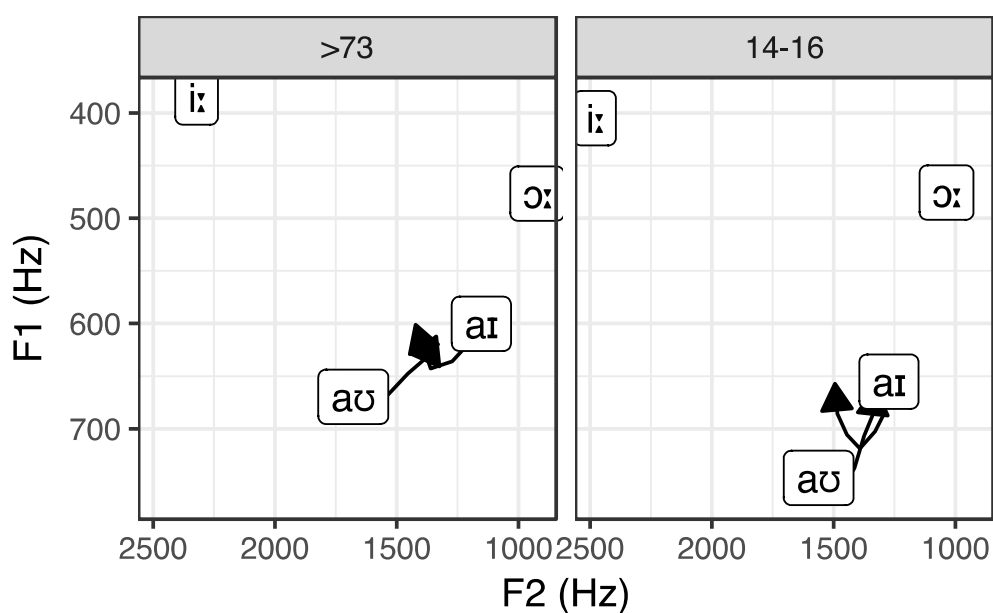


Figure 1. Average trajectories for the PRICE and MOUTH vowels for the oldest and the youngest speakers in the dataset

We expand on this preliminary evidence of a PRICE-MOUTH crossover, using an apparent-time analysis with increased granularity of the age predictor. We identify five

distinct age groups, to reflect the sociolinguistic processes that have been documented across the South East since the 1980s. Our main research question, in this context, is whether the trajectories change continuously in apparent time, or whether we can see an abrupt shift. Furthermore, we compare the formant trajectories in apparent time, to establish whether observed changes affect the vowel dynamics.

## **2. Materials and method**

### **2.1. Speakers**

51 speakers living in Debden were recruited for a sociolinguistic interview. All those interviewed had lived there for at least the previous 30 years, whereas nearly all speakers under 72 had lived in Debden since birth. All speakers aged >73 had been born and raised in London's traditional East End. They considered themselves Cockney and had relocated to Debden at various stages of adulthood. Therefore, this age group can be used as a baseline for defining traditional Cockney speech. We did not attempt to determine the social class of the speakers, as qualitative interviews with participants show that outward perceptions of class in Debden do not reflect self-identification. However, all speakers originated from what were, until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white, East London working-class families.



The age groups (>73, 55 – 72, 28 – 54, 18 – 27, 14 –16 years), were selected to reflect important historical changes in the community. Debden has not always had its own secondary school and throughout various periods of time, Debden children have gone to schools in neighbouring Loughton alongside local children. At other points of time, Debden children have been schooled separately on the estate. In general, those aged 14 –16, 18 – 27 and 55 – 72 years went to Debden schools, whilst those aged 28 – 54 and >72 years went to schools in Loughton. These differences in place of schooling were shown in qualitative interviews and fieldwork in Debden to be ideologically salient as important identity markers such that the age groups for this study were designed accordingly. However, it is important to note that a minority of participants did school outside of the area or may have gone to school in Loughton, whilst living on the peripheries of Debden. Further, these age-groups reflect important social and political changes in Debden. Those aged 73+ grew up prior to deindustrialisation when work opportunities on council-estates were limited, schooling was largely capped at 15 or 16 and housing was all socially rented. However, for those in younger age-groups, there has been somewhat of an expansion in the domains of work and education as well as a dramatic increase in rates of home-ownership in Debden. Table 1 shows the participant summaries by sex and age-group.

Age group	F	M
14-16	4	4
18-27	5	5
28-54	8	3
55-72	9	5
73+	4	4

Table 1. Participant Summaries

## 2.2. Materials

The participants completed a sociolinguistic interview (Labov, 1966; Llamas, 2007) designed to elicit speech in a range of different styles: an open interview, reading of a phonetically-balanced passage (an adaptation of the popular children’s story “Chicken Little”, Shaw, Best & Docherty, 2018), and reading of a word-list. They also completed a background information form that elicited key demographic information, and an attitudinal identification questionnaire (Llamas, 2007) which was not analysed as part of this present study (but see Cole & Evans, 2020).

The word-list included all English vowels, as well as consonantal features known to be of sociolinguistic interest in the South East. Whilst the word-list targeting vowel production aimed to include bVt/bVd words, this was not always possible. A pilot study showed the need to use high-frequency words and words with transparent spelling, as some participants struggled to read some items.

Of the 51 speakers, all read the word-list, and 45 read the passage. Six participants did not feel comfortable or confident reading the passage aloud.

### **2.3. Procedure**

All interviews were conducted by the first author, a white, English-speaking female from Debden whose family had moved from East London to Debden in the 1950s as part of the LCC Greater London Plan. Each subject read the passage once, followed by two repetitions of the items in the word list. The words were presented individually in a random order. The speakers were instructed to read the words and the passage as if they were talking to a friend or family member.

A majority of recordings took place in a quiet room in the first author's parents' home, or in participants' homes. The participants were seated at a table or on a sofa with the microphone placed on a table in front of them. The recordings for the age group 14–

16yrs took place in their school in a quiet classroom after consent was obtained from the school's headmistress and the participants' parents.

## **2.4 Analysis**

The word list and passage data were transcribed in ELAN by an undergraduate RA to exclude disfluencies, reading errors, etc. The ELAN files were used as input for automatic segmentation and extraction with FAVE (Rosenfelder et al., 2014). We extracted formant measurements dynamically, at 1ms intervals with the FAVE default settings which included a maximum of 5 formants up to 5000Hz for males and 5500Hz for females. We removed outliers, defined as values outside the range of  $\pm 2.5$  standard deviations from the mean for each vowel by-speaker, as likely tracking errors. We then z-score normalised the F1 and F2 values within speaker (Lobanov, 1971). Following this, we extracted the instances of PRICE and MOUTH vowels, excluding high-frequency words that are highly prone to reduction, such as *l*, *l'd*, or *now*. The total number of tokens was 1103 for PRICE and 1154 for MOUTH.

We normalised the length of the individual formant trajectories, by reducing the dataset to the measurements taken at 10% intervals throughout each vowel.

We analysed the normalised F1 and F2 trajectories for both PRICE and MOUTH, using Generalised Additive Mixed Modelling (Wood, 2006). The predictors we considered included:

- main effects of **sex** (female vs. male) and **age group** (>73, 55 – 72, 28 – 54, 18 – 27, 14 –16 years), as well as an interaction between them
- main effect of **style** (word list vs. passage)
- **normalised time**, as well as normalised time by the predictors listed above
- **vowel duration** and tensor product interaction between duration and normalised time (Sóskuthy, 2017).
- by-speaker and by-item random smooths for normalised time.

We fitted a full model based on all the predictors listed above, and tested for significance of the individual predictors by removing them step-by-step, and comparing the ML values, based on the procedure described in Sóskuthy et al. (2018). This procedure allows us to distinguish between factors affecting mean formant values, and factors affecting formant trajectories. Only significant predictors were retained (at  $\alpha=0.05$ ). All interpretations of significance in Section 3 below, as well as all  $p$ -values, are based on

model comparison. We corrected for autocorrelation using an AR1 error model (Baayen et al., 2018).

### 3. Results

We found no significant age group effects on normalised F1 for either vowel, suggesting no apparent-time change along this dimension. In contrast, both vowels show significant F2 changes in apparent time ( $p < .001$  for PRICE;  $p < .01$  for MOUTH), and a significant interaction between age group and normalised time ( $p < .001$  for PRICE,  $p < .05$  for MOUTH), suggesting apparent-time changes in the vowel trajectory.

As shown in the left panel of Figure 2, there is overall fronting of the onglide of PRICE in apparent time, with a fairly abrupt shift for speakers under 28 years. We also see further changes affecting the vowel offglide in the youngest speaker group (14–16), manifested as F2 lowering in the offglide, resulting in overall less displacement along the F2 vector for the youngest speakers. F2 trajectory in PRICE was also significantly affected by sex ( $p < .001$ ; effect not illustrated), with females overall ahead of males with respect to onglide fronting. Sex did not interact significantly with age group.

The right panel of Figure 2 shows the dynamic effect of age group on F2 in the MOUTH vowel. We find a significant apparent-time change in the F2 trajectory, and once again, there is an abrupt shift for speakers under 28 years. This speaker group shows

retraction of the onglide, compared to the older groups, consistent with a shift towards Modern RP (or Standard Southern British English; SSBE). Simultaneously, there is a retraction in the vowel offglide, such that the overall shape of the trajectory remains relatively stable. We did not find significant sex effects for the MOUTH vowel, nor a significant interaction between sex and age group.

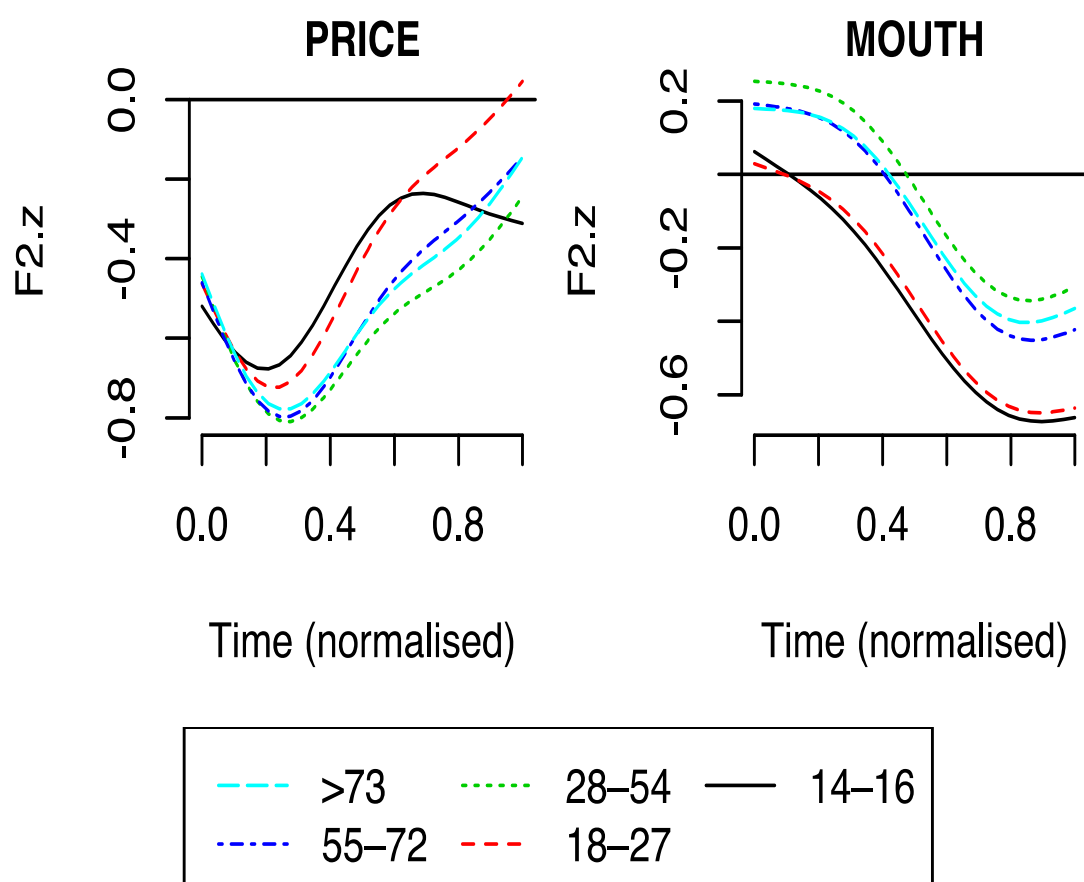


Figure 2. GAMM estimates of F2 trajectories for the PRICE and MOUTH vowels, as a function of age group.

#### 4. Discussion

The data seem to cluster into two groups: those under 28, and 28+. Those aged 28+ have typical Cockney PRICE and MOUTH vowels and do not show signs of MOUTH-PRICE reversal. In contrast, those under 28 show both a fronting in the onglide of PRICE and a backing of the onglide of MOUTH. Therefore, the vowels do not appear to have changed immediately as a result of Cockneys moving to Essex, and living within the town of Loughton (if that were the case, we would have expected to see a change in an older age group). This is likely due to the limited contact between the two communities which occurred for several decades after the construction of the estate. Participants aged >55 report that their friendship networks did not transcend the boundaries of Debden and that they rarely went to Debden's surrounding towns/villages (eg. Loughton. Theydon Bois etc).

The age groups 55–72 and 28–54 do not demonstrate a movement away from the oldest speakers. Whilst the <28 group do not pattern with the older groups, their average formant trajectories do not show MLE influences, as seen in other parts of greater-London. Apparent-time changes do not affect F1, so there is no evidence of lowering as in MLE, whereas the observed changes in F2 in speakers under <28 suggest a shift towards Modern RP.

It is likely that the abrupt change for those <28 reflects social and historic changes that occurred abruptly in the 1980s across Britain, and particularly for council estates



through post-industrialisation and the establishment of neoliberal policy. Thatcherite policies sought to eradicate class distinction by the implementation of house-owning democracy through the Right to Buy scheme and an extension of market rule. This saw the privatisation of the council estates in Essex, and men from these areas experienced an expansion of their working opportunities. Many of them worked in the City of London (Biressi & Nunn, 2013; Rye, 2015). Therefore, those aged <28 were the first generation to grow up in Debden after this period of great social change.

The changes observed in the <28 group are found for both the MOUTH and PRICE vowels, which suggests the Debden vowels may be changing as a system rather than innovation in one single vowel. Whilst this requires further work, it may be part of a wider movement towards modern RP which reflects an ideological move towards a perceived “standard” and away from Cockney. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the Cockney crossover has not been completely reversed. In the individual speaker systems for the <28 speakers, the PRICE-MOUTH crossover was present and the onglide for PRICE was never more front than the one for MOUTH. Thus, the process of full reversal is at a phonologically early stage in Debden.

Finally, there seems to be a tendency for the offglide of the vowels to follow the onglide. Even though we find significant apparent-time differences in vowel trajectories, the overall shape of the trajectory is largely maintained, and the average realisations are

fairly diphthongal. The only exception is the PRICE F2 for the 14–16-year olds where there is a sharp backing at the offglide such that the vowel trajectory shape for this age-group does not resemble that of the other age groups. More research is required to ascertain if this is an innovation in the PRICE vowel, age-grading or part of a wider system of innovation amongst this age group.

## 5. Conclusions

This apparent-time analysis demonstrates that there is evidence for change in the vowel system in Debden, which appears to be moving as a system towards Modern RP. Nonetheless, this does not represent major changes in the trajectory shape which is broadly maintained. The change in the PRICE and MOUTH vowels appears to be at a relatively early stage, such that the crossover has not been fully reversed. Furthermore, this change appears to be relatively young, as it is only seen in the <28 age group. The abrupt change in the vowel system likely reflect abrupt socio-political changes that transformed the Debden Estate from the 1980s.

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**Chapter 7.**

Co-variation, style and social meaning: the implicational  
relationship between (H) and (ING) in Debden, Essex

Forthcoming in *Language Variation and Change*

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## Abstract

This paper demonstrates that the differing social meanings held by linguistic features can result in an implicational relationship between them. Rates of (H) and (ING) are investigated in the casual speech of 63 speakers from a community with Cockney heritage: Debden, Essex. The indexicalities of h-dropping in Debden (signalling Cockney) are superordinate to and incorporate the indexicalities of g-dropping (working-class, “improper”), resulting in an implicational relationship. H-dropping implies g-dropping, but g-dropping can occur independently of h-dropping. This occurs in terms of co-variation at the between-speaker level and clustering effects at the within-speaker level which is measured through a novel approach using the number of phonemes as the denomination of distance. The features’ differing social meaning are also related to rates of change. Young speakers are shifting away from linguistic features which index Cockney heritage (h-dropping; the [-ɪŋk] variant of *-thing* words) in favor of more general, southeastern, working-class norms (g-dropping).

KEYWORDS: implicational relationship; co-variation, style, social meaning, h-dropping, g-dropping, Cockney; language change; Debden; Essex

## **Introduction**

The understanding of language as part of a wider projection of identity and affiliation implies that linguistic features do not have static meaning and are not independent from each other. Instead, a single linguistic feature can take on social meanings and can occur in combination with other linguistic variables to project a collective social meaning (Campbell- Kibler, 2011; Phrao, Maegaard, Møller, & Kristiansen, 2014; Phrao & Maegaard, 2017; Podesva, 2008).

This paper investigates to what extent the differing social meanings held by linguistic features can lead to an implicational relationship between them. Rates of co-variation between (ING) and (H) at the between-speaker level are investigated as well as clustering effects at the within-speaker level. In Debden, the indexicalities of g-dropping (working-class and “improper” speech) are incorporated in the superordinate indexicalities of h-dropping (Cockney heritage). While it is possible for a Debden speaker to index working-class speech without indexing their Cockney heritage, the reverse is not possible. As such, I postulate that there is an implicational relationship between (H) and (ING): h-dropping implies g-dropping, but g-dropping can occur alongside any value of (H).

## **Style clusters**

Approaches to style in sociolinguistics have evolved from earlier unidimensional definitions to consider linguistic features to be symbolic resources that hold variable



indexicalities both individually, and in combination with, other linguistic features (Moore, 2004). “Indexicality” refers to the ideological relationship between linguistic features and a social group, persona, characteristic, or place that they signal (see Eckert, 2008; Johnstone, Andrus, & Danielson, 2006; Silverstein, 2003). Linguistic features can hold indexicalities that are not only connected to macro categories (e.g., class, ethnicity, or gender) but to locally meaningful characteristics (e.g., “jocks” versus “burnouts” in Detroit [Eckert, 1999]; “populars” versus “townies” in Northern England [Moore, 2004]). Indexicalities are not limited to stable aspects of speaker identity but can be changeable (for instance, indexing interactional stance). Speakers are active, stylistic agents who tailor their linguistic output in variable projections of self (Eckert, 2008; 2012).

Single speakers can represent themselves in variable and complex ways, in part, through their linguistic production (Eckert & Labov, 2017; Rickford & Price, 2013). For instance, Podesva (2008) demonstrated variability in the speech of a single speaker, Heath, who was asked to record himself in different situations. Podesva identified style clusters of linguistic features when salient interactional moves in discourse occur such that Heath is projecting either his “diva” or “caring doctor” persona, suggesting that sociolinguistic styles and their meanings only materialize as a result of the overlapping meaning of each component linguistic feature. For instance, in Heath’s speech, frequent (T,D) deletion indexes “informal” and frequent and extreme falsetto indexes “expressive.”

While both these features (among others) combine to index “diva,” only the former indexes “informal” (Podesva, 2008:4). It follows, then, that linguistic features that jointly index a certain stance or persona do not consistently cluster together across all utterances. That is, not every instance of (t,d) deletion must be accompanied by extreme falsetto, as Heath may solely be indexing informality but not “expressive” or the superordinate style “diva.”

Several phonetic perception studies also demonstrate that the social meaning of individual linguistic features can combine to create the overall, superordinate social meaning of an utterance. For instance, Campbell-Kibler (2011) played participants in the United States a range of variants and combinations of (ING) and /s/-fronting/backing. She found that /s/-fronting is associated with gayness and being less masculine while g-dropping is associated with masculinity. Nonetheless, a backed /s/ could also index associations of “country” when it was found in the speech of some Southern US speakers but this was dependent on its surrounding linguistic context. Similarly, in a matched-guise study, Phrao et al. (2014) found that, in Copenhagen, a fronted-/s/ could index either “gayness” or a “street” persona, depending on the cluster of linguistic features with which it co-occurred (see also Levon, 2014; Phrao & Maegaard, 2017).

These studies demonstrate that linguistic variants do not occur independently of their surrounding linguistic and social context. In this sense, grammatical coherence is also an important consideration in determining the resultant linguistic variant (Guy, 2013; Oushiro

& Guy, 2015). A morphological or syntactic repetition effect has long been noted in the persistence literature (Poplack, 1980; Scherre & Naro, 1991) such that a speaker is more likely to produce a particular linguistic structure if they (or an interlocutor) have recently used that structure. For instance, a speaker is more likely to use *verb + gerundial* as opposed to *verb + infinitival* complementation if they or an interlocutor have recently used the former (Szmrecsanyi, 2006:1). In these instances, clustering of the same morphological or syntactic construction is not a social or stylistic effect but is considered to be psychologically motivated as a priming or recency effect (see Tamminga, 2016:337). In this present study, there is no reason to believe that a dropped /h/ would psychologically prime g-dropping through grammatical persistence (and vice-versa) as they operate independently of each other in terms of syntactic or morphological conditioning. Therefore, any clustering between the two variables is more likely due to social and stylistic factors.

In summary, linguistic features can have overlapping or distinct indexicalities that can combine to create a meaningful package. Within the speech of an individual speaker, there may be stylistic clusterings of linguistic features that jointly index a certain association. Nonetheless, this may be, in part, mediated by the features' respective social meanings. This paper explores to what extent the differing social meanings of (H) and (ING) result in an implicational relationship between the features.

### **Between-speaker co-variation in linguistic features**

The above section has examined the clustering of linguistic features within individual speaker systems. In addition, this paper explores co-variation between linguistic features at the between-speaker level. It initially seems plausible that, if variable X and variable Y share a similar social distribution in a speech community, there will be between-speaker correlations between the rates of occurrence of these features. Nonetheless, a wide range of studies have found weak correlations between rates of similarly socially stratified linguistic variables (New York City English: Becker, 2016; Copenhagen Danish: Gregersen & Phrao, 2016; Brazilian Portuguese: Oushiro & Guy, 2015). That is, while variable X and variable Y may share a similar social distribution in a speech community, speakers who have relatively high rates of the vernacular form of variable X may not necessarily have relatively high rates of the vernacular variant of variable Y. The weak correlations found between linguistic variables with similar social stratifications suggests that social distribution alone is not enough to predict co-variation between linguistic features.

Instead, this paper predicts that the differing social meanings held by linguistic traits may mediate the rates of between-speaker co-variation. Not all linguistic features that have a social distribution are used stylistically (e.g., Sharma & Rampton, 2015). If variable X does not hold social meaning and is not used agentively by speakers, we would expect

relatively steady and predictable rates of production for this variable. In contrast, if variable Y holds social meaning and, as such, is used stylistically and agentively, there will likely be both within-speaker and between-speaker variability in the production of this variable. For instance, two speakers who, on the surface, share many macrosocial characteristics, may not equally identify with the indexicalities of a particular variant of variable Y. Thus, there may be imperfect correlations between rates of variable X and variable Y. It seems, then, that the social meaning as well as the social distribution of linguistic features may explain rates of co-variation.

It may initially seem somewhat paradoxical to simultaneously consider that linguistic variables can have a systematic social distribution while also considering speakers to be agentive, variable, and perhaps unpredictable in their speech. However, social distribution and social meaning are not unconnected. Indeed, the social distribution of a linguistic feature creates the environment for the feature to be incorporated into social meaning. Guy and Hinskens (2016) suggested that speakers' repertoire of linguistic features only takes on social meaning through the features' social distributions and associations acquired in the community. That is, a linguistic feature may index the social associations and expectations typically held about the social group(s) that most use the feature. As a result, Podesva (2008:3) proposed that features with similar social distributions across different speech communities come to acquire somewhat similar social meanings. He

provided the example of (TH)-stopping. In many speech communities, this variant is firstly most prevalent among the lowest socioeconomic classes (e.g., Labov, 1966), and secondly, is broadly indexing of “toughness.” It seems that the social distribution of a linguistic feature enables the feature to take on indexicalities that may lead to the stylistic use of a feature.

In summary, social distribution is not a sufficient predictor of the rates of between-speaker co-variation between two linguistic features (Guy & Hinskens, 2016). Instead, some, but not all, features with social distributions can acquire social meaning. The varying levels and configurations of social meaning held by different linguistic features may mediate the rates of co-variation between the features.

### **Community of Interest**

This paper investigates rates of co-variation at the between-speaker level and clustering effects at the within-speaker level between (H) and (ING) in the casual speech of sixty-three speakers from Debden. The Debden Estate (or Debden) formed part of the “Cockney Diaspora.” This term refers to the twentieth-century relocation of white, working-class East Londoners out of London and into the surrounding counties, particularly, to Essex (Watt, Millington, & Huq, 2014:121). Debden was built in the town of Loughton in 1949 as part of a series of government-led slum clearance programs that sought to depopulate

and alleviate poverty in East London (Abercrombie, 1944). The vast majority of those who relocated to Debden in the 1950s were white, working-class East Londoners and many identified as Cockney. My paternal grandparents were relocated from East London to the Debden Estate in approximately 1950 and I was raised on the estate. In present times, although Debden is in the county of Essex, it is around five miles from the Northeast London border and around thirty-five minutes from central London on the London Underground train service (for a more detailed description of the history, location and demographics of Debden, see Cole & Evans, 2020).

While there is much debate about how to define Cockneys, often Cockneys are considered to be white, working-class East Londoners, who were born/live in London's traditional East End (Fox, 2015:8). Often, the accents spoken in South East England have been considered to occur on a continuum between Received Pronunciation (or its successor dialect, Standard Southern British English) and Cockney (see Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Cole, 2021). In South East England, the linguistic continuum between Standard Southern British English and Cockney parallels the class continuum. While Cockney people are often portrayed as epitomizing the working class in South East England (see Dodd & Dodd, 1992), Standard Southern British English is the variety spoken by and associated with the higher classes (Agha, 2003; Badia Barrera, 2015).

As Debden was originally inhabited almost exclusively by East Londoners, it seems probable that Debden speakers will use consonantal features that have previously been reported in Cockney. This is line with previous research that found that, despite some apparent-time change toward Standard Southern British English variants, a Cockney vowel system was brought to Debden along with the Cockneys who relocated (Cole, 2021; Cole & Evans, 2020; Cole & Strycharczuk, 2019). Nonetheless, this paper does not have the scope to provide detailed descriptions of the variety of English spoken in Debden.<sup>1</sup> Instead, this paper principally investigates to what extent the differing social meanings held by linguistic variables can lead to an implicational relationship between them at both the within-speaker and between-speaker levels.

### **(ING) and (H)**

The linguistic variables of interest are both phonological alternations present in Cockney with similar social distributions, being most prevalent in men and the working class. Nevertheless, these variables differ in their indexicalities. As I will demonstrate, in Debden, h-dropping has comparatively very high social prominence and holds locally meaningful associations in relation to the community's East London heritage. In contrast, g-dropping has much less social salience and, more broadly, indexes working-class or "improper" speech.



### **Social distribution of (H) and (ING)**

The (H) variable refers to an alternation between the presence and absence of the glottal fricative /h/ in syllable initial position in non-function words. The term “h-dropping” is widely used to refer to the latter. While in most varieties of English, h-dropping is widespread for function words (for instance pronouns; *he, him her, his* and auxiliaries; *has, have, had*), h-dropping (or at least variability) is also found in non-function words in most urban centres across England and Wales (Hughes, Trudgill & Watt., 2012:66-7).

In South East England, (H) has traditionally had a rigid social distribution, and h-dropping is found most prevalently among Cockneys. In 1982, Wells reported that among white, working-class East Londoners (or Cockneys), h-dropping was found almost categorically but was almost never found in Received Pronunciation speakers (Wells, 1982:254). Around this time, research also demonstrated that h-dropping in London was strongly conditioned by social class. For instance, Hudson and Holloway (1977) showed that, in London, working-class schoolboys dropped /h/ on an average of 81% of instances, compared to 14% for middle-class boys. Previous research, although not conducted in East London, has consistently established that h-dropping is more prevalent in men than women (Baranowski & Turton, 2015; Bell & Holmes, 1992). In the South East England context, the social distribution of h-dropping (highest prevalence among the working class,

males and prevalent in East London) may have enabled the feature to take on social meaning (Guy & Hinskens, 2016; Podesva, 2008).

More recent work has found that /h/ has been reinstated in East London (Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill, & Torgersen, 2008:15) as well as other southern dialects in the towns of Reading and Milton Keynes (Williams & Kerswill, 1999:147). In the inner East London borough of Hackney, young speakers had significantly lower rates of h-dropping than elderly speakers (11% compared to 58.1%). Rates of h-dropping were also conditioned by speaker ethnicity. White British (or “Anglo”) speakers had significantly higher rates than “non-Anglo” speakers (18% compared to 3.9%) (Cheshire et al., 2008:15). It may be that, in general, young speakers in the South East and in London are ideologically distancing from the indexicalities held by h-dropping. In line with these trends observed in Milton Keynes, Reading, and East London, /h/ may also be in a process of reinstatement in Debden.

The second variable analyzed as part of this study is (ING), which refers to an alternation between the standard velar [ŋ] and the alveolar [n] (though not for *-ing* after stressed vowels in monomorphemic words, e.g., *ring*, *sing*, etc.). The term “g-dropping” is used to signal the alveolar variant. While this term is problematic in that it uses the pejorative and erroneous term “dropping” to refer to the substitution of one phoneme for

another, it will be employed throughout this paper for clear reference to the alveolar variant and for easy comparison with h-dropping.

The alveolar variant is strongly favored in East London (Hughes et al., 2012:77; Labov, 1989; Mott, 2012:84). Rates of g-dropping are also conditioned by social factors in both the US and the UK. The alveolar is more common in men than women and in the lower classes (Labov, 2001; Trudgill, 1974; Wells, 1982). The social distribution of (ING) is stable, as change has not been observed in any of the locations where the variable has been analyzed throughout decades (Hazen, 2008; Labov, 2001).

In the United States, the alveolar variant is more strongly favored in verbal contexts than in nominal contexts (Houston, 1991; Labov, 1994:583, 2001:79), but this effect was not found for London-born adolescents (Schleef, Meyeroff, & Clark, 2011:222). As well as differences between nominal and verbal contexts, in the United States (ING) operates differently for *-thing* words (while *something* and *nothing* favor the alveolar variant, *anything* and *everything* categorically favor the velar; see Campbell-Kibler [2006:23]; Labov [2001:79]). The clear division between alveolar and velar endings in *-thing* words was not found to be as clearly marked in Britain as in North America (Houston, 1985). In some very limited varieties of English, a third variant, [-ɪŋk] is also found for *-thing* words. These varieties include the English used in Canberra, Australia (Shopen, 1978) and

Cockney (Schleef et al., 2011; Wright, 1981). In this study, I refer to this variant as the “[-ɪŋk]” variant, and I use the term “velar variant” to refer to the standard [-ɪŋ] variant.

### **Social meaning of (H) and (ING) in Debden.**

(H) and (ING) appear to differ in their potential indexicalities that may lead to an implicational relationship between the two features. In Britain, there is evidence spanning centuries that h-dropping has drawn overt, social commentary, including in relation to Cockney. The feature has been observed since as early as the sixteenth century and appears to have been stigmatized throughout this period (Mugglestone, 2003). For instance, in 1791, John Walker published *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* that provided pronunciation advice to the Scottish, Irish, and, above all, Cockneys, who Walker believed spoke a variety of English “a thousand times more offensive and disgusting” (Walker, 1791:17). The publication includes a list of “faults” commonly produced by Cockneys, including h-dropping and hypercorrection: “not founding ‘h’ where it ought to be found, and inversely.”

In modern times, there is ongoing evidence that h-dropping has high social prominence and is associated with Cockney. Indeed, Wells considered the feature to be “the single most powerful pronunciation shibboleth in England” (Wells, 1982:254). Evidence for the association between Cockney and h-dropping can be found in online instructional videos that guide viewers on how to impersonate a Cockney accent. Without fail, these videos

mention h-dropping as a key facet of a Cockney accent and encourage users to emulate this feature in order to sound Cockney. These pop-cultural references suggest that h-dropping is indexing of Cockney and could be considered an enregistered (cf., Agha, 2003; Johnstone et al., 2006) feature in the Cockney variety of English. That is, h-dropping has become overtly linked with the “Cockney” accent or dialect label.

Evidence for the enregisterment of h-dropping in Cockney is perhaps best demonstrated in the Cockney song (or “ding dong”) *Wot’s the good of hanyfink! Why! Nuffink!* (for the full lyrics and piano music see Keeping [1975:35]). The chorus lyrics are represented orthographically as:

*Wot’s the good of tryin’ to hearn a livin’ now-a-days?*

*Wot’s the good of honesty when ‘umbug only pays?*

*Wot’s the good of slavin’ o’ a ravin’ about savin’?*

*Wot’s the good of hanyfink? Why!... Nuffink!*

(Keeping, 1975:35).

The song finds humor in drawing overt attention to h-dropping in Cockney. In all instances where /h/ would be expected in standard British English it is removed (e.g. “humbug” becomes “umbug”), and vice versa (e.g. “earn” becomes “hearn”). The strategic and humorous use of h-dropping and hypercorrection in this song demonstrate a

conscious awareness of h-dropping. The feature is indexing of Cockney and is used in stylistic projections.

With respect to (ING), the above song also includes orthographic representation of the [-ɪŋk] variant for *-thing* words, demonstrating some level of awareness of this feature. Furthermore, there are orthographic representations of g-dropping in non-*thing* words such as *tryin'*, *ravin'*, and *savin.'* This attests the fact that speakers are familiar with the alternation. Nonetheless, of the previously mentioned videos that guide speakers to emulate a Cockney accent, with very few exceptions there are no mentions of g-dropping as a feature of Cockney. This chimes with previous research suggesting that, unlike in the United States, g-dropping does not draw overt social commentary and evaluations in the UK (Levon & Fox, 2014). In Labovian terms, (ING) appears to be a marker while (H) is a stereotype (Labov, 1972).

In Debden, interviews with participants also revealed discrepancies in the social prominence and indexicalities of (H) and (ING). For instance, in the below excerpt h-dropping is discussed by three participants from Debden (a 48-year-old woman, Jane, her 54-year-old husband, Brian, and her 75-year-old father, Michael).

*Brian<sup>2</sup>: Well, it seems - it seems to me that if people can't pronounce their words properly, they seem to—they assume you come from London, init. If they're not saying their*

*t's or h's or anything like that, there's—they'll say, "Oh, you come from London then, don't you?"*

*Jane: Oh, my nan though. She used to tell me off 'cause I didn't sound my t's and h's.*

*Michael: Yeh, but why? She come from Shoreditch. What? She ashamed of it or summin'k [something]?*

*Jane: No, she always used to make me sound my letters, didn't she? And um, I mean, it was only when I had children—when I—when I had [my son] that I actually pronounced— started making sure that I pronounced my t's and h's so that it was—he ended up speaking lovely but then it—then it just went again. Went back to normal.*

*Michael: I suppose it sounds—it sounds better—it sounds nicer if you talk properly.*

Although Michael ultimately concedes that it sounds “better” to talk “properly,” he initially seems offended by Jane’s suggestion that h-dropping is shameful. He understands h-dropping as an indicator of their Shoreditch heritage (a traditionally Cockney area of East London). Similar sentiments arose frequently across the interviews in Debden. Therefore, h-dropping encompasses associations of working-class or “improper” speech but also indexes more local interpretations in relation to Debden’s cultural heritage in East London. H-dropping may not explicitly index the linguistic label “Cockney,” or even “East

London,” due to the community’s relocation to Essex. Indeed, it has been found that young speakers in Debden have reinterpreted some “Cockney” linguistic features as an “Essex” accent (Cole & Evans, 2020). Nonetheless, h-dropping does certainly seem to index something local and related to the community’s working-class, East London heritage.

In contrast, participants in this present study rarely referenced g-dropping. Of the limited instances in which the feature was mentioned, it was associated with working-class, “improper,” and “incorrect” speech. For instance, in the below excerpt, a 51-year-old woman, Denise, describes her feelings of shame around her accent, which she does not believe is “proper.” After being mocked for her accent by her colleagues, she attempted to speak “better” for an entire day. As part of these efforts, she aims to “add ‘g’ on the end of words,” thus using the standard velar as opposed to the alveolar. However, she ultimately acknowledges that “speaking better” is “not [her],” such that her accent (of which g-dropping is part) is intrinsic to her sense of self. Although Denise associated g-dropping with “incorrect” or “improper” speech, she does not explicitly relate this feature with any local meaning.

*I was saying, “I’m going to speak much better today, I’m going to speak and I’m going to say all my words properly and all my letters properly.” And they were*



*laughing at me 'cause I suppose I'll say 'laughin'' and 'jokin'' and we don't put a 'g' on the end and—but I know—it was far too much effort 'cause it's not me, is it?*

In summary, although both g-dropping and h-dropping are supraregional in England, they differ in the extent and configuration of their social meaning in Debden. There is no substantial evidence to suggest that g-dropping has locally meaningful associations in Debden where it is broadly associated with working-class and “improper” speech. In contrast, h-dropping carries locally meaningful and overt indexicalities related to the community’s Cockney heritage.

### **Hypotheses of this study**

In terms of the distribution of (H) and (ING), as Debden is a working-class community with East London heritage, we would firstly expect that, at least to some extent, h-dropping and g-dropping will be present. Secondly, we would expect rates of both h-dropping and g-dropping to be more frequent among Debden men than women. Thirdly, it seems likely that h-dropping will be in a state of change toward reinstatement in line with changes observed in South East England (Williams & Kerswill, 1999:147) and London (Cheshire et al., 2008:15). In contrast, (ING) is likely to be stable in apparent time following a wide range of work that has found the variable to be stable (see Labov, 2001).

The principal hypothesis of this paper is that the differing social meanings held by linguistic features can lead to an implicational relationship between them. The prediction is that rates of h-dropping will be contingent on rates of g-dropping as the indexicalities of the latter (working-class and “improper”) are incorporated in the superordinate indexicalities of the former (Cockney heritage). Firstly, I investigate to what extent h-dropping and g-dropping cluster together in the speech of individual speakers. That is, I hypothesize that, if a speaker produces h-dropping, they will predictably produce the alveolar variant of (ING) if the variable occurs in proximity. In contrast, g-dropping may occur in proximity to any value of (H). I measure the distance between (H) and (ING) with a novel approach: using the number of phonemes as the denomination of distance. Secondly, I investigate to what extent the features co-vary at the between-speaker level. The hypothesis is that speakers with high rates of h-dropping must also have high rates of g-dropping. In contrast, a high rate of g-dropping does not necessitate high rates of h-dropping. While it is possible for a Debden speaker to index working-class speech without indexing their Cockney heritage, the reverse is not possible.

## Methods

### Participants

Ranging from fourteen to ninety-one years of age ( $M = 49.3\text{yrs}$ ,  $SD = 23.8$ ), sixty-three participants (thirty-six female) were recruited from the Debden Estate using a friend-of-a-friend approach. The participants' ages reflect their age at the time of recording in 2017.

As previously mentioned, my grandparents were relocated to Debden from East London in approximately 1950 as part of the slum-clearance programs, and I was brought up in Debden. As a result, the data was mostly collected through my network of friends and family. All participants were white and from historically working-class, East London families as ascertained through employment and educational patterns.

### Procedure

The speakers took part in a sociolinguistic interview, consisting of reading a wordlist and passage as well as an open interview with myself, a native Debden speaker. The production data for this paper is extracted from the open interviews (see Cole & Evans [2020] or Cole & Strycharzuk [2019] for phonetic analyses of wordlist and passage data).

The interviews consisted of semi structured conversations about a range of topics with a focus on the participants' lives, views on the local area, experiences living in Debden, sense of identity, and the linguistic features found in Debden.

The recordings were mostly conducted one-on-one, but seven interviews were conducted in groups of up to four friends or family members. Interviews were a minimum of twenty minutes, a maximum of three hours, and averaged fifty minutes. The interviews were transcribed with Elan (Version 5.4) (Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, 2019) in full except for nine longer ones capped at fifty minutes per speaker. The interviews were aligned with FAVE align (Rosenfelder, Fruehwald, Evanini, Seyfarth, Gorman, Prichard, & Yuan, 2014). A hand-coding, Praat script was then used to code auditorily for (H) and (ING) (Fruehwald, 2011). Function words, such as pronouns or auxiliaries, were not included for (H). Although, as previously mentioned, hypercorrection of h-dropping may be indexing of Cockney, no instances of hypercorrection were found in the data. Therefore, hypercorrection was not analyzed. For (ING), instances of *-ing* after stressed vowels in monomorphemic words (e.g., *ring*, *sing*, etc) were not included, and *-thing* words were analyzed separately, as they have been shown to operate differently to other *-ing* words (see Campbell-Kibler, 2006).

This gave a total of 2,183 tokens of (ING) for non-*thing* words, 492 tokens of (ING) for *thing* words, and 4,058 tokens of the (H) variable.

## Analysis

### Variation and Change in (H) and (ING).

Firstly, the social distribution of (ING) and (H) was analyzed using logistic mixed effect regressions using the *lme4* package (Bates, Maechler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015) in R (R Core Team, 2018). The dependent variables were the realizations of (ING) and (H) across all participants. The first analysis investigated rates of (H), the second and third analyzed rates of (ING) for *-thing* and non-*thing* words respectively. Of the sixty-three participants, four participants were not included in the analysis of *-thing* words, as they did not produce any *-thing* word during the interview. As the production of *-thing* words has three potential variants in Cockney [ɪŋ, ɪn, ɪŋk], three separate models were run to test each possible comparison of variants in the dependent variable: (1) [ɪŋ] and [ɪn]; (2) [ɪŋ] and [ɪŋk]; (3) [ɪn] and [ɪŋk]. For all analyses, statistical significance was tested with  $\alpha$  set at 0.05.

The predictors included in the models were age (continuous), sex (female:  $n = 36$ ; male:  $n = 27$ ), and an interaction between these two variables. The sex predictor was treatment-coded (F = 0, M = 1). Participant and word were included as random effects to control for any participant or word-specific effects (words:  $n = 315$  and  $n = 307$  for (ING) and (H) respectively). For *-thing* words, carrier words were included as a predictor (*anything*, *everything*, *something*, or *nothing*:  $n = 109, 84, 93, 206$ , respectively). This predictor was included, as word-specific variation has been observed in the realization of

(ING) (Campbell-Kibler, 2006:23; Houston, 1985; Labov, 2001:79). Further, for the analyses of (ING) (for both *-thing* and non-*thing* words), the place of articulation of the following phoneme was also included as a predictor. Expanded from Tamminga (2016:339), this was coded as either (1) alveolar, (2) velar, or (3) neither alveolar nor velar (non-*thing* words:  $n = 315, 89, 1779$ , respectively; *thing*-words:  $n = 94, 6, 392$ , respectively). The only phonological conditioning that has been observed for this variable is in the form of regressive assimilation whereby the alveolar variant is more frequent when it precedes alveolar stops, and the velar variant is more common when preceding velar stops (see Campbell-Kibler [2006] for an overview). For each dependent variable, I fitted full models based on all the predictors listed above and tested for significance of the individual predictors by removing them step-by-step and comparing the model fit.

Although, in the United States, g-dropping is morphologically conditioned such that it is more likely in verbal than nominal contexts (Labov, 2001:79), this effect was not found for London-born teenagers (Schleef et al., 2011:222), and, thus, nominal and verbal contexts have been analyzed together. No linguistic constraints were included in the analysis of (H), as the variable is not considered to have phonological or morphological conditioning, with the exception of the possibility that the quality of /h/ (but not its presence or absence) may differ depending on the following vowel (see Hughes et al., 2012: 45; Ladefoged & Maddieson, 1996).

In each model, the vernacular variant of the dependent variable (h-dropping for (H) and g-dropping for (ING)) was coded as zero and the standard was coded as one. For the comparison between [-ɪŋk] and alveolar variants for *-thing* words, the [-ɪŋk] variant was coded as zero.

### **Co-variation and clustering between (H) and (ING).**

At the within-speaker level, I analyzed to what extent h-dropping and g-dropping cluster together in the speech of individual speakers. The temporal distribution of style clusters within an individual speaker's discourse has been analyzed with different temporal units, such as utterance (Podesva, 2008; Sharma & Rampton, 2015), discourse topic (Schilling-Estes, 2004), and tokens (Kendall, 2007). In this study, I use a novel approach to analyzing clustering effects by using number of phonemes as the denomination of distance between (H) and (ING). Rates of co-variation between (H) and (ING) were analyzed when the variables were, firstly, two phonemes apart in an utterance, secondly, three phonemes apart, thirdly, four phonemes apart, etc. The analysis continued until the point at which there was no significant co-variation between (H) and (ING) given the distance between them. For instance, would (H) and (ING) co-vary when they were three phonemes apart when produced in words such as “(H)av(ING),” or when they were six phonemes apart in phrases, such as “Music (H)all tak(ING)”?

A drawback of this method is that the phonetic realizations of the phonemes between (H) and (ING) were not adjusted for all phonological processes. In some instances, this may have altered the number of phonemes between (ING) and (H), for instance, if linking/intrusive-r or schwa deletion occurred. Nonetheless, there were very few instances when the number of phonemes between (H) and (ING) would have been altered by these phonological processes.

For each individual speaker, the probability of h-dropping occurring in proximity to g-dropping (for non-*thing* words) was calculated as follows: the number of times h-dropping occurred within X phonemes of g-dropping was divided by the number of times h-dropping occurred within X phonemes of (ING) (regardless of surface variant). This resultant probability was then contrasted with the probability of h-dropping occurring independently of its surrounding environment. That is, is the rate of speakers producing h-dropping within X phonemes of g-dropping higher than speakers' overall rates of h-dropping throughout the interview? These probabilities were contrasted with a Mann-Whitney U test. The same process was then conducted to assess whether the probability of g-dropping in proximity to h-dropping was greater than the probability of g-dropping occurring independently of its surrounding environment.

For each analysis, only participants who had more than five occurrences of (H) and (ING) within X phonemes were included in the analysis so as to increase the reliability of



results. For instance, twenty-five participants were included in the analysis of (H) and (ING) within three phonemes; this increased to forty-five participants within ten phonemes. An analysis of (H) and (ING) in immediately adjacent positions was not analyzed, as there were not enough instances of occurrence to provide sufficient statistical power. While not all participants could be included in the analysis in the interest of reliability and accuracy of results, this analysis was not looking at community-wide patterns in the first instance, but instead was interested in within-speaker patterns that could be interpreted independently. Clustering between (H) and *-thing* words could not be analyzed due to the limited number of realizations of *-thing* words across the corpus (492).

At the between-speaker level, rates of co-variation between (H) and (ING) (for non-*thing* words) were analyzed with a Pearson's correlation test. This test assessed whether speakers with relatively higher rates of g-dropping also had relatively higher rates of h-dropping (and vice versa).

## Results

### Variation and change in (H) and (ING)

Logistic mixed effect regressions investigated to what extent rates of (ING) and (H) were related to age and sex. Both age ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $z = -3.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and sex ( $\beta = -1.95$ ,  $z = -3.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were significantly related to the rates of (H) (see Figure 1). Males had higher rates of h-dropping than females (48.4% h-dropping for men compared to 23.3%

for women) and older participants had higher rates than younger participants. Change toward the retention of /h/ was observed most abruptly in those aged  $\leq 35$  yrs. Retention of /h/ was very low among adolescents and almost categorical for female adolescents. While there was not a reduction in rates of h-dropping for women aged between thirty-five years and ninety-one years, there was a steady apparent-time decrease for men in this same age bracket. However, for both sexes, change toward retention occurred most abruptly in those aged  $\leq 35$  yrs. There was no significant interaction between age and sex.

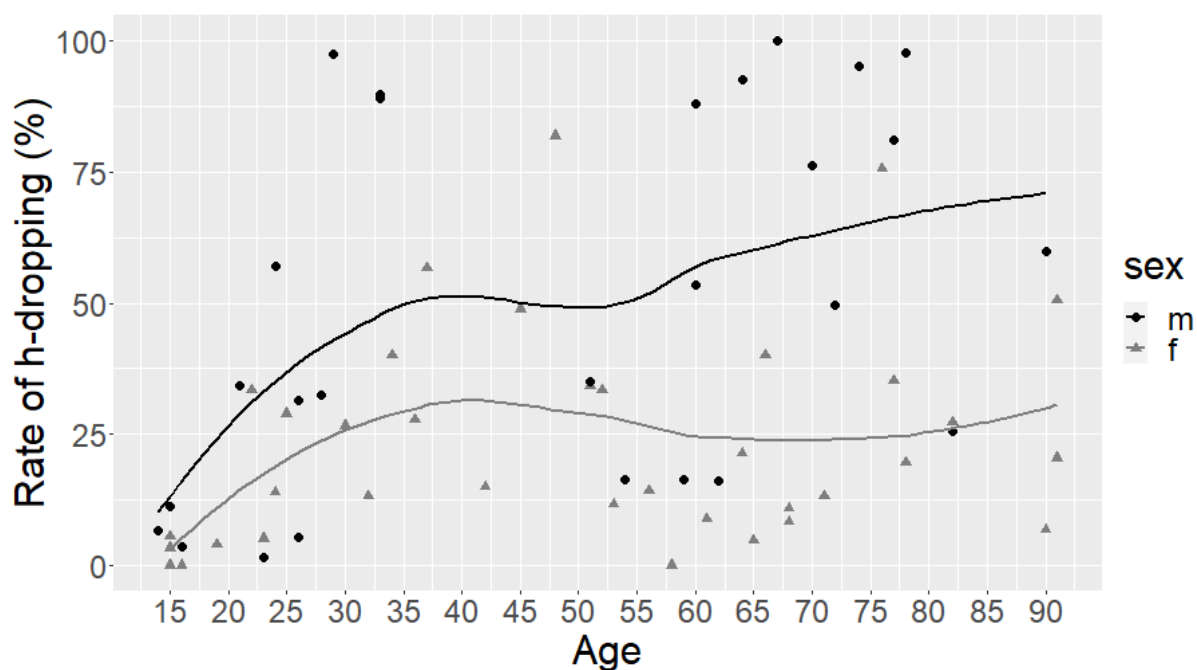


FIGURE 1. Rates of h-dropping by age and sex for sixty-three speakers from Debden, Essex. H-dropping is significantly more likely in older speakers (particularly those aged  $>35$  yrs) and in men.

For (ING) in non-*thing* words, there were no significant age or sex effects or interactions between these variables (Figure 2) (the velar form occurred on 17% of instances for males and 15.8% for women). The only significant effect in the model was the place of articulation of the following sound. The velar form was significantly more likely to occur when the following sound was velar (64% of instances) compared to when it was alveolar (13.7%) or neither alveolar nor velar (22%) ( $\beta = -2.23$ ,  $z = 5.83$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

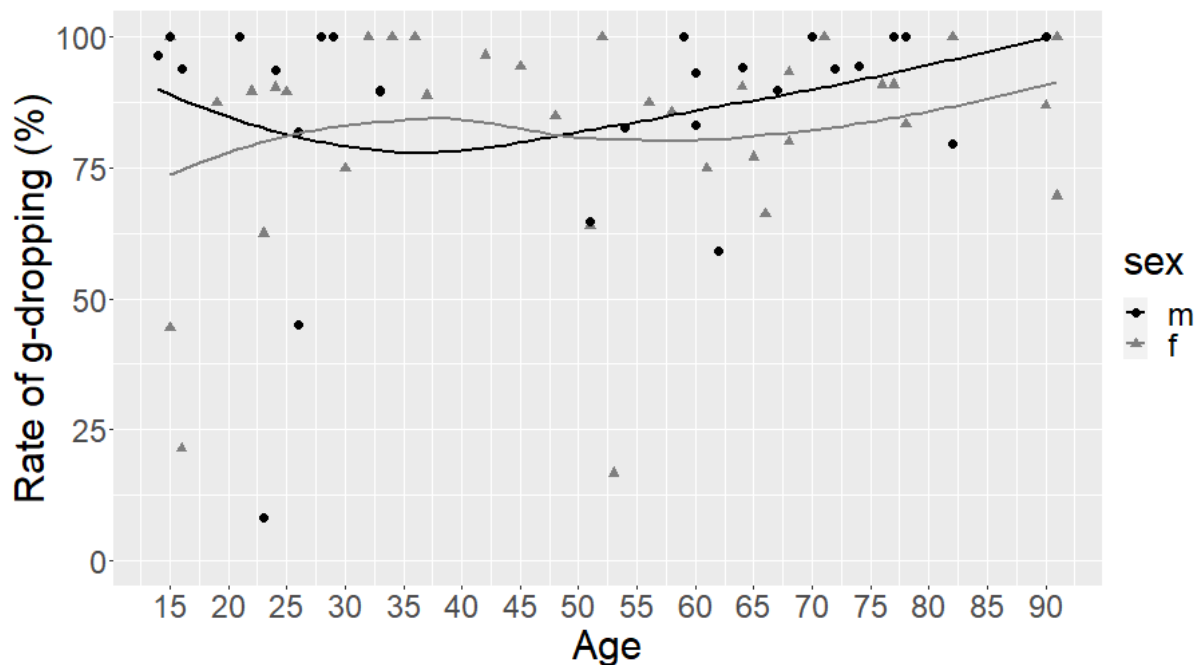


FIGURE 2. Rates of g-dropping for non-*thing* words by age and sex for sixty-three speakers from Debden, Essex. There are no significant sex or age effects in rates of (ING).

As found in previous research, in Debden, (ING) operates differently for *-thing* words compared to non-*thing* words. In Figure 2, for nearly all speakers, the alveolar form was favored across all ages for non-*thing* words. In contrast, the velar variant was favored for

-*thing* words (Figure 3). For -*thing* words, no significant effects were found in the model that compared rates of production of the velar variant and the [-ɲk] variant. However, a significant age effect was found in the comparison between the alveolar form and [-ɲk] form ( $\beta = -0.15$ ,  $z = -2.12$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). Young speakers were more likely to use the alveolar and less likely to use the [-ɲk] form. There were no other significant main effects or interactions.

For the comparison between rates of the alveolar and the velar variants, the velar form was more likely if the following sound was a velar. This concurred with the finding for non-*thing* words. There was also a significant age effect: young speakers were more likely to use the alveolar and less likely to use the velar ( $\beta = -0.07$ ,  $z = 2.77$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There was also a significant effect for carrier word. The word *something* operated differently from the other -*thing* words ( $\beta = -2.89$ ,  $z = -2.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There was also a significant interaction between the production of the word *something* and age ( $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $z = -2$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). An apparent-time decrease in rates of the velar form and an increase in the alveolar form was found for *anything*, *nothing*, and *everything*. This effect was not found for *something* where rates of each variant have remained relatively stable in apparent time. The findings in Debden differ from the research conducted in the United States where *anything* and *everything* categorically favor the velar, while *nothing* and *something*

comparatively favor the alveolar (see Campbell-Kibler, 2006:23; Houston, 1985; Labov, 2001:79).

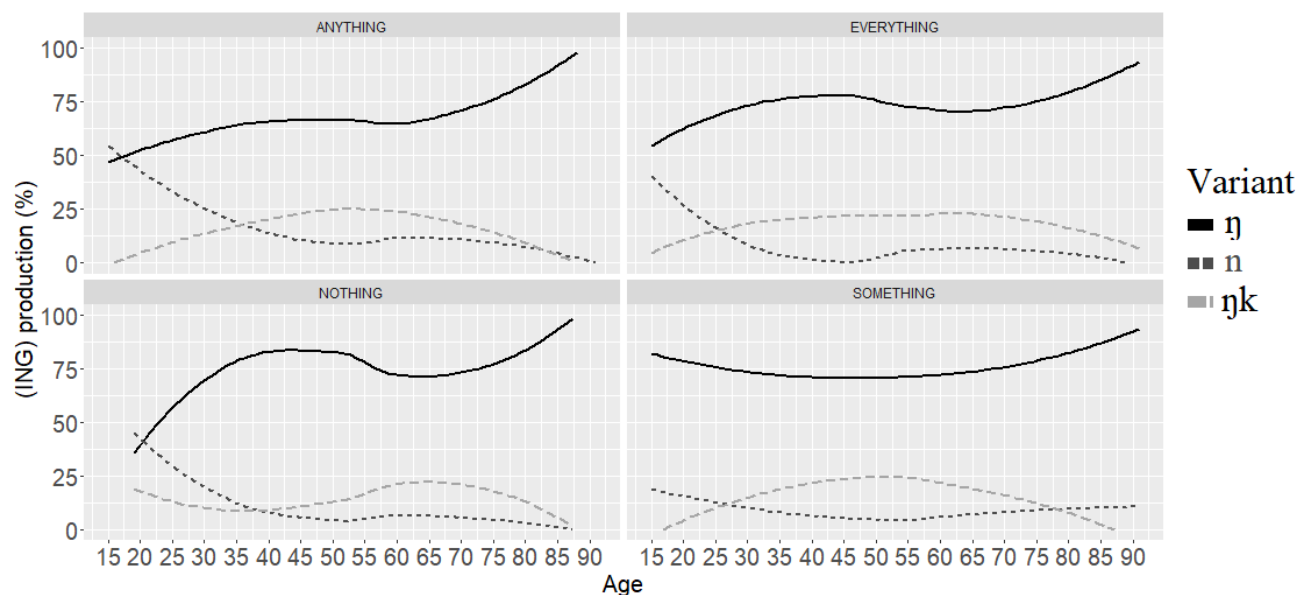


FIGURE 3. Rates of (ING) by age and word for *-thing* words for fifty-nine speakers in Debden, Essex. While the velar variant is most prevalent for all words across all ages, the youngest speakers increasingly favor the alveolar variant.

In summary, (H) is in an advanced process of reinstatement in Debden, which is almost complete in adolescents. Rates of h-dropping are higher in males than females across all ages. For non-*thing* words, the alveolar variant of (ING) is favored by all ages, and there are no significant apparent-time changes or sex differences. For *-thing* words (except for *something*), the velar form is favored by almost all ages and for all words except for the youngest speakers. In comparison to older speakers, young speakers increasingly disfavor

the velar [-ŋ] or the [-ŋk] forms in favor of the alveolar variant. There are no significant differences in the comparison between the standard velar and the [-ŋk] variants.

### **Co-variation and clustering between (H) and (ING)**

Clustering effects between (H) and (ING) within the speech of individual speakers was tested with Mann-Whitney U tests. Speakers were significantly more likely to produce h-dropping in proximity to g-dropping compared to the probability of them producing h-dropping independently of its surrounding environment. Likewise, g-dropping was significantly more likely to occur if h-dropping had occurred in proximity compared to the probability of g-dropping occurring independently. These effects were only significant when (ING) and (H) occurred within two or three phonemes of each other ( $p < 0.05$  for all comparisons) (Figure 4). Nonetheless, although not significant, a tendency for co-occurrence persists across a wider phoneme window.

As demonstrated in Figure 4, the rate of h-dropping when g-dropping occurred within two or three phonemes was greater than 50% and 33% respectively for all speakers. In contrast, when (H) was analyzed independently of surrounding environment, rates of h-dropping were almost null for some participants. Each individual speaker had a higher probability of h-dropping within both two and three phonemes of g-dropping, compared to the probability of that same speaker h-dropping throughout the interview. Similarly, all

speakers were more likely to g-drop in proximity to h-dropping compared to their rates of g-dropping throughout their interviews. On all instances, for all speakers, g-dropping was the resultant variant when (ING) occurred within two or three phonemes of h-dropping. That is, on no instance did any single speaker produce the velar variant of (ING) within either two or three phonemes of h-dropping.<sup>3</sup>

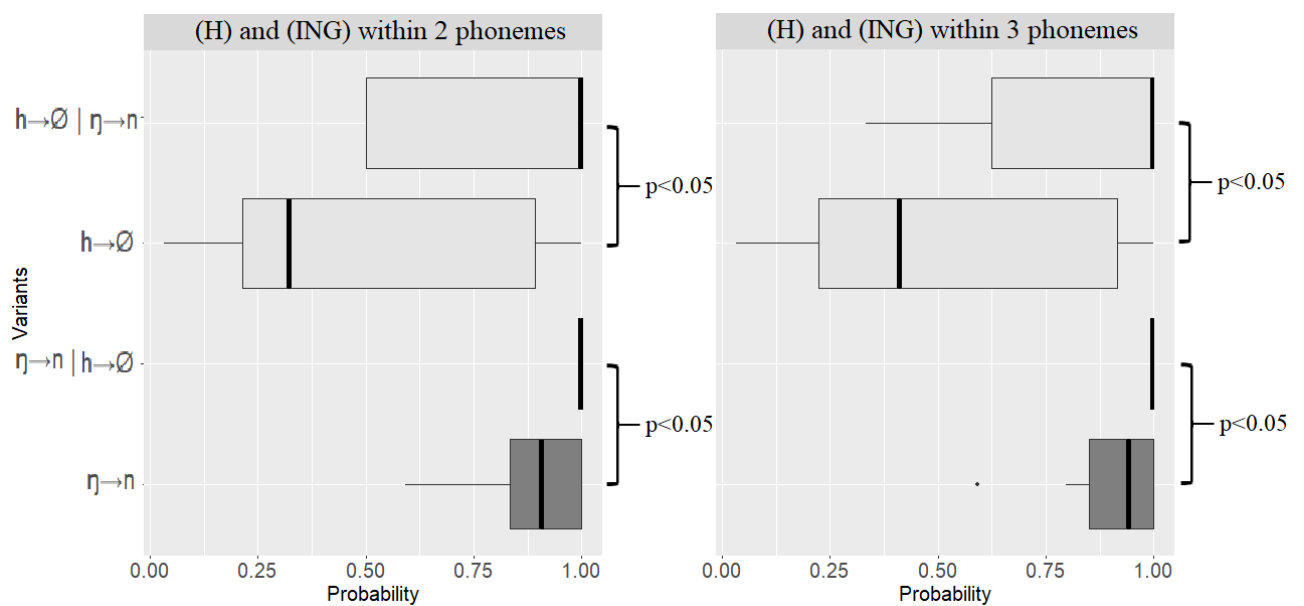


FIGURE 4. In Debden, Essex, speakers are significantly more likely to produce h-dropping within two (left panel) or three (right panel) phonemes of g-dropping compared to the probability of h-dropping occurring independently (and vice-versa). “ $h \rightarrow \emptyset$ ” refers to the probability of h-dropping occurring independently of any surrounding environment. “ $h \rightarrow \emptyset \mid \eta \rightarrow n$ ” refers to the probability of h-dropping occurring given the fact that g-dropping has occurred.

At the between-speaker level, rates of co-variation between (H) and (ING) (for non-*thing* words) were analyzed with a Pearson's correlation test. There was a significant correlation between speakers' rates of (H) and (ING) ( $t(61) = 2.97$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ,  $r = 0.36$ ). While this correlation was significant, it was weakened by an implicational relationship between (H) and (ING) (Figure 5). Speakers who had high rates of h-dropping always had high rates of g-dropping. However, speakers with high rates of g-dropping had variable rates of h-dropping (ranging from 0% to 100%).



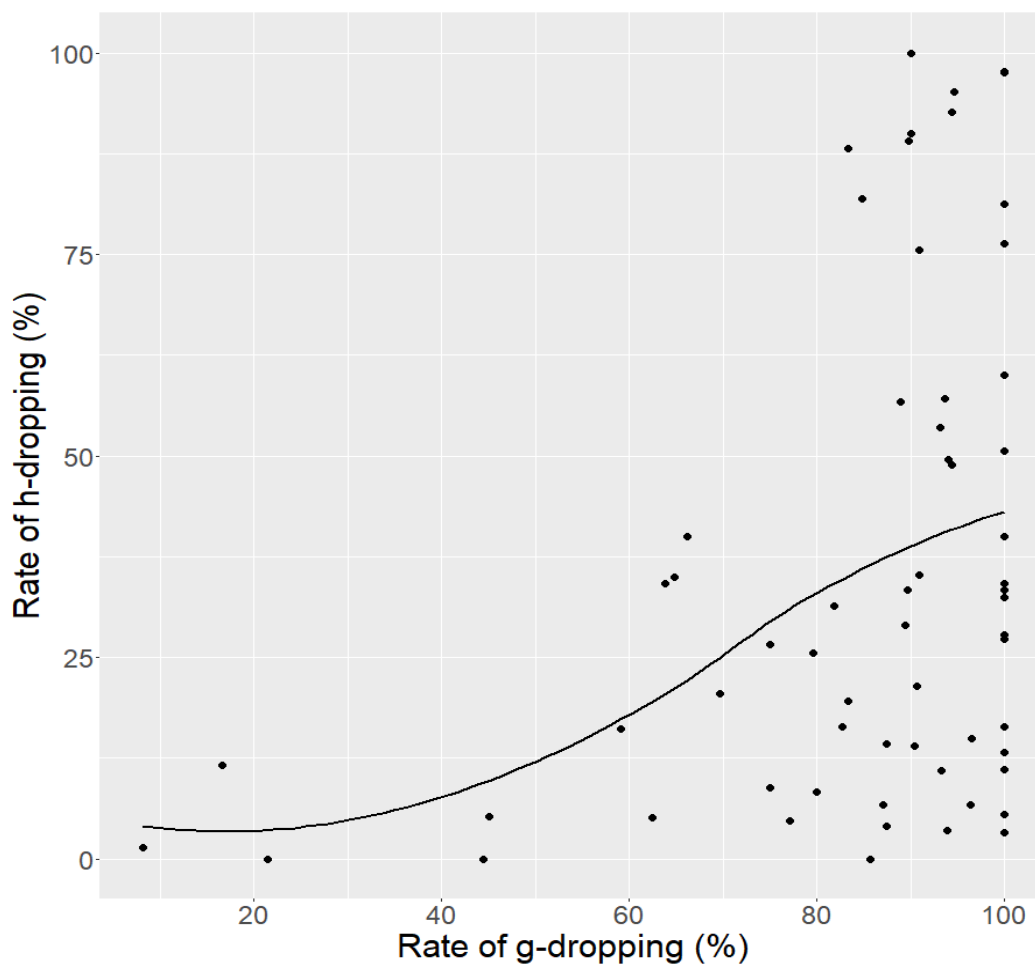


FIGURE 5. There is a weak correlation ( $r = 0.36$ ) between rates of (ING) (for non-*thing* words) and (H) for sixty-three speakers in Debden, Essex. There is an implicational relationship between these features: while h-dropping implies g-dropping, the reverse is not true.

## Discussion

This paper investigated to what extent the differing social meanings held by linguistic features can lead to an implicational relationship between them. Rates of co-variation between (ING) and (H) at the between-speaker level were investigated as well as

clustering effects at the within-speaker level. This paper hypothesized that there would be an implicational relationship between (ING) and (H) as a result of their distinct but overlapping social meanings. That is, I predicated that h-dropping may be contingent on g-dropping as the indexicalities of the former (Cockney heritage) are superordinate to and incorporate the indexicalities of the latter (working-class and “improper”).

This hypothesis was confirmed at both the within-speaker and between-speaker levels. Speakers with high rates of h-dropping necessarily had high rates of g-dropping. In contrast, speakers with high rates of g-dropping had variable rates of h-dropping. This implicational relationship weakened the correlation coefficient between (H) and (ING). That is, it is possible to be a g-dropper who does not h-drop, but it is not possible to be an h-dropper who does not g-drop. To some extent, an implicational relationship between (H) and (ING) was also found within the speech of individual speakers. The probability of h-dropping was greater when (H) occurred within two or three phonemes of g-dropping compared to the probability of h-dropping occurring independently of its surrounding environment. The same effect was found but to a greater extent for (ING). If (ING) occurs in proximity to a dropped /h/, the resultant variant is always g-dropping and never retention. That is, for Debden speakers, it is possible to g-drop in proximity to a retained /h/. However, it is not possible to produce the velar variant of (ING) within two or three phonemes of h-dropping.

The implicational relationship between h-dropping and g-dropping seems to be mediated by the features' different social meaning. In Debden, h-dropping is a locally meaningful dialect feature with indexicalities related to the community's Cockney heritage. In contrast, g-dropping does not carry local interpretations and, more generally, indexes working-class or "improper" speech. The indexicalities of h-dropping encompass and are superordinate to those of g-dropping. In general, a speaker in Debden may wish to index working-class speech more broadly without indexing more specific, local meaning around Cockney. However, a speaker cannot index their Cockney heritage without necessarily also indexing working-class speech. As a result, h-dropping implies g-dropping, but g-dropping can occur independently of h-dropping.

These results support an approach to sociolinguistic style which considers language to be a fluid and symbolic resource to project identity and affiliation. Linguistic features are not independent of each other, and, instead, the social meaning of linguistic features can combine to create a collective social meaning (Campbell-Kibler, 2011; Coupland, 2007; Pharao et al., 2014; Pharao & Maegaard, 2017). It has previously been demonstrated that language features that jointly index a certain style can cluster together in the speech of individual speakers (Podesva, 2008; Sharma & Rampton, 2015). This result was confirmed by this paper: h-dropping and g-dropping did significantly cluster together within the speech of individual speakers. Nonetheless, this paper has expanded on this

research to demonstrate an implicational relationship between linguistic variables as a result of their differing social meanings. That is, clustering effects between the features may not be entirely mutual as a result of the features' differing social meanings.

In general, it seems that young speakers in Debden (most notably those aged  $\leq 35$  yrs) are moving away from features that index Cockney or their East London heritage but have maintained features that have indexicalities more generally around working-class speech. As a result, although for non-*thing* words (ING) is stable with high rates of the non-standard alveolar variant across all speaker groups in Debden, /h/ is in an advanced process of reinstatement. This is in line with the reinstatement of /h/ in the southeastern towns of Milton Keynes and Reading (Williams & Kerswill, 1999:147) as well as in East London (Cheshire et al., 2008:15). Dialects in South East England are typically conceived of as a linguistic continuum that parallels the class continuum from the most vernacular, localized, and working-class dialect, Cockney, to the most standard, supralocal, and higher-class dialect Standard Southern British English (Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Cole, 2021; Hughes et al., 2012; Wells, 1997). Therefore, southeastern working-class speech norms incorporate, to some extent, many features of Cockney. Nonetheless, h-dropping, but not g-dropping, has often been cited as a key feature differentiating Cockney from more general southeastern speech patterns (Wells, 1992). In Debden, then, young speakers are moving away from linguistic features that hold local associations with

Cockney such as h-dropping, and, instead, favor features more broadly indexing southeastern working-class speech such as g-dropping in non-*thing* words.

The results for *-thing* words provide further evidence that working-class speech norms and not Standard Southern British English are the target of linguistic change in Debden (see also the Cockney vowel system: Cole & Evans, 2020). Young speakers are moving away from both the standard velar form and the [-ɪŋk] form in favor of the alveolar form. It initially seems contradictory that young speakers are shifting away from both the most vernacular, Cockney variant [-ɪŋk] and the standard, velar form [-ɪŋ]. Nonetheless, it may not be helpful in this instance to consider the velar variant solely as the standard form. The velar variant was favored among even the oldest speakers in Debden who strongly identify as Cockney, lived in East London into adulthood, and have many traditionally Cockney linguistic features. Perhaps it would be most accurate to consider the velar form as a Cockney variant. It may be that the velar form is, to some extent, a reduced variant of the traditional Cockney [-ɪŋk] form with which it shares the velar component [ɪŋ]. Indeed, no significant apparent-time changes were found between rates of the [-ɪŋk] and the “standard” velar form, suggesting that the forms are not diverging. In Debden, then, young speakers are shifting away from localized, “Cockney” forms toward broader, southeastern, working-class norms. Thus, for *-thing* words, young speakers are shifting toward alveolar variants.

In summary, in Debden, young speakers are moving away from localized linguistic features that index the community's Cockney heritage such as h-dropping and the [-ɪŋk] form (and potentially the velar form) of *-thing* words. In contrast, young speakers have maintained traditional "Cockney" features that represent broader, southeastern, working-class norms, such as the alveolar form of (ING) for non-*thing* words. Furthermore, young speakers are increasingly favoring the nonstandard alveolar form for *-thing* words and not the "standard" velar [-ɪŋ] variant or the most vernacular, traditional Cockney [-ɪŋk] form. The overlapping but distinct social meanings held by h-dropping and g-dropping (for non-*thing* words), has also led to an implicational relationship between the features at both the within-speaker and between-speaker levels. In order for speakers to index more local meaning related to their East London heritage, they must necessarily encompass broader working-class norms. As a result, there is a clustering effect in the speech of individual speakers between h-dropping and g-dropping. Although these results need to be replicated to explore the generalizability of the results, this paper has demonstrated that the differing social meanings held by linguistic features can lead to an implicational relationship between them.

#### NOTES

**1.** For descriptions of the variety of English spoken in Debden and how this relates to language contact or social and historical influences in the community, see Cole and Evans (2020); Cole and Strycharczuk (2019).

2. All names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the participants.
3. Although not within the scope of this paper, future research could investigate to what extent these clustering effects are affected by whether the linguistic variables are found within the same word.

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**Chapter 8.**

Phonetic variation and change in the Cockney Diaspora:  
the role of place, gender and identity.

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## **Abstract**

Recent research has suggested that two linguistic processes are displacing Cockney: the emergence of Multicultural London English (MLE) in inner London and dialect levelling (e.g. Kerswill & Williams 2005). This study investigates firstly whether Cockney phonetic features have ‘moved east’ to Essex (Fox 2015), and secondly the features’ indexicality in relation to place and identity. Fifty-four participants from Debden, an outpost of the Cockney Diaspora, completed a sociolinguistic interview. Vowel measurements were made from a wordlist and passage, and quantitative attitudinal and qualitative data were extracted from a questionnaire and interviews. Overall, changes in identity as a result of social change exceeded linguistic changes, and linguistic labels were not interpreted uniformly across the community. Whilst Cockney variants were largely maintained in young speakers, they were transposed onto an ‘Essex’ accent. Furthermore, some young women but no young men considered themselves Cockney, likely due to the matrifocal nature of Cockney. (Cockney, phonetic variation and change, dialect levelling, identity, indexicality, gender)

## **Introduction**

Much recent work on London English has suggested that two separate linguistic processes have displaced or are in the process of displacing the Cockney vernacular: (i) dialect levelling across South East England and the London peripheries (Williams &

Kerswill 1999; Torgersen & Kerswill 2004; Kerswill & Williams 2005), and (ii) the emergence of Multicultural London English (MLE) in the traditional East End of London which has partially diffused to outer London (Kerswill, Torgersen, & Fox 2008; Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox, & Torgersen 2011; Fox 2015). MLE is characterized by contact between the diverse multidialectal and multilingual communities that now make up the majority of the population in the traditional East End of London (cf. Vertovec 2007), and it has been argued that as a result, what we think of as traditional Cockney will be lost within the next twenty years (Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox 2015).

However, if linguistic features are not just markers of belonging to a particular place, but also reflect social identity and community affiliation (e.g. Eckert 2008; Moore 2010), it is possible that Cockney may continue to be used in some communities. For example, it has been suggested that Cockney has moved east to Essex (Fox 2015), along with the traditional East End communities who relocated in the ‘Cockney Diaspora’ (Watt, Millington, & Huq 2014). However, if we understand that place is symbolic and culturally defined (Johnstone, Andrus, & Danielson 2006; Montgomery & Moore 2017), there may be a disconnect between the phonetic features found in the community and the way they are labelled and categorised. This could mean that communities of East Londoners who now reside in Essex do not identify as Cockney. That is, the Cockney identity may not have moved east with the community. Further, even if Cockney phonetic

features are maintained, young people may not label this variety as ‘Cockney’ as this term is strongly associated with East London (cf. Johnstone et al. 2006; Montgomery & Moore 2017). In this article, we assess firstly, the extent to which Cockney phonetic features have ‘moved east’ (Fox 2015) to the Debden Estate in Essex. Secondly, we investigate the way in which linguistic features are used to index place and identity in relation to Debden’s specific cultural, social, and historical background.

### **Community of interest: The Cockney Diaspora and the Debden Estate**

As well as being the name of a language variety, ‘Cockney’ is also the name given to a group of people. Traditionally, a Cockney is considered to be an individual who was born within the sound of the Bow Bells in Cheapside, the City of London, and lived in London’s traditional East End. However, over the last century, the Cockney Diaspora has seen traditional East London communities relocate to the London peripheries, the home counties, and, in particular, to Essex (see Fox 2015; Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014). No single reason led to the mass relocation of traditional, white, working-class East Londoners into Essex. Instead, the Cockney Diaspora emerged as a result of a wide range of inter-related factors such as the deindustrialisation of the East End and the slum clearance programmes which ran between the 1920s and the 1960s (Watt, Millington & Huq, 2014).

The Greater London Plan was part of a series of successive governmental slum clearance programmes which sought to reduce East London's poverty and overcrowding by constructing purpose-built towns and housing estates outside of London (Abercrombie 1944). As part of the Greater London Plan, in 1949 the construction of the Debden Estate (or Debden) began in the town of Loughton, Essex. By 1953 Debden comprised 4,321 homes (Powell 1956) with an estimated population of 15,000 people, almost all of whom were white, working-class East Londoners (Carter 2006). Debden has remained largely separate from the surrounding area and has separate schools, high streets, stations, markets, and churches from Loughton. Loughton, where Debden is situated, is in the county of Essex, approximately five miles from the London border (see Figure 1).

The town is well connected to central London and is directly connected via the London Underground to London Liverpool Street station in the City of London. Since Debden was constructed, the official geographic delimiters of East London and the neighbouring county of Essex have been reshaped. Traditionally the term 'East End' covered modern-day Tower Hamlets and southern parts of Hackney (Fox 2015). Nonetheless, the London Government Act 1963 saw the areas that now constitute the boroughs of Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Havering, and Barking and Dagenham transferred from Essex to Greater London. Therefore, there has been an expansion of

what could be considered ‘East London’ or the ‘East End’. As shown in Figure 1, although Loughton is officially outside of the jurisdiction of Greater London and is situated in the county of Essex, it borders East London. Debden is geographically as close (if not closer) to the City of London as several outer-London boroughs, for example, Havering, where some MLE features have been found in young speakers (Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill, & Torgersen 2008; Cheshire et al. 2011; Kerswill, Torgersen, & Fox 2008; Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox, & Torgersen 2008).



Figure 1. Map of Greater London showing the London boroughs and the position of Loughton, where Debden is situated. Whilst Loughton is officially under the jurisdiction of Essex, it is five miles from the Greater London border and is as geographically as close to central London as some outer-London boroughs such as Havering.

### **The linguistic context: Language variation and change in the vowel system in South East England and London**

On a linguistic level, the Cockney vernacular has been described as both innovative and highly stigmatised (e.g. Wells 1982); Wells considered it to be ‘overtly despised, but covertly imitated’ (Wells 1994:205). Although Cockney has been traditionally associated

with East London (Sivertsen 1960; Wells 1982), in modern times, Cockney variants are not typically found among young speakers in East London (Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox, & Torgersen 2008; Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox 2015). Over the past century, the traditional East End, the area with which Cockney is primarily associated, has undergone a vast transformation. Though the East End has always been a centre for immigration, modern-day East London has become increasingly ethnically, culturally, and linguistically heterogeneous (Kerswill, Torgersen, & Fox 2008; Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox 2015). For instance, the largest ethnic group in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is Bangladeshi, representing 32% of the population, followed by White British who constitute 31% of the population (Office for National Statistics 2016). High rates of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity have led to the emergence of MLE in the inner-city East London boroughs of Tower Hamlets (Fox 2015) and Hackney, and to a lesser extent, in Havering, an outer-London borough, previously part of Essex (Cheshire et al. 2011; Kerswill, Torgersen, & Fox 2008).

The emergence of MLE is reflected in several apparent-time changes which have been found in the vowel systems in both Tower Hamlets and Hackney, and to a lesser extent, in Havering. The FOOT vowel is fronting/centralising in East London to [ʊ] and the TRAP vowel is centralising to [ɜ̜]. This differs from the traditional TRAP Cockney variants [ɛ] ~ [æ] which are found in older speakers (Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox, & Torgersen 2008;

Fox 2015). The STRUT vowel is backing and raising (Kerswill, Cheshire, Fox, & Torgersen 2008), in contrast with the traditional Cockney STRUT vowel which is fronted and occurs in the region of [ɐ] to [a] (Wells 1982). Although a traditional Cockney GOOSE vowel, [u:], is reported to be slightly more fronted than in Standard Southern British English (SSBE) (Wells 1982), extreme fronting is found amongst younger, non-Anglo speakers in Hackney (Kerswill, Torgersen et al. 2008). However, as FOOT and GOOSE are fronting in many varieties of English in South East England, including RP (e.g. GOOSE: see Harrington, Kleber, & Reubold 2008; FOOT: see Fabricius 2007) this arguably should not be considered an MLE feature.

Still larger differences have been found in the diphthong system in East London, in particular for the MOUTH and PRICE vowels. One of the defining phonetic features of Cockney is a diphthong shift, whereby the /ʊ/-diphthongs are rotated clockwise and the /ɪ/-diphthongs show an anti-clockwise movement (Wells 1982; Labov 1994). Thus, the Cockney MOUTH vowel is fronted whilst the PRICE vowel has a backed and raised onset (Wells 1982). The traditional Cockney PRICE vowel is considered to range from a diphthong with a fully backed and raised onset, [ɔɪ], to one with a lowered onset [ɑɪ], and can also be produced as a monophthong, [ɑ:], in broad Cockney (Sivertsen 1960; Wells 1982). Cockney MOUTH is described as ranging from a monophthong [æ:] to a closing-backing diphthong [æʊ], with a 'true Cockney' producing the former (Wells 1982:309).



However, in Hackney, and to a lesser extent, in Havering, the diphthong shift has been reversed (Cheshire et al. 2011). Both PRICE and MOUTH are lowering and centralising. PRICE is produced using the narrow diphthongs [aɪ] or [ɛɪ], or even monophthongal [æ], instead of traditional [aɪ], and the MOUTH vowel is now typically a lowered, mid-front monophthong or an innovative back diphthong [aʊ] (Kerswill, Torgersen, & Fox 2008; Fox 2015).

Given Debden's geographic proximity to East London, one possibility is that like younger speakers in Havering, younger speakers in Debden will also use MLE features. Another possibility, however, is that the variety in Debden will show evidence of dialect levelling, that is, a reduction of local variants and adoption of supra-regional variants as has been found in other towns in the southeast of England, such as Milton Keynes and Reading (Williams & Kerswill 1999; Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005). Milton Keynes is a new-build town that was constructed in the 1960s to ease the overpopulation of London. Around 75% of those who lived in Milton Keynes had moved there from other areas in the South East, including London. This led to the emergence of a 'new town koine' as a result of dialect levelling (Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005). In this variety, whilst older speakers have a traditional Cockney PRICE vowel, young speakers use [aɪ] which is intermediate between SSBE [aɪ] and broad London [ɑ:]. The MOUTH vowel most closely

resembles SSBE [aʊ] in young speakers, whilst Cockney variants are found in older speakers (Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005).

Like Milton Keynes, Debden is a new town (or new estate, in this case) and is on the Greater London periphery. On this basis, we might predict that we may also find evidence of levelling in younger speakers in Debden. However, Debden differs from Milton Keynes in several ways. Firstly, the changes found in Milton Keynes have been linked to limited close-knit social networks in the community (Torgersen & Kerswill 2004). If a strong sense of community and close-knit networks are found in Debden, this may inhibit change towards SSBE features. Secondly, unlike Milton Keynes, Debden was originally populated almost entirely by one social group; white, working-class East Londoners. These factors may instead promote retention of traditional Cockney features, particularly given the social meaning that may be attached to features in terms of place and identity.

### **Place, identity, and indexicality in language change**

Language is a complex, symbolic resource which speakers use to communicate referential information and to signal and negotiate social meaning (Eckert 2008).

*Indexicality* refers to the ideological relationship between linguistic features and a social group, persona, characteristic, or place that they signal (see Silverstein 2003; Johnstone et al. 2006; Eckert 2008; Montgomery & Moore 2017). In this article we investigate,

through both a quantitative and qualitative analysis, the indexicality of phonetic features in Debden in terms of their ideological association with place and identity.

Whilst it is possible that young people in Debden have maintained Cockney phonetic features, they may not identify themselves or their way of speaking as 'Cockney'. As previously mentioned, a Cockney is considered to be a person who was born within the Bow Bells and lives in East London. Most people aged under seventy years in Debden do not fulfil either of these characteristics and therefore, may not identify themselves or their accent as 'Cockney'. Nonetheless, if we consider 'Cockney' to be a sociocultural identity, it may be possible for young people in Debden to inherit a Cockney identity through their families and the local community. As Moore & Montgomery explain, place is 'symbolic, socially constructed, and culturally defined, as much as it is physically delimited' (2017:5). Therefore, although Debden is in Essex, it may be possible that all generations in Debden identify with Cockney and East London due to their Cockney heritage and culture.

The continuation of Cockney culture to Debden may have facilitated both the maintenance of Cockney features and speakers' ideological identification with 'Cockney'. For instance, Debden Broadway houses Kelly's Pie and Mash shop which was originally opened in 1915 in Bethnal Green, East London. The shop serves food which has long been served in East London and is associated with this area, such as

jellied eels, pie, mash, and liquor. This is in stark opposition to East London where many established food outlets like this have closed. For instance, Tubby Isaacs, a jellied eel stall in Aldgate, closed in 2013 after ninety-four years. Similarly, in 2019, Cooke's Pie and Mash shop announced that they would close in Hackney after over 100 years. Further, in the 1950s, the performing arts group, the Loughton Players, was established in Debden. This group became popular in the community and mainly performed Music Hall songs which are strongly associated with Cockney music and dance (e.g. the Cockney 'knees up'). Indeed, it has been argued that Essex could now be considered a more authentic example of traditional Cockney culture than East London (Watt et al. 2014). This may also have supported maintenance of a close-knit, relatively homogeneous community which, in turn, may mean that Cockney features continue to be used (cf. koineization towards the standard in Milton Keynes, see Williams & Kerswill 1999; Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005). This may mean that young people in Debden identify with 'Cockney' both socially and linguistically, despite being born and raised in Essex.

Another possibility though is that speakers will identify with Essex and not East London. We know that official county borders are important determiners in linguistic production. For instance, Llamas (2007) found that in Middlesbrough, linguistic features changed through generations depending on whether the town was officially considered

its own unitary authority or part of the counties Yorkshire, Teeside, or Cleveland.

Speakers orientated their speech towards the linguistic features of the county in which the town was situated at any given time. Similarly, we may also expect speakers to label their linguistic features in terms of the county where they live. That is, if they are from Essex, they may identify their phonetic features as ‘Essex’ to ideologically index their origins. In this way, then, Debden may differ from Havering. Although geographically, Debden is as close, if not closer, to inner-East London than Havering, since 1964 Debden has fallen under the jurisdiction of Essex whilst Havering is part of Greater London. Therefore, those in Debden may ideologically orientate towards ‘Essex’ linguistic features and identify their accent as ‘Essex’, rather than identifying with London and MLE features.

However, what constitutes an Essex accent is complex and there may be generational differences in how this term is interpreted and used. In the *Survey of English dialects*, much of Essex shared linguistic similarities with Suffolk and Norfolk rather than London (Orton 1962). More recently, though, Trudgill has argued that only north-eastern Essex forms part of East Anglian English (Trudgill 2008). Therefore, whilst we may expect older participants to associate an Essex accent with typically East Anglian features, younger speakers are likely to hold different associations. In modern times, an Essex accent may be more readily associated with the way of speaking in the

docusoap *The only way is Essex* (on ITV; see <https://www.itv.com/hub/the-only-way-is-essex/1a9310>) which is mostly filmed in Southwest Essex (e.g. Brentwood and Loughton). The show follows the lives and relationships of young people living in Southwest Essex who speak a variety more linguistically similar to Cockney than East Anglian (see Levon & Holmes-Elliott 2013). It may be then that for young people, as a result of the importation of Cockney culture to Essex (Watt et al. 2014), Cockney linguistic features and even culture may be re-interpreted as Essex accent features. This means that young speakers in Debden may have maintained Cockney phonetic features, but that they may associate these with an Essex accent.

Gender may also affect how speakers label their accent. Cockney culture has long been considered matrifocal, characterised by dense social networks of female friends and relatives. Young & Willmott (1957) highlight the negative impact that relocating from East London to Debden had on families and, in particular, the wellbeing and happiness of women in Debden. They describe the traditional East End as a place where women are the centre of the community, people live near their female relatives, generations of women raise children together, and families pop in and out of each other's houses throughout each day (Young & Willmott 1957). Although some have criticised the validity of Young & Willmott's claims (e.g. Clapson 1999; Lawrence 2016), in recent times Cohen (2013) replicated their findings in the Isle of Dogs, East London.

He found that Cockney culture was matrifocal and that a Cockney identity was matrilinear. That is, although young women still identified as Cockney, the erosion of job succession from father to son in dock workers meant young men no longer felt a strong sense of Cockney identity. Similarly, young women in Debden, particularly those who have a close-knit network of female friends and relatives, may maintain a Cockney identity and be more likely to identify their accent as Cockney than young men.

### **This study**

This study investigates phonetic variation and change in the vowel system in relation to place and identity in Debden. Male and female participants in four age groups—14–27yrs, 28–55yrs, 56–69yrs, and 70+yrs—were recorded completing a sociolinguistic interview in which they read out a wordlist, a short passage, and were interviewed about their attitudes towards their accent and identity. We aim to explore (i) the extent to which the Cockney vowel system has been maintained in the context of ongoing linguistic changes in the South East, evaluating to what extent the English spoken in Debden can be described as ‘Cockney moved east’ (Fox 2015), and (ii) how the variety/varieties of English spoken in Debden are labelled by speakers and how this relates to the community’s sense of place and identity.

## Methods

### Participants

Twenty-four male subjects aged 14–90yrs ( $M = 46$ yrs,  $SD = 23.5$ ) and thirty female subjects aged 15–91yrs ( $M = 49.9$ yrs,  $SD = 24.9$ ) were tested, giving four age groups: 14–27yrs ( $n = 18$ , female = 9), 28–55yrs ( $n = 13$ , female = 8), 56–69yrs ( $n = 12$ , female = 7) and 70+yrs ( $n = 11$ , female = 6).

All participants were either from East London, or their parents or grandparents were. All participants aged seventy years or over were born in East London, whilst all participants aged thirty-two years and younger were born in Debden. This was with the exception of one participant whose parents were from Debden, had moved to another part of the UK, but returned when the participant was aged four years. We did not overtly seek to match participants on educational levels. However, of the participants recruited, very few held A levels (qualifications typically taken by school students aged eighteen years) or higher. Of the youngest age group, most had completed GCSEs (qualifications taken at age sixteen years) or BTEC (vocational and work-related courses). One participant was currently studying for a degree, and all those aged less than nineteen years were still in school. No participants in the 28–55yrs age group held qualifications higher than GCSEs with the exception of two participants who held vocational qualifications. All participants over fifty-five years had left school aged 13–



15yrs except for two participants who had completed O-levels (a qualification predating GCSEs that was also taken at age sixteen years), one participant who had completed a BA degree in her seventies, and two participants who had completed Higher National Certificates in engineering (a UK higher education qualification).

All except two participants were living in Debden at the time of the study. One (forty-five years old, male) had moved at age twelve from East London to a neighbouring town. However, his parents owned a business in Debden where he spent a lot of time and where he worked from age twenty-five. A final participant (twenty-four years old, female), had lived in Debden until the age of nineteen before moving to a nearby estate where she was offered council housing.

All participants were white, monolingual English speakers and none reported significant hearing problems or a history of speech or language difficulties. All participants originated from working-class, London families as ascertained from employment and educational attainment data.

### **Stimuli and apparatus**

Prior to the interview, the participants completed a background questionnaire to elicit basic demographic information as well as an identity questionnaire (Llamas 2007) to elicit information about their attitudes towards their language and identity. For each question, participants responded using a seven-item Likert scale, ranging from strongly

disagree to strongly agree. The questions considered in this study asked participants to rank whether they believed they spoke with (i) an Essex accent, (ii) an East London accent, (iii) a Cockney accent, and whether they (iv) considered themselves Cockney.

All participants completed a sociolinguistic interview (Labov 1966) to elicit speech in a range of different speech styles: a wordlist, a phonetically balanced passage and then an open interview about a wide range of factors including their lives and their experiences of Debden/East London.

The wordlist consisted of /b/-V-/t/ and /b/-V-/d/ words as well as /h/-V-/d/ words covering the majority of the English vowel space. As high frequency words and transparent spelling were important in ensuring that all participants' ability could read the words fluently, we also included some high frequency words which did not fit the /h/-V-/d/ or /b/-V-/d/ format, for example, *mouth*, *toad*, *boy*. A total of fifty words were included, and all participants read each word twice. The reading passage was an adaptation of *Chicken Little* (Shaw, Best, Docherty, Evans, Foulkes, Hay, & Mulak 2018). Of particular interest were the words containing the MOUTH, PRICE, TRAP, STRUT, GOOSE, and FOOT vowels as these show the largest observed changes in modern-day East London speech (e.g. Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox 2015). All recordings were made directly onto a laptop computer with a sampling rate of 44.1 kHz, 16-bit resolution using an MXL Studio 1 USB microphone.

## Procedure

Each subject started by producing the reading passage. They were given time to read the passage through to themselves before making their recording and were asked to repeat sentences with any errors or hesitations. They then recorded the wordlist. They recorded two repetitions of each target word in a randomised order. The words and the passage were presented on PowerPoint on an electronic tablet which the participants controlled themselves. The speakers were instructed to read the words and the passage as if they were talking to a friend or family member. They then completed the interview. All interviews were conducted in 2017 by the primary author, a white, English-speaking female from Debden with heritage in working-class, East London families. Individuals are known to alter the way they speak as a function of their interlocutor (Bell 1984), and so participants were recruited using the friend-of-a-friend approach as it was believed that the researcher's relationship with the subjects would encourage them to speak in a way that they would when communicating with those living in the local area (Milroy 1987). This was of particular importance in the Debden community; nearly all of the participants enquired as to her place of heritage and several referred to her as 'one of us' and were thus happy to share their experiences. This method was used with the exception of those between fourteen and sixteen years old who were recruited through their school and took part in the interview in a classroom setting.

The interview was designed to follow up on a questionnaire which participants had filled in beforehand, and which also solicited basic demographic information. Over forty hours of interview data was collected from the fifty-four participants. The interviews were conducted in the model of linguistic ethnography whereby they were semistructured, and no set questions were asked to all participants, but instead several themes were discussed such that topics that arose naturally were free to be pursued (Copland & Creese 2015). Of these interviews, most were completed on a one-to-one basis. Seven interviews were conducted in groups. The participants aged fourteen to sixteen years were interviewed in two separate groups of three. Two interviews consisted of a husband and wife; one interview included a husband, wife, and her father; and another two elderly sisters. Two other interviews included groups of friends: one included two female friends and, in the other, five elderly women were interviewed together. The results of the interview with the five elderly women was not included as three of the women later agreed to take part in a one-to-one interview with the author and the results of these three interviews were then included in this study.

The majority of recordings took place in a quiet room in the primary author's parents' or participants' homes. Where this was not possible, participants were recorded in a public place, for example, their workplace, in as quiet an environment as possible. As previously mentioned, those aged fourteen to sixteen years were interviewed in

classrooms in their school. The participants were seated at a table or on a sofa with the microphone placed on a table in front of them.

## **Analysis**

### **Acoustic analysis.**

All acoustic measurements were taken from the vowels produced in both the wordlist and the passage. The wordlist and passage productions were each transcribed in ELAN before time-aligned text-grids were produced for each audio file with FAVE align. The text-grids were manually checked and any errors hand corrected. The F1 and F2 measurements at 20%, 35%, 50%, 65%, and 80% were then extracted and normalised according to the Lobanov method within each speaker with FAVE Extract (Rosenfelder, Fruehwald, Evanini, Seyfarth, Gorman, Prichard, & Yuan 2014). For monophthongs, the F1 and F2 values were analysed at 50%, and for the diphthongs, F1 and F2 measurements were taken at 20% (onset) and 80% (offset). For the wordlist, acoustic measurements from both repetitions of each word were included in the analysis. For the passage, acoustic measurements from all vowels in primary stressed syllables were analysed. As FAVE align is based on American English, adjustments were made to some transcriptions to fit SSBE pronunciations. For instance, SSBE is not rhotic, has a TRAP-BATH split, and unlike standard US English, both the LOT and CLOTH vowels correspond to [ɒ] in SSBE. High frequency and function words such as prepositions and pronouns were

not included as they are more likely to be reduced. A total of 316 different words were analysed from the passage and the wordlist combined.

Vowel productions were excluded from the analysis if FAVE extract could not produce formant readings of F1 and F2 at any measurement point, for instance, if FAVE had not been able to accurately track formants. Outliers for each vowel—defined as any data points more than 1.5 interquartile ranges (IQRs) below the first quartile or above the third quartile—were also excluded as these were likely formant tracking errors. A total of 13,506 vowel productions were analysed across fifty-four speakers from 316 different words.

Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) analyses were run to assess potential changes in F1 and F2. For all statistical analyses,  $\alpha$  was set at 0.05. The independent variables in the linear regression analyses were age (categorical: four age groups) and gender, as well as the interaction between these two variables. The Likert-scale, identity data were also included as independent variables in order to examine whether, when holding age and gender constant, there was a relationship between phonetic production and identifying with Essex, East London, or Cockney accents. The model also controlled for the surrounding phonological environment; manner, place, and voicing of both the preceding and following sounds were included in the analyses.

The dependent variable for each analysis was the individual F1 or F2 values. For the diphthongs, individual MLR analyses were run to consider both the onset and glide elements of each vowel. The reference level for gender was ‘female’ as this constituted the largest group and was thus most likely the most accurate estimate of an effect ( $n = 30$ , 55.5% of data). The reference level for age was the 14–27yrs group ( $n = 18$ , 33.3% of data) as the far end of the scale (i.e. youngest age group), which is the most obvious point of comparison for analysing language change in apparent time. Vowel plots were produced in R (R Core Team 2018) with the phonR package (McCloy 2016).

### **Attitude and identity.**

Kruskal Wallis tests investigated potential effects of age and gender on the four attitude and identity questions which asked participants to rate on a Likert scale whether or not they (i) considered themselves to be Cockney, (ii) believed they spoke with an Essex accent, (iii) believed they spoke with an East London accent, or (iv) believed they spoke with a Cockney accent. The Likert scale data was coded as the dependent variable in each of the analyses. Age and gender effects were investigated separately; individual tests investigated age effects within each gender, and gender effects were investigated separately within each age group.

### **Qualitative analysis.**

All interviews were transcribed using ELAN (Version 5.4; Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics 2019). Interviews were transcribed in full or up to the first fifty minutes, whichever came first, and points that mentioned a theme relevant for this article—for example, a participant's (or the community's) sense of linguistic or social identity in relation to Cockney, East London, or Essex were coded. These sections were then extracted and transcripts were produced. These abridged transcripts were then grouped by gender and age group. Following this, for each age group and gender, we extracted the general theme that most frequently emerged in the interview. We present the written transcriptions that most clearly capture the key themes that were extracted.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative vowel analysis**

#### **Monophthongs**

Figure 2 displays the average F1 and F2 values of the monophthongs produced by each age group. Whilst there is a great deal of stability in the vowel space, there are also some differences, in particular, in the production of GOOSE, FOOT, STRUT, and TRAP. MLR analyses confirmed that the GOOSE ( $F(21,280) = 6.73$ ) and FOOT ( $F(18,94) = 3.889$ ) vowels were significantly more fronted in the 14–27yrs age group compared to all those aged more than twenty-seven years and more than fifty-five years respectively ( $p < 0.05$  for



all comparisons). The youngest age group were also found to have a significantly lower FOOT vowel than the 28–55yrs age group ( $F(18,94) = 3.24, p = 0.026$ ). However, the effect size was very small and there was no significant difference when compared to any other age group (see Figure 2).

The TRAP vowel was firstly, lowered ( $F(26,316) = 3.757$ ) in the 14–27yrs age group compared to the 56–69yrs ( $p = 0.001$ ) and 70+yrs groups ( $p = 0.011$ ) and secondly, more backed ( $F(26,316) = 6.59$ ) compared to all other groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). The STRUT vowel was significantly raised ( $F(33,775) = 6.958$ ) in the 14–27yrs age group compared to all other groups and significantly backed compared to the two oldest groups ( $F(33,775) = 17.72, p < 0.01$  for all comparisons).

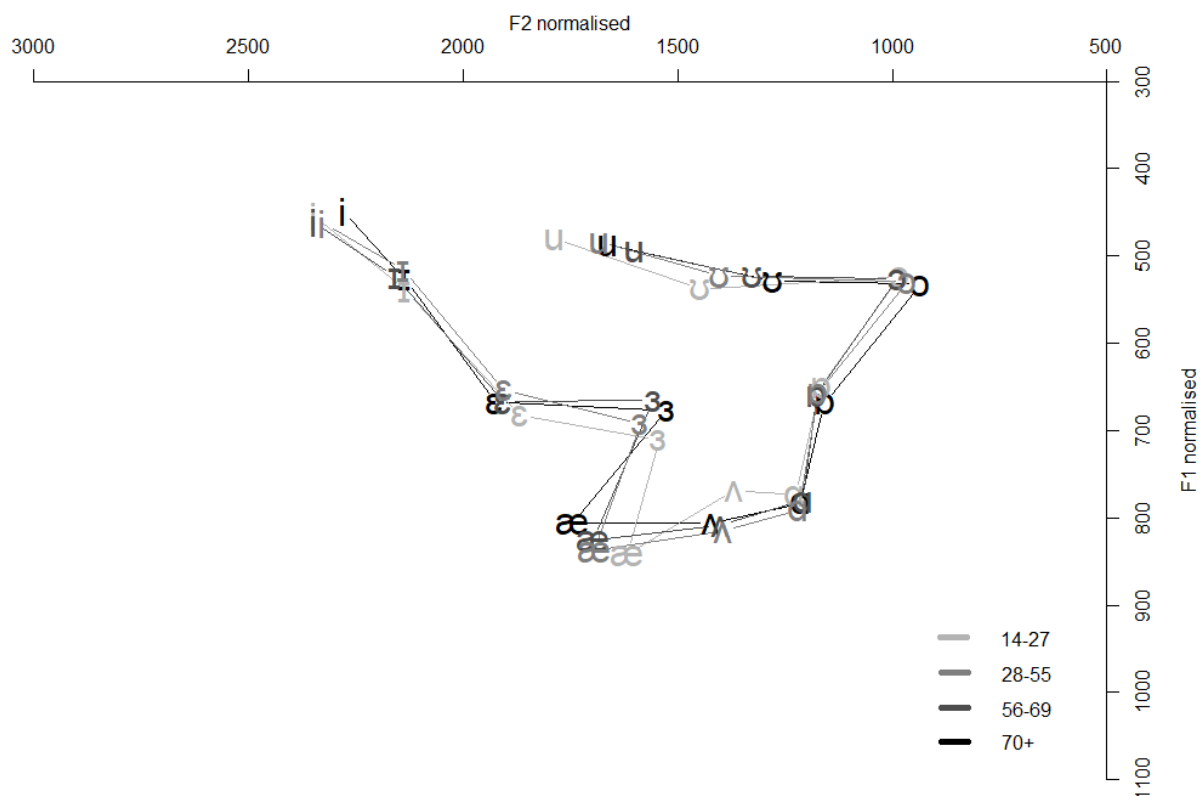


Figure 2. F1–F2 formant frequency plots of participants’ productions of monophthongs, averaged across age groups. There is some evidence of change away from traditional Cockney vowels, for example, the backing of TRAP and the raising of the STRUT vowel.

There was also a small but significant difference in the NURSE vowel which was lower in the 14–27yrs age group compared to the 56–69yrs age group ( $F(22,294) = 4.848, p < 0.001$ ). It was also significantly more backed in the 14–27yrs group compared to the 28–55yrs group ( $F(22,294) = 11.48, p < 0.001$ ). However, it was further front than in the 70+yrs group suggesting that there is no systematic, linear change in apparent time. The LOT vowel was significantly more fronted in the youngest age group when compared to the 70+yrs group ( $F(21,186) = 7.09, p = 0.02$ ) but once again the effect size was small.

The DRESS vowel was significantly backed in the youngest age group ( $F(34,791) = 9.924$ ) compared to the 56–69yrs and 70+yrs age groups ( $p < 0.001$  for both). The THOUGHT vowel was also significantly fronted in the youngest age group compared to the 70+yrs group ( $F(32,550) = 9.667, p < 0.001$ ).

There were few significant differences in production according to gender, and these were relatively small (see Figure 3). The TRAP vowel was more front ( $F(5,31) = 4.453, p = 0.042$ ) and raised in men compared to women ( $F(26,316) = 3.76, p < 0.01$ ). The THOUGHT ( $F(32,550) = 9.67, p < 0.001$ ), KIT ( $F(32,489) = 8.13, p = 0.002$ ) and LOT ( $F(21,186) = 7.09, p = 0.002$ ) vowels were all backed in men.

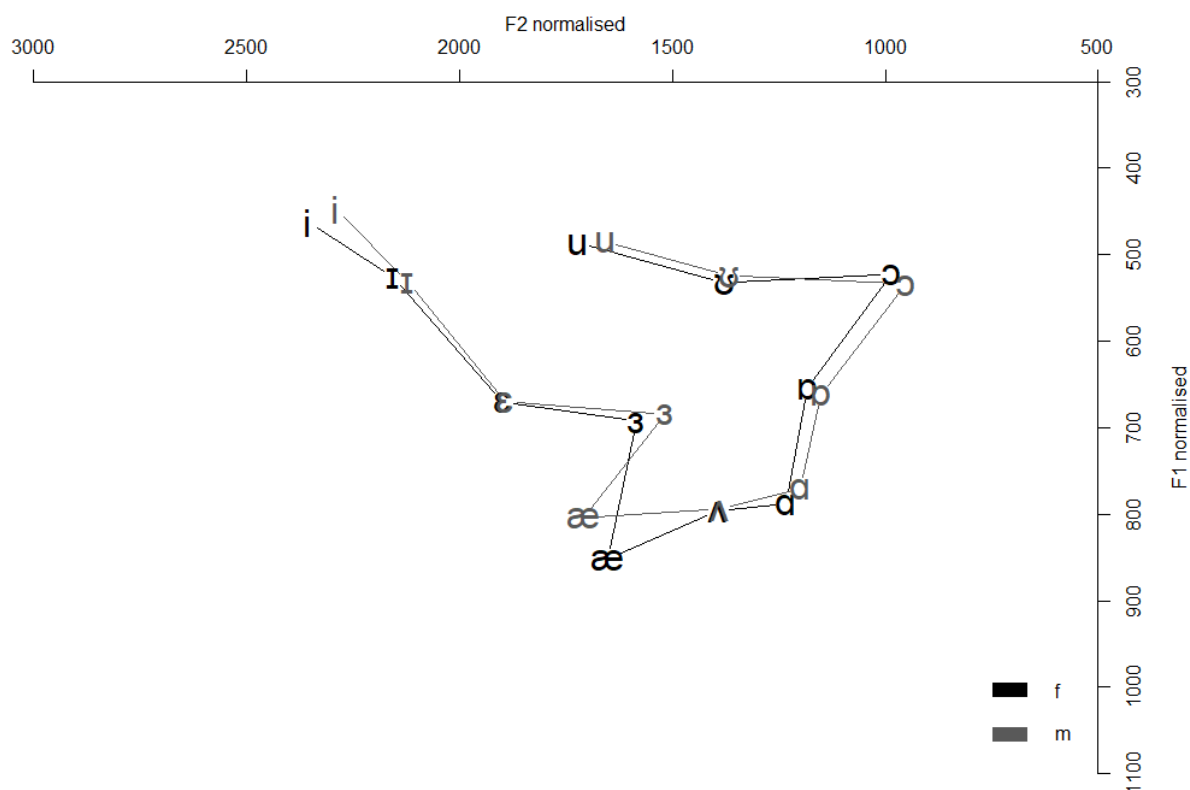


Figure 3. F1-F2 formant frequency plots of participants' productions of monophthongs, averaged by gender (f = female, m = male). The most notable difference is the lowered and backed TRAP vowel in women, though this is raised in both male and female speakers.

There were several significant interactions between age and gender. For the THOUGHT vowel, there were no gender differences in the 70+yrs age group but the vowel was lower in men for other age groups. The START vowel was lower in males than females in the 28–55yrs age group but this effect was not found for other age groups ( $F(25,166) = 1.716, p = 0.0379$ ). Similarly, contrary to other age groups, the STRUT vowel

was lower in men than women in the 56–69yrs group ( $F(33,775) = 6.958, p < 0.001$ ), the DRESS vowel was higher for men in the 56–69yrs age group compared to other groups ( $F(34,791) = 8.24, p < 0.001$ ) and more backed in the 70+yrs men ( $F(32,55) = 5.55, p = 0.0015$ ). The THOUGHT vowel was backed in men compared to women in the 14–27yrs age group ( $F(32,550) = 9.67, p < 0.001$ ), and the LOT vowel was more fronted for men in the 28–55yrs age group ( $F(21,186) = 7.091, p < 0.001$ ), but not in any other group. The above differences did not seem to represent any systematic interactions between gender and age, but instead, individual groups patterned in various different ways for individual vowels.

There were some significant effects of identity on phonetic production. A lowered DRESS vowel was significantly more likely in those who did not think they had an East London accent ( $p = 0.045$ ) and did not identify as Cockney ( $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, those with a lowered NURSE vowel and a backed STRUT vowel were less likely to identify as a Cockney ( $p = 0.0026$  and  $p = 0.004$  respectively). A raised FOOT vowel was significantly associated with not identifying with an East London accent ( $p = 0.003$ ). In contrast, a fronted THOUGHT vowel was significantly more likely in those who thought they had an East London accent but was less likely in those who thought they had a Cockney accent ( $p < 0.001$  and  $p = 0.007$  respectively). Finally, a more fronted GOOSE vowel was less likely in those who felt they had an East London accent ( $p = 0.006$ ).

In general, the features that were found in the youngest age group in Debden (lowered NURSE vowel, backed STRUT vowel, fronted THOUGHT vowel, fronted GOOSE vowel) were also found in those who least associated themselves with a Cockney accent and identity and, to a lesser extent, an East London accent. Nonetheless, there were no significant effects between vowel production and considering one's accent to be an Essex one. This suggests that for both older and younger speakers, perceiving oneself to have an Essex accent is not related to the way in which vowels are produced, whilst traditional Cockney phonetic features are indeed associated with having a 'Cockney' accent.

### **Diphthongs**

Figures 4 and 5 display the average F1–F2 values for each age group and gender respectively. The PRICE onset was significantly lower in the two oldest age groups compared to the 14–27yrs group ( $F(23,299) = 7.1, p = 0.029, p < 0.001$  respectively for 56–69yrs and 70+yrs). A lower onset was also significantly associated with a lower likelihood of identifying with either an Essex accent ( $p = 0.024$ ) or an East London accent ( $p = 0.001$ ), as well as with a lower likelihood of identifying as Cockney ( $p = 0.006$ ). The PRICE offset was raised in the 56–69yrs group compared to the 14–27yrs group ( $F(23,299) = 4.76, p = 0.029$ ), but there was no significant difference between the youngest and the oldest group suggesting that this is not indicative of a change in

progress. When holding age constant, those with a fronted PRICE onset were less likely to consider they had a Cockney accent ( $p = 0.002$ ) or an Essex accent ( $p = 0.006$ ) but more likely to consider themselves Cockney ( $p = 0.003$ ). However, no change was found along the F2 dimension for this vowel in apparent time.

The MOUTH onset was significantly lower and the offset was significantly higher in the 14–27yrs group but only when compared to the 28–55yrs group ( $F(24,381) = 7.08$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ;  $F(24,381) = 3.096$ ,  $p = 0.021$  respectively). However, compared to all other age groups, the MOUTH onset was significant backed in the 14–27yrs group ( $F(24,381) = 9.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for all groups). The offset was significantly fronted in the 14–27yrs group compared to the 56–69yrs group ( $F(24,381) = 5.341$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) but not when compared to the oldest group.

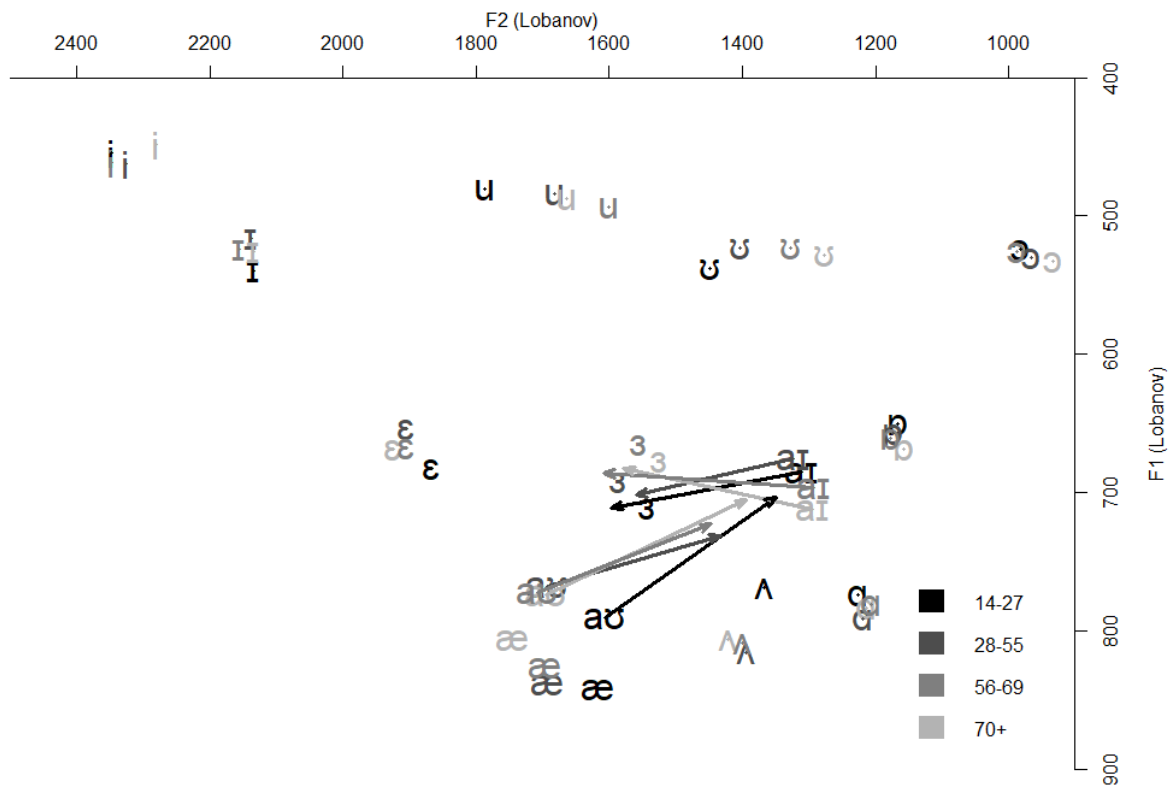


Figure 4. F1-F2 formant frequency plots showing trajectories of participants' productions of the PRICE and MOUTH vowels, measured at 20% and 80% of the vowel duration and averaged across age groups. The 14-27yrs age group have fronted onsets for the MOUTH vowel compared to all other groups.

No significant gender effects were found for either vowel. There were also no significant interactions between gender and age group with the exception of the F2 values for the MOUTH onset. For this vowel, there was a gender effect for the 14-27yrs group alone; men had a more backed MOUTH onset than women.



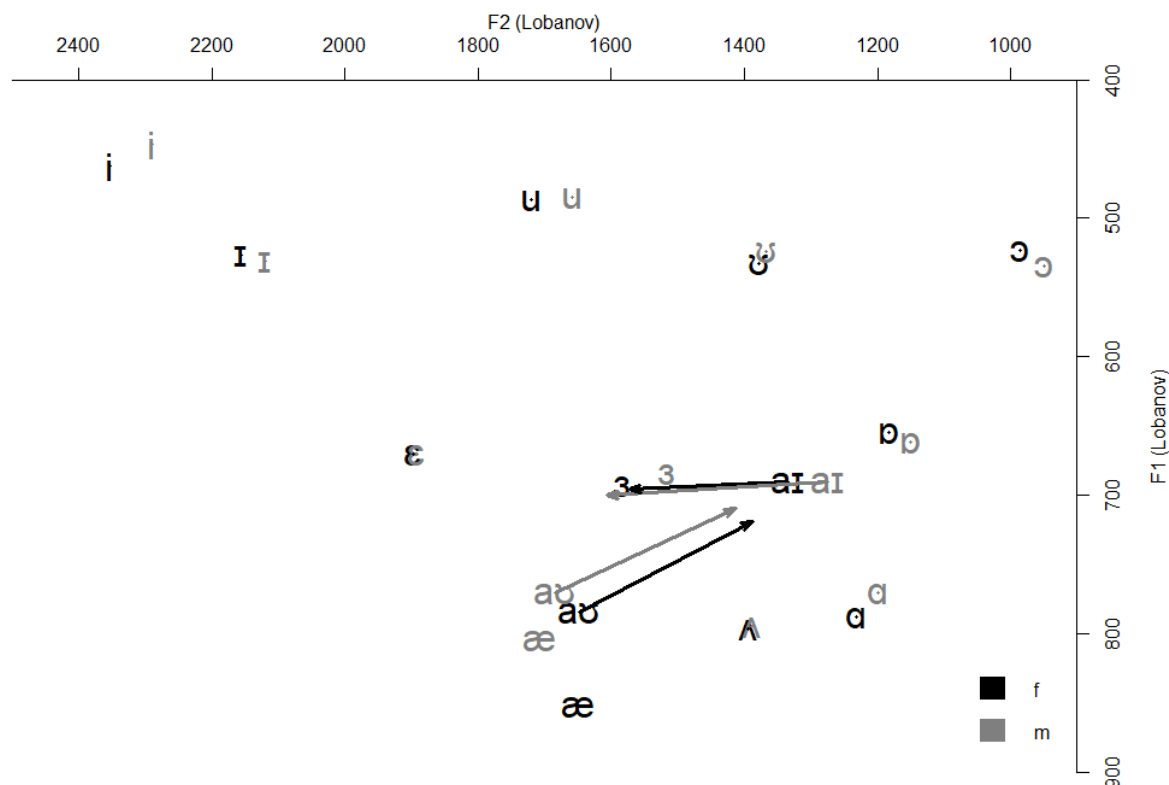


Figure 5. F1-F2 formant frequency plots showing trajectories of participants' productions of the PRICE and MOUTH vowels, measured at 20% and 80% of the vowel duration and averaged across gender (f = female, m = male). There were no significant gender differences for either of these vowels.

### Summary of phonetic changes in apparent time.

On the whole, Cockney phonetic features have been maintained in the community. All age groups have a raised THOUGHT vowel which is more raised than FOOT. All groups also have a fronted GOOSE vowel (further fronted than both FOOT and NURSE), and somewhat fronted TRAP (sitting not far behind DRESS) and STRUT vowels. In terms of diphthongs, traditional Cockney vowels were also found to some extent in all age groups. For

instance, to some extent, all age groups had a backed onset (of varying heights) for PRICE (not far in front of START) and a fronted onset for MOUTH (as front as TRAP).

Nonetheless, there is some evidence of change in apparent time towards SSBE vowels.

In the youngest age group (14–27yrs), both TRAP and STRUT are lowering and backing,

and in line with widespread changes found in British English, GOOSE and FOOT are

fronting. There was no significant change in the F2 dimension for PRICE, but the onset is

raising, whilst for MOUTH, the onset is lowering and backing.

### **Attitude and identity**

#### **Gender effects**

No significant gender effects were found for any measure for the 14–27yrs, 28–55yrs, or

70+yrs age groups. In the 56–69yrs group, males were significantly more likely than

women to consider themselves as speaking with a Cockney accent ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.03, p =$

0.045). Compared to young men, however, young women tended to associate more

strongly with a Cockney identity and accent (see Figure 6). Whilst young women did not

consider themselves or their accent to be Cockney to the same extent as older and

middle-aged women, they tended to give a higher rating than young males.

### Age effects

For males, older participants were significantly less likely to feel that they had an Essex accent ( $\chi^2(3) = 7.96, p = 0.047$ ). Further, 70+yrs males were significantly more likely than males in the other age groups to consider themselves to have an East London ( $\chi^2(3) = 7.89, p = 0.048$ ) or a Cockney accent ( $\chi^2(3) = 14.98, p = 0.002$ ). Similarly, there was a significant association between age and whether male participants considered themselves to be Cockney ( $\chi^2(3) = 11.8, p = 0.008$ ), with older participants more likely to consider themselves to be Cockney. Younger women were more likely than older women to consider that they had an Essex accent ( $\chi^2(3) = 10.04, p = 0.018$ ). However, unlike for male participants, there was no relationship between age and whether female participants considered themselves to be a Cockney, or to have a Cockney or East London accent (see Figure 6).

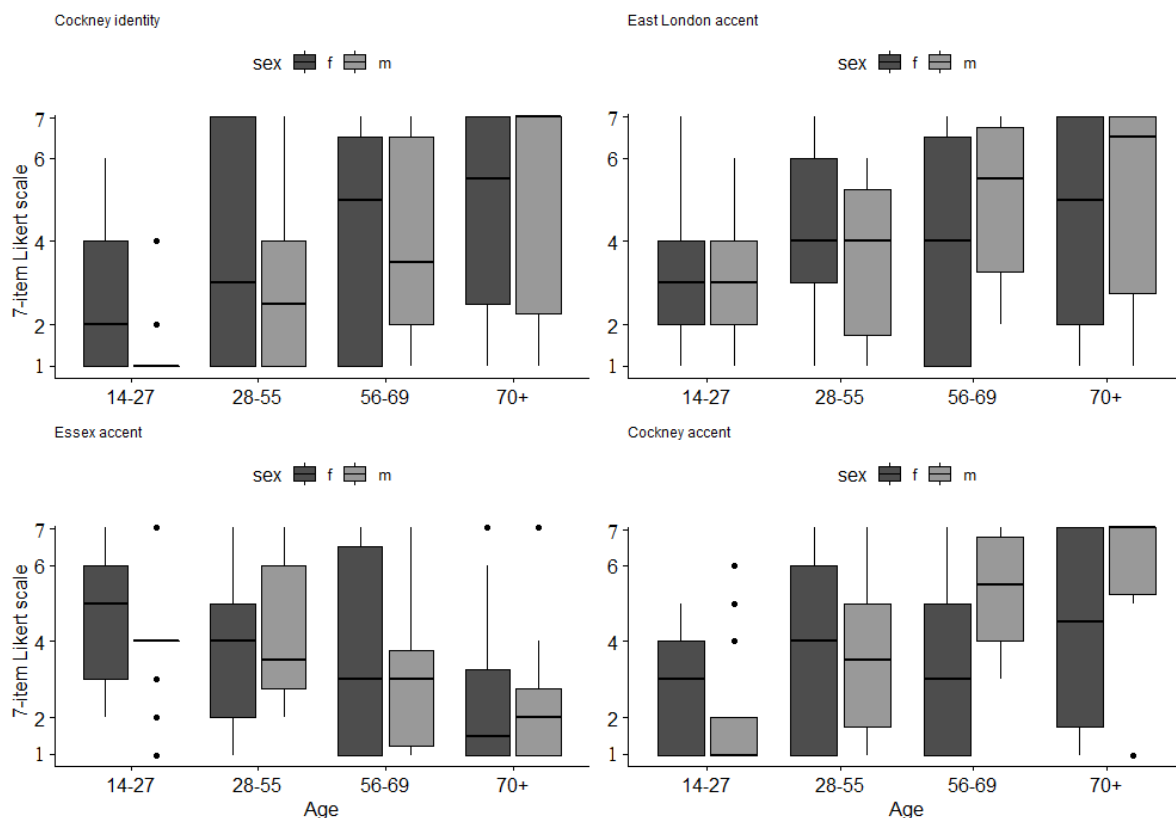


FIGURE 6. Boxplots showing questionnaire responses for whether participants (i) considered themselves to be Cockney (top left), (ii) believed they spoke with an Essex accent (bottom left), (iii) believed they spoke with an East London accent (top right), or (iv) believed they spoke with a Cockney accent (bottom right). There has been a reduction in apparent-time of identifying with a Cockney or East London accent as well as a Cockney identity. This has been led by men. Young speakers are more likely than older speakers to identify their accent as Essex.

## Qualitative analysis

In this section we present the recurrent themes that arose during the interviews as relevant to participants' sense of cultural and linguistic identity in relation to Essex, Cockney, and East London.

Older participants on the whole strongly identified as being Cockney. They also felt that the Cockney culture and dialect, with which they strongly identified, were no longer present in modern-day East London, but were found strongly in Debden.

### (1) Seventy-seven-year-old male

East London's definitely down here. I'm not knocking the foreigners, but East London ain't East London no more. It's all foreigners. I can't go Hackney or where I used to go. I can't talk Cockney. They don't know what you're talking about ... They definitely don't understand. But down here [in Debden], now and again, I might meet a Cockney.

Participants aged over twenty-eight years who were born in Essex or who had moved to Essex as children had more complex and varied identities. Most believed that they were to some extent a Cockney, an East Ender, and from Essex, and did not see any contradiction in these identities. There was substantial variation within this age group

and many exhibited hybrid identities. For instance, a sixty-year-old participant who had left London at the age of three before moving to Debden, identified as Cockney (5/7 on the Likert scale).

(2) Sixty-year-old male

I think because you're from London you want to hold on to what you are. That may sound stupid because I moved out when I was young but that's where I'm from and that's where I always tell people I'm from and I almost make a point of it I think when people are talking. So, I'm obviously quite proud that in the day, back then in 1957, that's where I was born and I'm quite happy with that... I have some pride I come from London, I do. And my family; I know my dad did. I'm definitely more a London guy than an Essex guy. I don't think I want to be an Essex guy, which is strange because I've lived here – lived in these parts for fifty odd years so that may sound strange, but I live here, that's it. And that's where I'm from and that's good enough for me.

In contrast, his seventy-two-year-old cousin who comes from the same Cockney family and left London at the age of five to live in the same street in Debden did not

identify as Cockney (1/7 on the Likert scale), demonstrating the variation within this age group.

Young, male participants unanimously distanced themselves from having a Cockney accent or identity. In spite of acknowledging that their parents and/or grandparents were East Enders/Cockneys, they themselves did not share this identity. A young man whose family strongly identified as Cockney, was asked whether he considered himself Cockney.

(3) Twenty-four-year-old male

Definitely not. I would say I'm an Essex boy

Another young male who was raised in Debden did not share the same sense of identity as his mother, who considers herself Cockney.

(4) Twenty-six-year-old male (A), Interviewer (I)

A: I'm not Cockney at all. I don't want to say I am. If people think that I'm Cockney then that's their opinion, but I don't want to say I am because I've not been brought up in East London and I've not mixed with the right crowd to say that I'm Cockney... I think Cockney's died out. People that pretend

they're Cockney shouldn't say they are when – I mean – their parents and their granddads might be, and I might pick up the odd word or two, or the phrase and stuff like that, but I don't think there is a Cockney any more

I: So what do you consider yourself?

A: A bit of in-between really. I'm from Essex, you know, like I've been brought up in Essex, that's where I'd say I'm from.

Despite this, he found it perplexing that people he encountered outside of the area frequently mistook him for an East Londoner.

Although young males rejected having a Cockney identity, there was more variation within young females. Whilst some young females did not believe they were Cockney, others believed they were, and that this identity had been transmitted culturally through their family. In the following dialogue, two young women discuss why they consider themselves Cockney.

(5) Twenty-four and twenty-two-year-old female friends

B: I honestly couldn't – I honestly couldn't say 'oh that makes someone Cockney'.

I couldn't. I think it's just one of those things that you grow up with. It rubs off on you and-



C: You're stuck with it

B: Yeh. It sticks- it sticks with you. It sticks with you. It doesn't leave.

C: Yeh

B: Yeh it don't leave you until you leave it.

Furthermore, in extract (6) below, a twenty-five-year-old woman explains why she identifies strongly as Cockney (6/7 on the Likert scale). Whilst she herself was not from East London, she believes that because her family are from Plaistow, East London, she too can identify as Cockney.

(6) Twenty-five-year-old female (D), Interviewer (I)

I: So, you think you - so you'd consider yourself a Cockney?

D: Yeh. yeh, definitely. Do you or not?

I: Consider myself?

D: No, consider me.

I: Consider you? Yeah, I think if you consider yourself Cockney, you're Cockney.

D: Cool stuff, cool stuff.

I: And what makes someone Cockney?

D: Um, I don't know. They – the Coc- the Cockney accent usually originates from London, don't it? So, someone who's stayed in London or you know, or been around someone that speak a lot of Cockney language from London or –

I: Yeah, so even though you're not born in London or lived in London you think it's- how, like? How could you be Cockney. I'm just sort of curious to see, like.

D: Um, 'cause my family are from Plaistow.

In summary, older generations in London (particularly those aged 70+yrs) did identify as Cockney and believed the way they spoke was 'Cockney'. In contrast, middle-aged generations had hybrid identities between Essex, Cockney, and East London which they did not believe was contradictory. A gender difference was found in young participants such that young men unanimously did not identify as Cockney whilst some young women did as they believed they had inherited it from their families.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The current study investigated variation and change, and indexicality in the vowel system of the variety spoken in Debden. Overall, the results indicate that a Cockney vowel system has been maintained. For instance, all age groups in Debden had traditional Cockney features (Wells 1982) such as a raised THOUGHT, fronted STRUT, and fronted GOOSE vowel, and a backed onset for PRICE and fronted onset for MOUTH. Whilst

GOOSE fronting is somewhat hard to interpret due to widespread fronting in many areas of the South East (e.g. Harrington et al. 2008), it is notable that all age groups have a fronted variant that is further fronted than FOOT, consistent with descriptions of Cockney (Wells 1982). It seems that linguistically, Cockney did move east to Essex (Fox 2015), along with the traditional East End communities who relocated in the Cockney Diaspora (Watt et al. 2014).

There were however, some apparent-time changes in the vowel system. The GOOSE and FOOT vowels were fronting, TRAP was lowering and backing, STRUT was raising and backing, DRESS was backing, THOUGHT and LOT were fronting, the PRICE onset was raising, and the MOUTH onset was lowering and backing. Of these changes, the fronting of both THOUGHT and LOT and the lowering and backing of TRAP were more advanced in women, providing tentative evidence that women are leading change.

As previously mentioned, the fronting of GOOSE and FOOT is consistent with findings across South East England, including in RP (e.g. GOOSE: see Harrington et al. 2008; FOOT: see Fabricius 2007). Indeed, the vowel system appears to be in the early stages of moving towards SSBE targets like those found in Reading and Milton Keynes (Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005). Debden thus differs from Havering where some MLE features have been found in young speakers (Kerswill, Torgersen, & Fox 2008; Cheshire et al. 2011). Although Debden is geographically as close to inner-East London as

Havering, the former is officially in Essex and the latter is in Greater London. One possibility is that this has affected accent variation and change in Debden; young speakers in Debden may look ideologically outwards to the home counties (the counties that immediately surround London) and not inwards to London, with change towards SSBE targets much like that observed in the home counties (Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005).

In general, the features that were found in the youngest age group (lowered NURSE vowel, backed STRUT vowel, fronted THOUGHT vowel, fronted GOOSE vowel) were also found in those who least associated with a Cockney accent and identity, and to a lesser extent, an East London accent and identity. No significant effects between phonetic production and identification with an Essex accent were found. This suggests that for all age groups in Debden, speakers' vowel systems do not index an Essex accent. In contrast, using traditional Cockney variants does indeed seem to index a Cockney accent. In this community then, an Essex accent thus appears not to be as socially meaningful as Cockney which, instead, is strongly associated with conservatively Cockney phonetic production.

Although we did not compare the data directly, apparent-time change was not found in Debden to the same extent as in Hackney, Havering (Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox 2008; Cheshire et al. 2011), Tower Hamlets (Fox 2015), Milton Keynes, or Reading

(Williams & Kerswill 1999; Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005). The maintenance of Cockney features in Debden may be related to the relative separation of Debden from the surrounding area (e.g. separate schools, high street, station), the homogeneity of the migrant community which relocated to Debden in the 1950s (unlike Milton Keynes, see Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005), and the importation of Cockney culture.

Nonetheless, whilst on the whole, Cockney phonetic features were maintained in Debden, the way in which speakers labelled their accents varied across generations. The results of the quantitative attitudinal analysis as well as the qualitative analysis revealed that association with an East London accent or Cockney accent/identity has decreased in apparent time, whilst identification with an Essex accent has increased. Identifying oneself and one's accent as 'Cockney' appears to have been lost more rapidly in apparent time for men than women; there were significant differences in these measures between old men and young men, but not between old women and young women. This indicates that there has been substantial generational change in how men identify themselves and their accents, but not for women.

The results of the qualitative analysis also revealed that no young men believed they could inherit a Cockney identity in Debden. Instead, they believed this identity was rooted in a certain culture and time period such that their parents and grandparents were Cockney but that they could not be. In contrast, some (but not all) young women

believed they were Cockney and spoke Cockney, a variety they felt that they had inherited from their families. The three young women who most identified as Cockney all lived in social housing and were not working. At the time of recording, two stated that they were looking for work as a hairdresser or as a barmaid, whilst the other looked after her two young children and was not actively job hunting. These three female participants all reported having strong relationships and a high degree of contact with their families, particularly their mothers and grandparents. For instance, one young woman reported that she always spoke with her mother at least once, but normally twice a day. In some ways then, the nature of these young women's lives did not differ greatly from the lives of the older female participants when they were young women in East London. The differences between young men and women in identifying as 'Cockney', as well as the variation among young women on this measure, could thus be explained through the traditional matrilinear and matrifocal nature of Cockney (Young & Willmott 1957).

Findings from other London communities support this interpretation. In the Isle of Dogs in East London, Cohen (2013) found that the matrifocal nature of Cockney culture has permitted the transmission of a Cockney identity to some young women. However, for men, where identity is accessed through their job, specifically working in the docks that have now closed, the Cockney identity is no longer available.

Whilst some, but not all young women identified their accent as Cockney, they simultaneously considered their accent to be an Essex one. Interestingly, they did not see this as a contradiction. Whilst a traditionally Cockney vowel system has been mostly maintained in Debden, both young men and women believed they had an Essex accent. Traditional Cockney features thus appear to have been re-enregistered as denoting an Essex accent. Therefore, different generations in Debden consider the same linguistic features (traditional Cockney features) to have different labels (Cockney for older speakers, Essex for younger speakers). This suggests that the linguistic labels we use to define different accents or dialects are not static or stable, and that even within the same community, these labels are adopted and interpreted differently.

In summary, Cockney has moved east to Essex (Fox 2015), and the traditional Cockney vowel system is found in Debden, though with some early signs of a shift towards SSBE variants. However, there is a disparity between the phonetic features that speakers use and how they define them. This is likely linked to the specific social, cultural, and historic makeup of the community. Cockney phonetic features have largely been transposed onto an Essex accent and identity, a change that has been led by women. Further, although a Cockney identity is not available for young men, it is possible for some young women, likely as a result of their lifestyles that are grounded within and reflect the matrifocal nature of Cockney (Young & Willmott 1957; Cohen

2013). In sum, it seems that social change in the community has driven identity change to a greater extent than it has driven linguistic change. Thus, whilst Cockney linguistic traits can be considered to have moved east (Fox 2015), on the whole, a Cockney identity has not.

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**Chapter 9.**

Disambiguating language attitudes held towards socio-  
demographic groups and geographic areas in South East  
England

Forthcoming in *Journal of Linguistic Geography*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Using a novel, digitised method, this paper investigates the language attitudes of 18-33-year olds in South East England. More broadly, this paper demonstrates that disambiguating the language attitudes held towards socio-demographic groups and geographic areas is paramount to understanding the configuration of language attitudes in an area, particularly, for areas with high cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. A total of 194 respondents evaluated the speech of 102 south-eastern speakers. Results reveal an imperfect mapping between language attitudes held towards geographic areas and speakers from these areas. Although East London and Essex are the most negatively evaluated areas, speakers' demographic and identity data is the primary factor conditioning language attitudes. Across South East England, working-class and/or BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) speakers, as well as those who identify their accent in geographically marked terms are evaluated most negatively which is confounded if they are from East London or Essex.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Analysing Language Attitudes in their Social and Geographic Context**

In language attitude and perceptual dialectology work, linguists are often presented with the consideration of how to disambiguate language attitudes held towards geographic areas and socio-demographic groups. For instance, in an attitudinal survey, respondents may be asked to evaluate accents which are presented to them conceptually through accent labels (e.g. Bishop, Coupland, Garrett, 2005; Giles, 1970). However, accent labels can have ambiguous designations. For instance, if a respondent evaluates the accent label 'London' as having low social status, we do not know if they would also evaluate any or all speakers from London in the same light and how this could be dissected by



demographic factors such as ethnicity or social class. In London, like many cities, there is considerable social, demographic and linguistic heterogeneity. Accent labels cannot simultaneously or precisely designate a geographic location such as 'London' as well as socio-demographic factors such as ethnicity or social class. We cannot understand what a respondent understands by the label 'London'. Therefore, using accent labels presupposes respondents' folk linguistic awareness of varieties (see Preston, 1989, 1999).

The draw-a-map task (Preston, 1986) is a method that has long been used in perceptual dialectology tasks to probe respondents' evaluations of different geographic areas without the ambiguous designations of accent labels. In a draw-a-map task, informants draw isoglosses on a map based on a question such as 'draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different' (Evans 2013: 272). Respondents may additionally be asked to then write their attitudes towards the speech/speakers found in each of the areas they have identified (e.g. Bucholtz, Bermudez, Fung, Edwards & Vargas, 2007; Cukor-Avila, Jeon, Rector, Tiwari & Shelton, 2012; Drummond & Carrie, 2019). Unlike attitudinal surveys in which respondents evaluate accent labels, in draw-a-map tasks, linguists do not pre-suppose non-linguists' perceptions of linguistic varieties. Respondents can freely circle areas on the map which can span official boundaries. Nonetheless, if a geographic area is evaluated as, for instance, 'unintelligent', we do not know which (if not all) demographic and social groups from the area are being evaluated in this way. Moreover, conventionally, draw-a-map tasks are accompanied by the methodological problem of how to visualise and statistically analyse results. With some exceptions (e.g. Chartier 2020; Drummond & Carrie, 2019), draw-a-map tasks are most frequently conducted on paper (e.g. Bucholtz et al., 2007; Cukor-Avila et al., 2012; Montgomery, 2012) which leads to difficulty in

building aggregate, composite maps and performing statistical analysis (Montgomery & Stoeckle, 2013; Preston & Howe, 1987).

A further limitation of both draw-a-map tasks and evaluations of accent labels is that both these measures of language attitudes may be biased by self-report. Respondents may be unaware or inarticulate of their language attitudes or may refrain from reporting them. The stereotyped evaluations of an accent that a respondent reports are, most probably, not entirely aligned with the language attitudes they actually hold towards a speaker who they encounter with that accent, whether or not they are aware of this distinction.

The language attitudes held towards the speech of different socio-demographic groups can be probed with an attitudinal survey in which respondents evaluate speech stimuli (e.g. Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985). Although respondents are unaware of the speakers' demographic information, they may evaluate speakers from specific socio-demographic groups or geographic locations most negatively. However, based on this data we cannot infer the respondent's evaluations of any geographic area. For instance, if a respondent negatively evaluates speech stimuli produced by a speaker from London, we cannot infer that this respondent holds negative opinions of what they conceptually believe to be a 'London' accent. Firstly, the respondent may not consider the speaker to be from London and secondly, they may not evaluate all speakers from London in the same way which may be conditioned by socio-demographic factors (e.g. speakers' ethnicity and/or social class).

In sum, language attitudes made towards geographic areas and socio-demographic groups may not be in perfect alignment. Indeed, recent research has demonstrated that the hierarchy of how accents in Britain are evaluated is most pronounced when respondents are evaluating accent labels and not audio stimuli

(Levon, Sharma, Cardoso, Ye & Watt, 2020). Nonetheless, we are currently lacking a measure of language attitudes towards geographic areas which neither pre-suppose non-linguists' awareness of linguistic varieties nor is biased by self-report. This paper tackles this challenge by using a novel and digitised method which explores language attitudes in South East England towards geographic areas. These results are then contrasted with the language attitudes held towards socio-demographic groups based on speech stimuli.

Results reveal a complex interaction and imperfect mapping between the evaluations of geographic areas and socio-demographic groups. For instance, whilst respondents evaluate London and the county of Essex most negatively in terms of social status and solidarity, not all speakers from these areas are negatively evaluated. Instead, speakers' demographic data is the most important factor conditioning the variation in language attitudes. The working-class and/or BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) speakers from across South East England are evaluated most negatively, which is confounded if they are from East London or Essex.

## **1.2. Language attitudes in South East England**

The two general categories most frequently used in language attitude surveys to group respondents' evaluations of speakers/varieties/places are social status and solidarity (Preston, 1999; Ryan & Giles, 1982). For instance, Stewart et al. (1985) consider the following social status traits: 'intelligent, confident, successful, ambitious' and the following solidarity traits 'trustworthy, sincere, kind, friendly, perceived similarity and social class'. There is often a disjunct between language varieties which receive high social status rankings and those which receive high solidarity rankings (e.g. Stewart et al., 1985). This may be in part explained by the relative levels and types of prestige held by different varieties. Whilst standard varieties hold overt prestige, non-standard

varieties can hold covert prestige (Trudgill, 1972). For instance, Preston (1992) found that African American English (AAE) does not hold overt prestige but does hold covert prestige such that young European-Americans may imitate AAE in order to sound 'tough', 'cool', 'casual' and 'down-to-earth'.

In Britain, much work into language attitudes has revealed that firstly, working-class or ethnic varieties do not hold overt prestige so receive low social status judgements, but in contrast can receive relatively higher solidarity judgements (Bishop et al, 2005; Giles, 1970). Secondly, these papers also revealed that Britain's standard variety is evaluated by Britons, even by those aged 15-24, as having high social status, and, although to a lesser extent, high solidarity (termed 'prestige' and 'social attractiveness' respectively in this work). Through standard language ideology, there has been a long-running construction of Received Pronunciation (RP) as the 'best English' in England (Agha, 2003; Milroy, 2001).

As RP is a class-marked standard, we would expect RP-like features to be most dominant in the areas of South East England which are most populated by the highest socio-economic classes: parts of London (particularly some western parts), parts of the western home counties (counties surrounding London) and in particular, the county of Surrey (see Figure 1 for a map of South East England). Excluding London, Surrey, which borders wealthy South West London, has a greater Gross Disposable Household Income than anywhere else in England (Office of National Statistics, 2016). Further, several of England's most prestigious 'public schools' (elite, fee-paying schools) are found in the western home counties. For instance, Eton College is found in Berkshire whilst Charterhouse School is in Surrey and charges over £40,000 in fees for each year's boarding and schooling. These schools are strongly associated with the social and political elite, for instance, in 2019, Boris Johnson became the 20th British prime

minister to have attended Eton College, where Prince William and Prince Harry were also educated. It is well established that RP is not only most predominant in the speech of the highest social classes but is particularly associated with those who attended a public school (Agha, 2003; Badia Barrera, 2015). Following this, we would expect parts of London, particularly South West London, the western home counties and in particular, Surrey, to be most associated with and to have the highest prevalence of South East England's highest socioeconomic classes and subsequently, with England's standard language variety, RP.



Figure 1. The home counties and towns of South East England.

At the opposite extreme from RP, conventionally, the most 'basilectal' (Wells, 1982: 302) linguistic variety in South East England has been Cockney which has long been associated with the white working class in East London (Cole, 2021; Cole & Evans, 2020; Cole & Strycharczuk, 2019; Fox, 2015). A more recent variety, so-called 'Estuary English', exists as a linguistic continuum ranging from England's class-marked standard variety, RP, to Cockney which supposedly spans all of South East England and parallels the class system (Agha, 2003: 265; Wells, 1997). That is, the lower the class of a speaker in South East England, the more likely they are to use Cockney-like features. In contrast, the higher the class of a speaker, the more likely it is that they will use RP-like features.

As Cockney is a working-class variety of English, it is unsurprising that a wide range of studies have found that Cockney is poorly evaluated (Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland 1975). Although Wells considers Cockney to be 'overtly despised, but covertly imitated' (1994:205), respondents typically evaluate the accent label 'Cockney' poorly on both social status and, to a lesser extent, solidarity judgements (Bishop et al., 2005; Giles, 1970). Nonetheless, the same pattern is not found when respondents are evaluating the accent label 'London' which receives a moderate level of social status and receives substantially higher solidarity rankings than 'Cockney' (Bishop et al., 2005). The authors suggest that the 'London' label is not interpreted uniformly as it fuses 'stereotypes of vernacular working-class speech with very different stereotypes linked to a busy and dynamic metropolis' (Bishop et al., 2005: 139).

Indeed, London is highly diverse and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city, particularly East London, has seen a consistent fall in the population of the white, working class. The so-called 'Cockney Diaspora' refers to the wide-scale relocation of East Londoners into the London peripheries and home counties. In particular, the county

of Essex (bordering North East London) has been the most prolific outpost of the Cockney Diaspora (Cole, 2021; Fox, 2015; Watt et al. 2014). Since the late 1990s, much of London has been gentrified by the large-scale arrival of professional, managerial and graduate populations (Butler & Robson, 2003). Therefore, as well as white, working class Cockneys, the label 'London' may also designate the accents of middle-class professionals.

Furthermore, the 'London' label may now be associated with Multicultural London English. In East London, a distinct and innovative variety of English has emerged: the multiethnolect Multicultural London English (MLE). MLE emerged as a result of high rates of immigration to London which began most notably in the 1980s and led to highly ethnically diverse, multilingual and multidialectal communities (Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill & Torgersen, 2008; Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox & Torgersen, 2011). Whilst previously the border between outer East London and Essex was most strongly demarcated by social class, in modern times, it is increasingly a border of ethnicity (Butler & Hamnett, 2011: 8). Although MLE includes some features of Cockney, it also has features from other languages or non-British varieties of English and is most frequent in the speech of young BAME speakers in East London (Fox, 2015; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008).

Much of the above research on language attitudes towards 'London' and 'Cockney' labels pre-dates the documentation of Multicultural London English. Nonetheless, several attitudinal surveys have probed British listeners' attitudes on ethnic varieties of English (using the following accent labels: 'Asian' and 'Afro-Caribbean' [Bishop, et al., 2005]; 'Indian' and 'West Indies' [Giles, 1970]; 'Indian' and 'Afro Caribbean' [Levon et al., 2020]). These studies coincided in demonstrating that the accent labels designating ethnic varieties were evaluated as having very low prestige but received somewhat more favourable social attractiveness ratings. This was especially

the case for 'Afro-Caribbean' accents which Bishop et al. (2005) found to be ranked relatively high on this measure, particularly, by those aged 15-24 years. The authors attributed this result to young speakers 'perhaps aligning this label with black and Caribbean influences in popular culture' (2005: 141). Extrapolating these findings, MLE - which is sometimes referred to by non-linguists as 'Jafaican' ('fake Jamaican') (Kerswill, 2014) - is likely to receive very low social status ratings but relatively higher solidarity ratings. The prediction of low social status ratings is corroborated by a recent qualitative attitudinal study which found that MLE is considered to be 'incorrect' and as a form of 'broken language' and 'language decay' particularly by those who do not identify as speaking this variety (Kircher & Fox, 2019).

Some researchers have suggested that MLE has displaced traditional Cockney (Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox 2015). Nonetheless, there is evidence that Cockney linguistic features were transported to the county of Essex along with the communities who relocated in the Cockney diaspora (Cole, 2021; Cole & Evans, 2020; Cole & Strycharczuk, 2019). This work suggests that traditional 'Cockney' features are perhaps more prevalent in Essex than any other part of the South East, including East London. As a result, in line with the negative evaluations of Cockney reported in previous studies, we would expect that both the geographic area of Essex and speakers from Essex will be most evaluated poorly on solidarity and particularly social status rankings.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper has the following research questions:

1. How are different **geographic areas** in South East England evaluated on social status and solidarity measures?



2. Are there differences in how **speakers** are evaluated on social status and solidarity measures according to their socio-demographic and identity factors?

Do the evaluations of speakers differ according to **respondent** group?

Research question 1 is analysed through a novel method which explores how different geographic areas are evaluated (as explained in detail in section 3.4.1). Following the research outlined in section 1.2, I predict that East London and Essex will be the most negatively evaluated geographic areas in terms of social status, and to a lesser extent, solidarity whilst South West London and the western home counties, particularly Surrey, are most positively evaluated on these measures. Further, due to the social and linguistic heterogeneity of London, I predict that there will be a substantial overlap in how London is evaluated due to the city's high cultural and linguistic diversity.

Research question 2 examines respondents' evaluation of speech stimuli in relation to the demographic and identity data of both speakers and respondents. Once again, following the previously outlined research in section 1.2, I predict that BAME and working-class speakers will receive lower social status evaluations than white and middle-class speakers respectively. However, the speech of BAME and working-class speakers may hold covert prestige and as such may receive relatively high solidarity scores. The results of research questions 1 and 2 are compared and contrasted to analyse the potential interactions and level of alignment between how speakers and geographic areas are evaluated.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. Procedure

223 respondents undertook a 25-minute perceptual dialectology (PD) task on computers and a 5-minute production task in which they were recorded whilst individually reading aloud a wordlist and passage. The order that respondents completed the tasks was randomised. In the PD task, based on a 10-second clip of production data for each speaker, respondents completed both an attitudinal task and a geographic identification task. The experiment was completed in the ESSEXLab facilities at the University of Essex with the support of an ESSEXLab Seedcorn grant.

The experiment was run over nine days and was divided into four rounds. Stimuli from different speakers were used in each of the four rounds. In each round, the speech stimuli used was extracted from the passage reading produced by a selection of speakers from the previous round. For instance, the speech stimuli which was evaluated by respondents in round two was extracted from passage readings produced by respondents in round one. The number of respondents and speakers in each round is shown in table 1. In total 223 respondents completed the experiment, and each judged between 27 and 29 speakers in a randomised order. A total of 102 different speakers were evaluated across the four rounds. Of these speakers, eight were repeated across rounds to give a balanced spread of geographic home locations and/or demographic characteristics in each round.

<b>Round</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Speakers</b>
<b>1</b>	59	27
<b>2</b>	56	29
<b>3</b>	55	27
<b>4</b>	53	27

Table 1. The number of respondents who took part in each of the 4 rounds and how many speakers each respondent evaluated.

In the PD task, respondents were seated at computers in partitioned booths such that they could not see the screens of other respondents. The task was completed on a program that I designed and developed in Python (Van Rossum & Drake, 2009). At the beginning of the experiment, respondents provided some basic demographic and identity data which they inputted directly into the computer program. Demographic data included information such as the respondents' schooling type, their class, ethnicity and where they were from in South East England. Respondents' defined their ethnicity in their own words and selected their class from a drop-down list with the choices: 'lower-working', 'upper-working', 'lower-middle', 'upper-middle', 'upper'

The identity data was collected on a 100-point slider scale in which respondents responded to the following questions:

1. I like my accent when I talk
2. I am proud of where I come from
3. I feel that my accent is typical of where I'm from
4. I feel that I speak with a South East England accent
5. I feel that I speak with a London accent

6. I feel that I speak 'Queen's English'<sup>3</sup>
7. I feel I speak with a Cockney accent
8. I feel that I speak Estuary English

### 3.1.1. Language Attitudes Task

Based on speech stimuli, respondents made attitudinal evaluations of speakers on slider scales for the following questions:

1. How friendly is the speaker?
2. How intelligent is the speaker?
3. How correctly do they speak?
4. How trustworthy are they?
5. How differently do they talk from you?

Questions (1), (4) and (5) reflect solidarity judgements whilst (2) and (3) are social status judgements. Question (5) is not a clear indicator of perceived solidarity as, unlike questions (1) and (2), it is likely biased by how similar respondents actually were to speakers (e.g. for factors such as geographic provenance, age, gender, social class, ethnicity). In addition, although not analysed as part of this present study, respondents were asked to identify speakers' social class.

Respondents were instructed 'Please move the following sliders to reflect your intuitions about the speaker. Remember that this is completely anonymous. Please provide your gut instinct.' The sliders each operated on a 100-point scale. Respondents were not made aware of this and instead, the scale was qualified as ranging from 'not at

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<sup>3</sup> Queen's English is a personifying term for RP.

all' to 'very much'. Respondents were required to move each slider such that they had to make either a positive or negative judgement of any scale.

### **3.1.2. Geographic Identification Task**

A measure of language attitudes towards geographic areas was ascertained by cross-referencing between the language attitudes task and a geographic identification task (the analysis is described in detail in section 3.4.1). In brief, the areas respondents were believed to be from was cross-referenced with how they were evaluated on social status and solidarity measures. This method provided insights into how respondents evaluated speakers they believed to be from a certain area, regardless of the speaker's actual geographic provenance.

In the geographic identification task, respondents were presented with a map of South East England and were instructed to draw around the area(s) that they believed the speaker could be from based solely on their speech stimuli. This method differs from conventional geographic identification tasks in which respondents identify the speaker's linguistic variety or geographic provenance using either fixed-choice labels (e.g. Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Leach, Watson & Gnevsheva, 2016) or free classification (e.g. Carrie & McKenzie, 2017; Mckenzie, 2015). Using fixed-choice labels (e.g. 'London', 'Essex') pre-supposes respondents' perceptions of linguistic variation and imposes linguistic isoglosses by splitting linguistic or social space. However, whilst free classification does not suffer from this problem, it provides an unrestricted possibility for answers which is difficult to aggregate and analyse quantitatively (see Mckenzie, 2015 for an overview). The method employed in this study has overcome both these problems by allowing respondents to freely circle areas on a map.

Respondents were instructed that they could draw around more than one area if required, but that they could not circle more than a third of the map. Respondents could circle more than one place from and across the region. This was an important consideration as production studies have suggested that in the South East, linguistic features are not only distributed geographically, but also by ethnicity and class. Therefore, theoretically, a respondent may presume that a speaker who they believe is white and working class could be from any number of white, working-class communities in the South East that may be geographically disparate.

Respondents could optionally receive their results only after completing the entire experiment. They were instructed that their result would reflect how accurately they performed but would also how small an area they circled. The purpose of this design was three-fold. Firstly, creating the experiment as a challenge incentivised trying hard and the respondents were less likely to get bored. Secondly, it discouraged respondents from simply circling names of places e.g. 'Essex' or 'London', but inclined them to focus on which area the speakers were actually from, therefore, allowing isoglosses to potentially span official boundaries. Thirdly, respondents were discouraged from 'hedging their bets' by circling very large areas of the map. As an example, a map produced by a respondent when identifying the geographic provenance of an individual speaker (actually from North London) is shown in Figure 2.

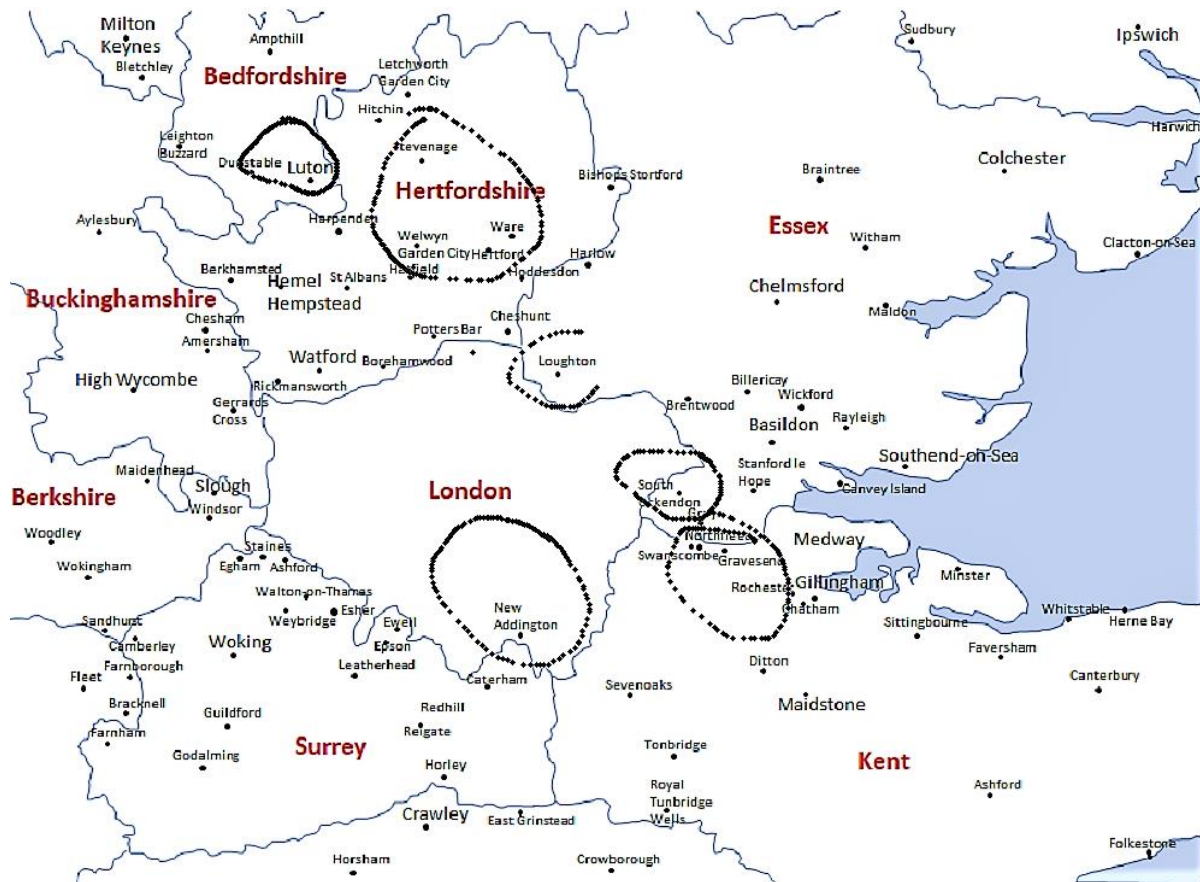


Figure 2. Example of a map drawn by a respondent when identifying the geographic provenance of a specific speaker

As the amount of detail and the place names listed on the maps have been shown to be important considerations in draw-a-map tasks (Cukor-Avila et al., 2012), the towns/ cities/ villages listed on the map were selected based on population data (all have >30,000 people), not on the relative cultural prominence of the places. County names (e.g. Essex, Kent, Surrey) and boundaries were included so as to help geographically orientate the respondents. The locations written with larger text (e.g. Maidstone, Chelmsford) had >100,000 population. The map only depicts the home counties however, respondents from the South East more broadly (e.g. West Sussex or East Sussex) were also welcomed.

### 3.2. Stimuli

The speech stimuli used in the first round were collected prior to the experiment from my friendship and family networks. As previously mentioned, in the subsequent rounds, the speech stimuli were extracted from the production data collected in the previous round. The production data consisted of readings of a wordlist and passage (adapted from *Chicken Little*: Blackwood Ximenes, Shaw & Carignan, 2017). As the linguistic variables present in audio stimuli are important considerations when designing PD tasks (Leach et al., 2016), the speech stimuli consisted of a reading of the same sentence for each speaker. The sentence was designed to include phonetic variables that have been shown to be variable and/or meaningful in South East England (e.g. variation between MLE, Cockney and RP in rates of th-fronting, t-glottalling, h-dropping, l-vocalisation, th-stopping, PRICE and MOUTH production). The sentence used as speech stimuli was extracted from the passage reading:

*'The sky is falling', cried Chicken Little. His head hurt and he could feel a big painful bump on it. 'I'd better warn the others', and off he raced in a panicked cloud of fluff.*

This passage extract took approximately 10 seconds for each speaker to read. These clips were edited in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2020) to remove disfluencies and reduce any long pauses that may affect the respondents' evaluation of the speakers.

### 3.3. Respondents and Speakers

All respondents and all speakers were aged 18-33yrs and were from South East England. This was with the exception of two speakers from other regions of Britain who were included as RP controls. These speakers were from Gloucester and Birmingham (30yr,



female; 26yr, female respectively), were educated at fee-paying schools and were identified as speakers of RP. These speakers were included to see how speakers from South East England are evaluated in comparison to RP speakers who are not from the region.

As much as possible, speakers and respondents were selected whose home locations were evenly dispersed across South East England and London (Figure 8 in section 4.2 shows the exact home locations of all speakers). At least one respondent and one speaker came from each of the following counties broadly in the South East: Essex, Surrey, Hertfordshire, Kent, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Suffolk, West Sussex, Hampshire, and from the following areas of London: North, North East, East, South East, South, South West, West, North West.

For both respondents and speakers, the ethnicity variable was dichotomised into 'white British' and 'BAME'. For instance, speakers grouped as 'BAME' had self-identified their ethnicities in the following ways: 'Asian British', 'Bengali', 'Black African', 'Black British', 'British Bangladeshi', 'Brown British', 'Mixed' and 'Srilankan British'. In contrast, speakers who were grouped as 'white British' identified their ethnicity as either 'White' or 'white British'. This meant that speakers and respondents from many different ethnicities were grouped together as 'BAME'. I do not wish to suggest that the evaluations made of speakers from different BAME backgrounds are identical, nor that there are not meaningful distinctions between the different ethnicities grouped as 'BAME'. However, for the purposes of this study, I seek to investigate whether white British speakers in general are evaluated differently to BAME speakers based solely on their speech. Table 2 shows the speaker summaries by ethnicity, gender and class.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Lower working</b>	<b>Upper working</b>	<b>Lower middle</b>	<b>Upper middle</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>White British</b>	<b>F</b>	9	8	17	9	43
	<b>M</b>	4	9	12	13	38
<b>BAME</b>	<b>F</b>	0	5	5	1	11
	<b>M</b>	5	1	3	1	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>102</b>

Table 2. Summary for the 102 speakers by gender, social class and ethnicity.

A majority of the respondents and speakers were students or staff at the University of Essex. Respondents were instructed that they must be aged <34yrs and from South East England. Respondents' and speakers' ages are true as of the point at which they completed the experiment between March and June 2019. Respondents and speakers were considered to be eligible if they had lived at least half of the years between the ages of three and 18 in the South East. Of the 223 respondents who completed the experiment, 29 were subsequently found to not meet the eligibility criteria and were excluded from the analysis. In each of the four rounds, 7, 10, 5 and 7 respondents were excluded respectively giving a total of 194 respondents included in the analysis. Table 3 is the respondent summaries by ethnicity, gender and class.

Ethnicity	Gender	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Upper	Total
		working	working	middle	middle	middle	
White British	F	10	15	14	7	2	48
	M	13	9	10	6	2	40
BAME	F	5	14	25	11	0	55
	M	5	11	22	13	0	51
<b>Total</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>194</b>

Table 3. Summary of the 194 respondents by gender, social class and ethnicity

### 3.4. Analysis

#### 3.4.1 RQ1: Social Status and Solidarity Evaluations of Geographic Areas

A series of aggregate, composite heatmaps were created to show which geographic areas were evaluated most positively or most negatively on social status and solidarity judgements. When respondents were completing the geographic identification task, as they circled areas on the map, the co-ordinates (corresponding to the pixel position) they drew were automatically extracted and exported to csv files which were stored on the lab server. The entire range of co-ordinates inside the shapes drawn by each respondent were then calculated using an algorithm developed in Python. A total of 774 respondent-speaker pairings were excluded as either the respondent indicated that they may have recognised the speaker, or they did not engage with the task (e.g. writing 'posh' on the map instead of circling any locations). A total of 5,246 individual respondent-speaker pairings were included in the analysis.

Heatmaps were then plotted by establishing a colour scale according to the relative frequencies that each co-ordinate was selected. The data was interrogated by

the social status and solidarity judgements made in the attitudinal tasks. Separate heatmaps were produced for the lowest and highest quartiles for each attitudinal measure. For instance, a heatmap was created showing the places speakers were judged to be from each time they were evaluated to be in the lowest quartile of intelligence (<26% perceived intelligence). This was repeated for those perceived to be in the highest quartile of intelligence (>74% intelligent). This was then repeated for all other social status and solidarity measures. The resultant heatmaps allow for a visual interpretation of the areas which speakers were most frequently believed to come from if they were evaluated positively/negatively on an attitudinal measure. For instance, do we find that speakers who are frequently considered as unintelligent are identified as coming from a specific geographic location regardless of the speakers' actual home locations? As with all plots in this paper, all heatmaps were plotted using the R package ggplot2 (Wickham, 2016).

This method circumnavigates the ambiguous designations created by accent labels which divide social and geographic space and presuppose non-linguists' awareness of distinct language varieties. Further, unlike both draw-a-map and accent labels tasks, this approach does not rely on respondents being aware and articulate of their accent prejudices or being open to reporting them. This is not to suggest that draw-a-map tasks and conventional language attitude surveys using accent labels are not without enormous merit, but this method provides an insight into an alternative facet of language attitudes.

### **3.4.2. RQ2: Social Status and Solidarity Evaluations of Speaker Groups**

Several gaussian generalised linear models were run in R (R Core Team, 2018). These models assessed whether, when respondents evaluate speech stimuli, there are

differences in the social status and solidarity scores attributed to speakers according to their demographic and identity factors. In addition, the models assessed whether the evaluations of speakers were related to the respondents' demographic data.

Respondents evaluated speech stimuli without being provided with any prior information about the speaker. This affords an analysis of how different socio-demographic groups are evaluated based solely on their speech without requiring respondents to self-report their language attitudes. Separate analyses were run with each of the social status and solidarity scores as the dependent variable (whether the speaker is perceived as intelligent, friendly, trustworthy, speaking differently to the respondent, and as speaking correctly).

The independent variables included were related to the speakers' demographic data: (1) speakers' social class (self-identified from fixed choice options), (2) ethnicity of speaker (self-identified and aggregated into white British/ BAME); (3) gender of speaker; (4) home location of the speaker which was a categorical variable with 19 levels: the counties that speakers originated from (Essex, Surrey, Hertfordshire, West Sussex, Kent, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Suffolk) as well as London split into eight distinct areas (North, North East, East, South East, South, South West, West, North West) and finally the two controls who were not from any area of South East England. The reference level was set as 'Berkshire' as a baseline control for comparison in the model. Following the research outlined in section 1.2, we would expect speakers from Berkshire to be evaluated positively and therefore to be at the extreme of the scale. However, unlike counties such as Surrey, the county lacks 'cultural prominence' and as such, it is unlikely that respondents would have strong perceptions of what a speaker from Berkshire would sound like.

Further independent variables were included from the speakers' identity data regarding whether the speaker felt their accent was: (5) typical of where they were from; (6) Cockney; (7) Queen's English; (8) Estuary English; (9) a London accent. The final identity variable was (10) to what extent the speakers felt proud of where they were from. Finally, independent variables were included relating to the respondents' demographic data: (11) the respondents' social class (self-identified); (12) ethnicity of respondent (white British/BAME); (13) gender of respondent. The reference level for both respondents' and speakers' social class was 'lower-working' as the extreme of the scale.

In order to avoid multicollinearity, several different models with different predictors were run for each of the dependent variables. Firstly, predictors (1) to (3) and (11) to (13) (related to speaker and respondents' social class, ethnicity and gender) were included in a separate model to other predictors. Secondly, models were run with only predictor (4). Predictor (4) was not included in the same analysis as speakers' ethnicity and class as it was not independent from these two variables. For instance, 62% of the BAME speakers came from London compared to 14% of the white British speakers.

Finally, separate models were run for each of predictors (5) to (10), relating to the speaker's identity data as there were correlations between these factors. For instance, there was a negative correlation between a speaker considering their accent to be 'Cockney' and 'Queen's English'. Separate models were run to avoid multicollinearity which could potentially reduce the predictive power and reliability of the model. Gaussian models were run as this reflected the distribution of each dependent variable which most closely resembled a normal distribution. For each analysis, significance was interpreted with  $\alpha$  was set at 0.05.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. RQ1: Social Status and Solidarity Evaluations of Geographic Areas

A series of aggregate, composite heatmaps (Figure 3) show how positively or negatively geographic areas were evaluated on social status and solidarity judgements. For each measure, positive (>74%) and negative evaluations (<26%) are on the left-hand side and the right-hand side of figure 3 respectively. The heatmaps show that, in general, on all social status and solidarity measures, much of London, particularly South West London, as well as the western home counties (Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire and particularly Surrey) were evaluated most positively. Whilst the effect was strongest for social status measures, it was also present for solidarity measures. In contrast, London (particularly East London) and Essex (particularly southern Essex) were evaluated most negatively on all measures. As predicted, there is substantial overlap in how London was evaluated. For all measures, speakers who were considered by respondents as coming from London were amongst the most positively and the most negatively evaluated.

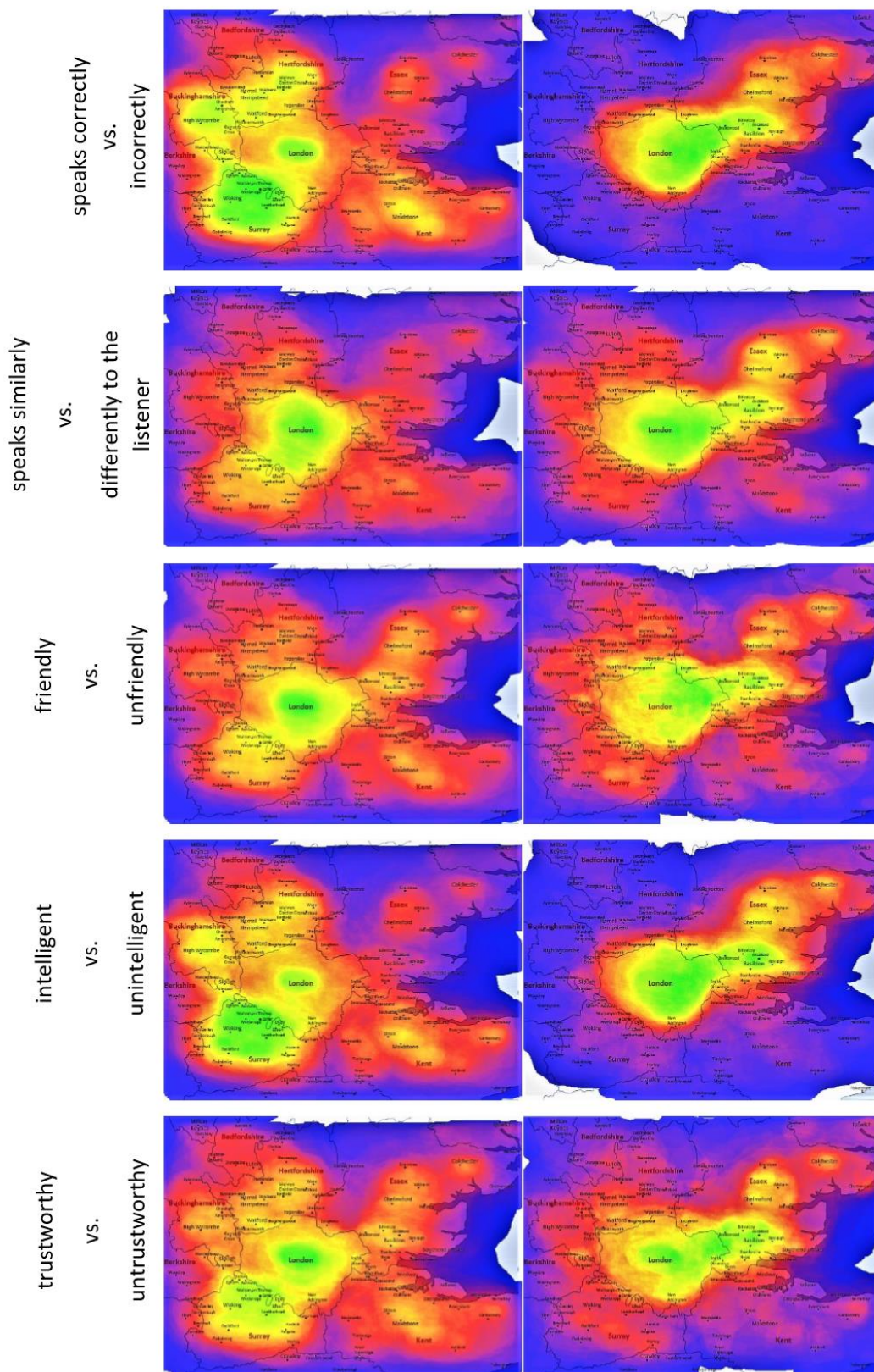


Figure 3. The relative frequency that geographic areas were evaluated positively (heatmaps on the left-hand side) and negatively (right-hand side). When respondents considered a speaker to come from East London or southern Essex, they evaluated them most negatively. In contrast South West London and the western home counties, particularly Surrey, were evaluated most positively. Light green = highest intensity; dark blue = lowest intensity.



#### 4.2. RQ2: Social Status and Solidarity Evaluations of Speaker(-groups)

Generalised linear models found significant differences in social status and solidarity scores according to both respondents' and speakers' socio-demographic factors (see table 4 in the appendix for the model outputs). In terms of the respondents' characteristics, male respondents were found to be more negative in their judgements of speakers (as also found by Coupland & Bishop, 2007). In general, they evaluated speakers as less intelligent, speaking less correctly and speaking more differently to themselves than women respondents did. White British respondents also tended to be more critical than BAME respondents. They judged speakers to be less friendly, less intelligent and as speaking less correctly but more similarly to themselves. It may not be surprising that white British respondents, in general, perceived speakers as speaking more similarly to themselves, given that 79.4% of speakers were indeed, white British (although respondents were unaware of this proportion). Compared to lower-working-class respondents, those of a higher class tended to be less critical in their evaluations of speakers. The lower middle class were by far the most positive evaluators whilst the lower working class were the most negative.

In terms of speakers' demographic factors, in general, the higher a speaker's class, the more likely they were to be evaluated more positively on social status measures. For instance, as shown in figure 4, the mean score for perceived intelligence was 50% for the lower working class compared to 64% for the upper middle class. In addition, the upper middle class were judged as speaking significantly more correctly than the lower working class (68% vs. 52%). Additionally, although the effect was not as large as for social status measures, upper-middle-class speakers were perceived as having higher solidarity compared to lower-working-class speakers. They were judged to be significantly more friendly (62% vs.

58%), more trustworthy (59% vs. 54%) and speaking more similarly to the respondent (60% vs. 52%).

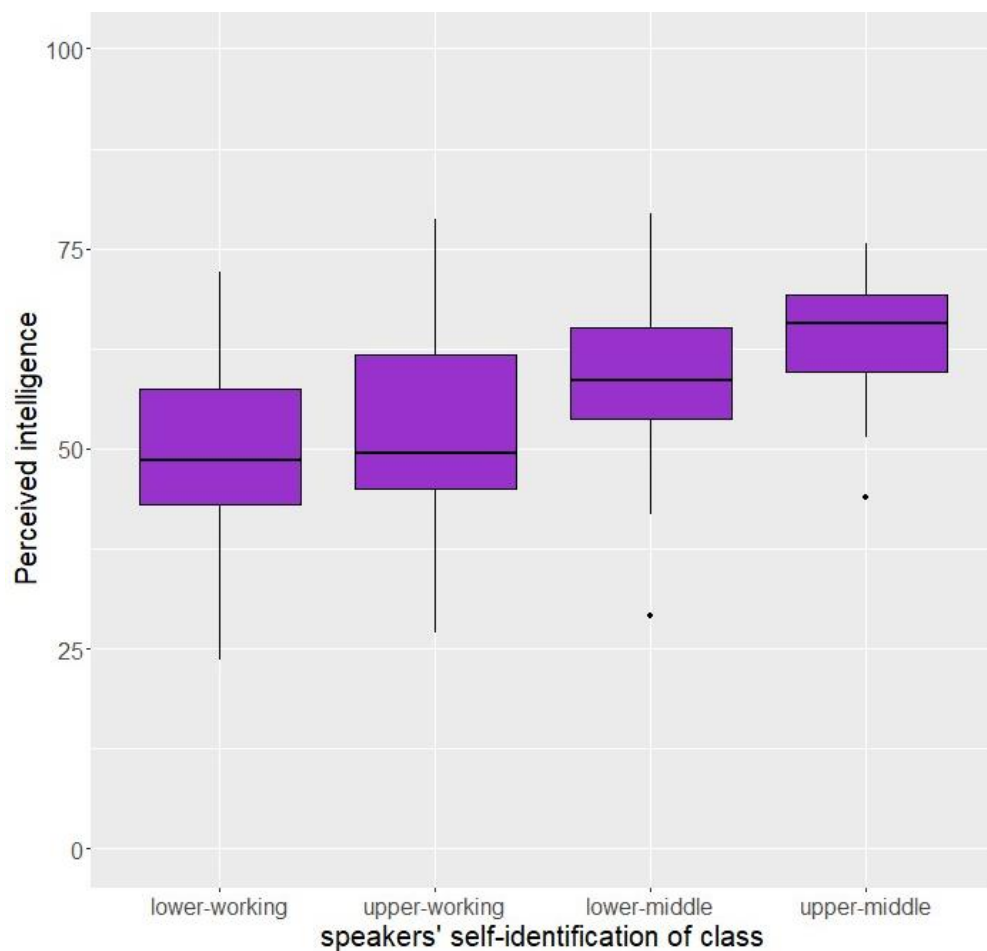


Figure 4. The social class of speakers and how intelligent they were perceived to be. The higher a speaker's class, the more likely they were to be evaluated as intelligent.

In terms of ethnicity, compared to BAME speakers, white British speakers were evaluated as having significantly higher social status. White British speakers were judged to be more intelligent (58% vs. 53%) (Figure 5) and to speak more correctly (62% vs. 54%). There were no significant differences in solidarity ratings between BAME and white British speakers.

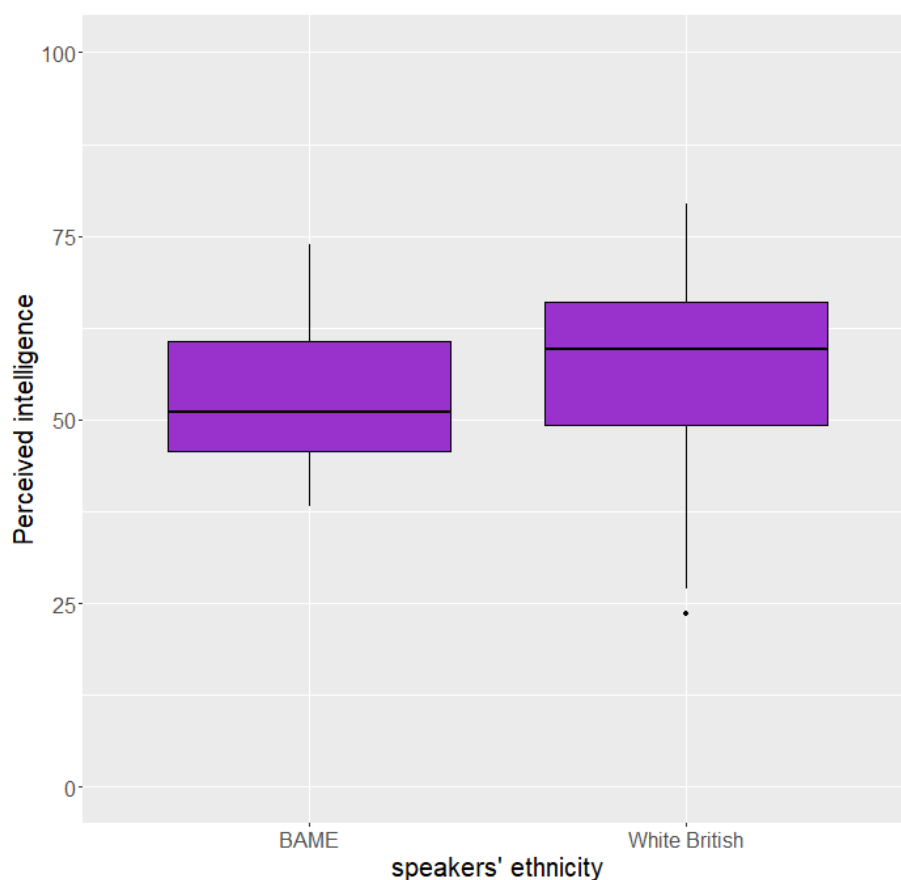


Figure 5. The ethnicity of speakers and how intelligent they were perceived to be. White British speakers were evaluated as significantly more intelligent than BAME speakers.

A self-bias effect was found for both class and ethnicity. That is, both white British and BAME respondents evaluated BAME speakers as less intelligent and as speaking less correctly than they evaluated white British speakers. For instance, on average, BAME respondents judged white British speakers to be 59% intelligent which was higher than their evaluation of other BAME speakers (55% intelligent). A similar effect was found for social class (Figure 6). Those who considered themselves to be lower working class judged the higher classes as more intelligent and as speaking more correctly. For instance, lower-working-class respondents evaluated other lower-working class

speakers on average as 48.2% intelligent compared to their judgement of upper-middle class speakers as 63.3% intelligent.

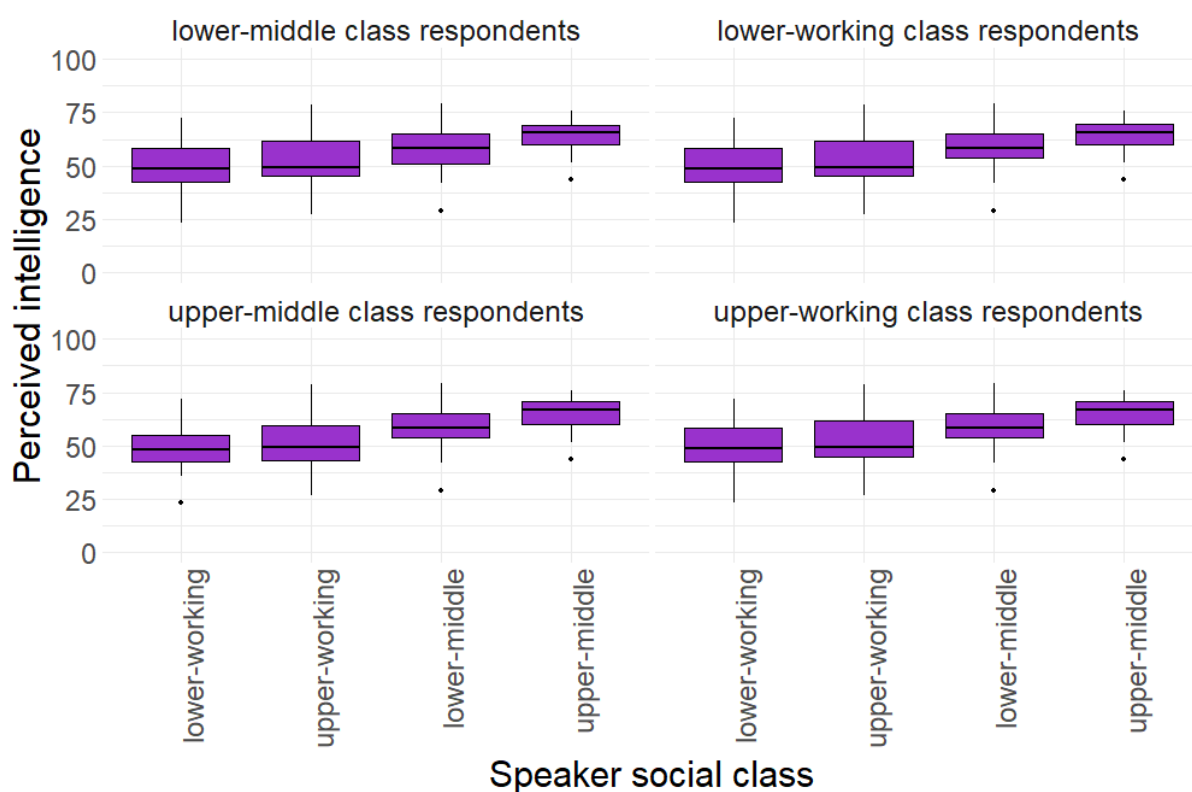


Figure 6. The average perceived intelligence of speakers in relation to the social class of both respondents and speakers. There is a self-bias effect. All classes, including the lower working class, consider lower-working-class speakers to be less intelligent than speakers from higher classes.

The relationship between how speakers were evaluated and their gender was more complex. Regardless of the respondent's gender, male speakers were perceived as more intelligent (58% vs 56%) and as speaking more correctly (61% vs 59%) than female speakers, but also as speaking less similarly to the respondent (55% vs 57%) and as being less friendly (57% vs 62%) and less trustworthy (54% vs 59%). In general, men

were perceived as having more social status whilst women were perceived as having more solidarity.

There were also significant effects relating to the speakers' identity data. Speakers who identified their own accent as 'Cockney' or 'London' were considered to be significantly less intelligent and as speaking less correctly and more differently to the respondent. Those who considered their accent to be 'south-eastern' or who indicated they were 'proud' of where they are from were evaluated as less friendly but speaking more similarly to the respondent. Speakers who indicated that they liked their accent or those who believed they spoke 'Queen's English' were evaluated most positively on all social status and solidarity measures (with the exception of perceived friendliness which was not significantly related to how much speakers liked their accents). In terms of identity factors, the greatest effect was found for 'Queen's English'. Those who considered their accent to be 'Queen's English' were evaluated as significantly more intelligent, friendly, trustworthy and as speaking more correctly and more similarly to the respondent.

Regarding the speaker's geographic provenance, in terms of solidarity judgements, there were not significant patterns in which areas were evaluated most positively or negatively on these measures. On social status judgements, compared to the reference level, speakers from the following areas were evaluated significantly more negatively on both measures (perceived intelligence and speaking correctly): East London, Essex, North west London, North East London, North London, South East London, South London, West London, as well as Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Suffolk, and West Sussex (Fig. 7). As predicted then, speakers from London as well as Essex were, on the whole, amongst the most negatively evaluated speaker-groups. In contrast, as hypothesised, the RP controls, as well as the speakers from the western counties such

as Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Bedfordshire, Hampshire were evaluated most positively, as well as speakers from South West London.

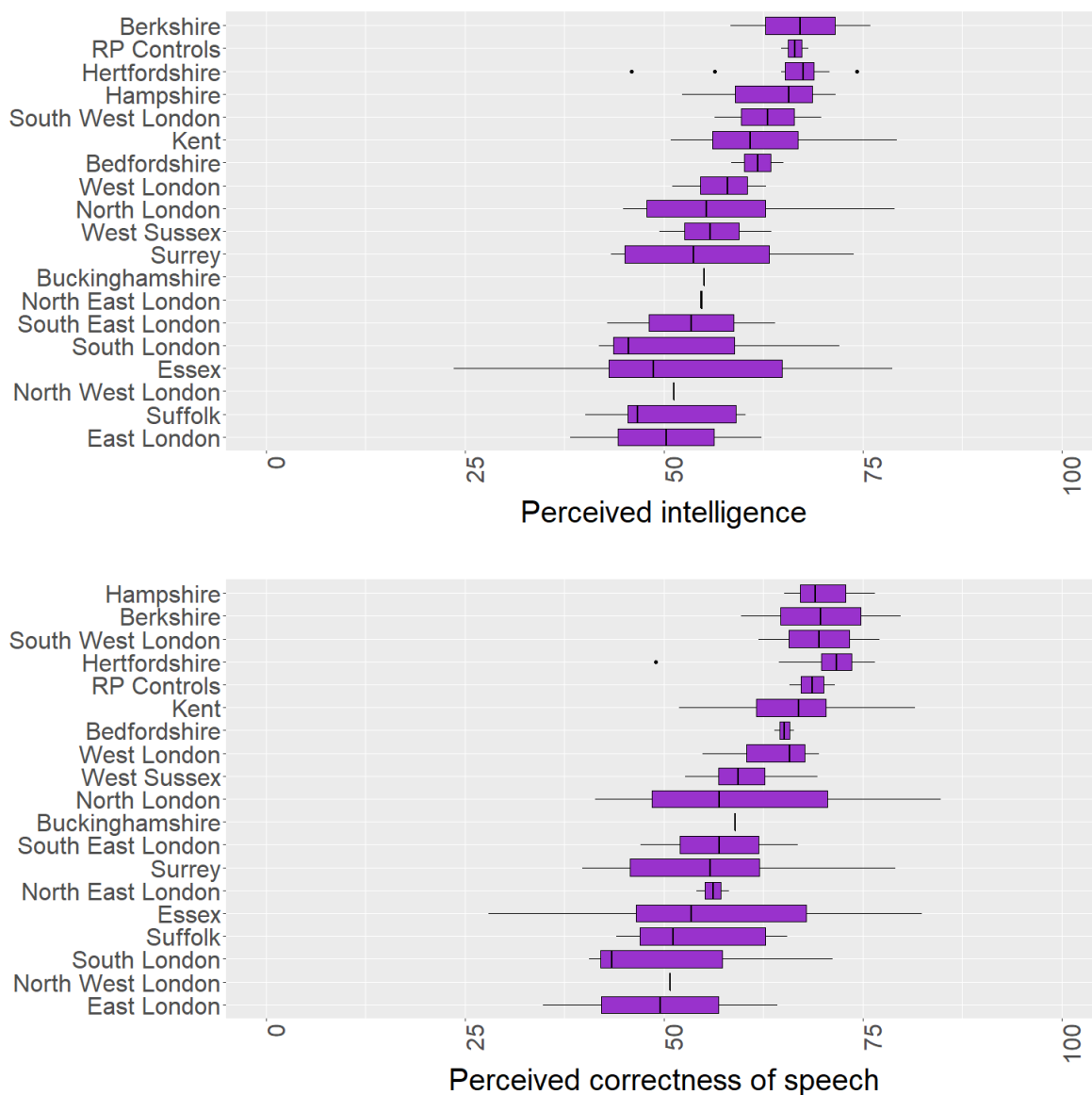


Figure 7. The home location of speakers and how they were evaluated on social status measures. Home locations are ordered from the highest mean score to the lowest for each attitudinal measure. Whilst there is much variation, in general, speakers from Essex and London are evaluated most negatively whilst speakers from South West London and much of the western home counties are evaluated most positively.

However, speakers from the same location were not evaluated uniformly. For instance, some speakers from East London were, on average, evaluated as speaking more correctly than the RP controls. Similarly, some speakers from Surrey were evaluated as less intelligent than the majority of speakers from East London. There was particularly high variation in how speakers from Essex were evaluated. Of all speakers in the sample, both the most positively evaluated speaker and the most negatively evaluated speaker on social status measures were from Essex (e.g. 78% vs. 23% score on perceived intelligence). The most positively evaluated speaker was from a village in northern Essex, St Osyth. The most negatively evaluated was from Debden, a council estate in southern Essex formed as part of the East London slum clearance programmes in the 1950s, where Cockney linguistic features are still present (Cole, 2021).

Figure 8 shows the actual home location of speakers and how positively they were evaluated. There are stark differences in how speakers from almost identical locations are evaluated. Demographic and identity factors were crucial in explaining the variation in how speakers from the same area were evaluated. For instance, two white, female speakers from South West Essex lived just 1.5 miles apart. However, they received mean perceived intelligence scores of 70% and 29% respectively. The former lives in Chigwell, an affluent area, attended fee-paying school, is university educated and identified as lower middle class. The latter is from Debden, attended state school, did not attain any further education, and identified as lower working class.

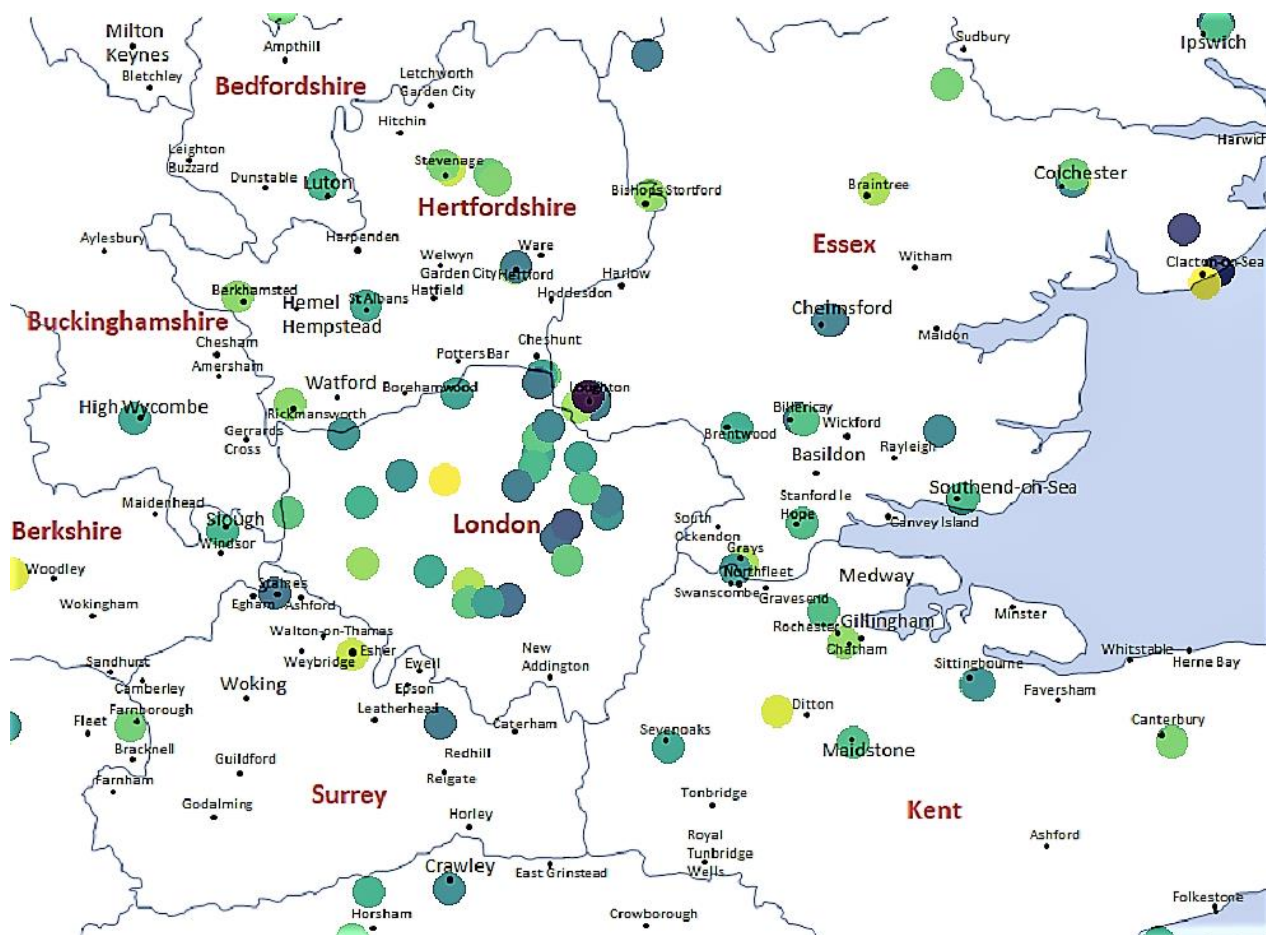


Figure 8. Speakers' home locations are coloured according to how intelligent they were judged to be on average. There is much variation in how speakers from very similar geographic locations are evaluated. For instance, circled are the home locations of a lower-middle-class woman and a lower-working-class woman who live 1.5 miles apart but who were evaluated as 70% and 29% intelligent respectively.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This paper has investigated language attitudes amongst young people in South East England with a broader methodological aim of disambiguating language attitudes held towards socio-demographic groups and geographic locations. Results reveal that working-class and BAME speakers are evaluated less positively on solidarity and



particularly social status measures compared to middle-class and white British speakers respectively. Contrary to the predictions of this paper, the accents of working-class speakers in South East England do not hold covert prestige. However, there were no significant differences in how BAME and white British speakers were evaluated on solidarity measures, suggesting that the accents of the former may hold some limited covert prestige.

As England's standard language is de-localised and class-marked, speakers who associated their accent with geographically diffused and supra-local terms such as 'Queen's English' were evaluated most positively. In contrast, those who identified their accents as 'London', 'Cockney' or 'typical', or even those who indicated they were 'proud' of where they come from, were evaluated negatively. There was also a trend for speakers from certain areas, especially London and Essex, to be evaluated most negatively on social status measures, but there were no significant patterns for solidarity measures.

The results of this study corroborate previous research in which respondents' evaluations of accent labels have revealed a remarkable consistency in the hierarchy of British accents (Bishop et al, 2005; Giles, 1970; Levon et al., 2020). In these studies, RP (as designated through accent labels) was the most positively evaluated variety in contrast to working class and ethnic varieties which were evaluated most negatively. The self-bias effect for both ethnicity and class that was revealed in this paper demonstrates that standard language ideology operates intuitively and goes widely unchallenged even by those who it directly disadvantages. Although respondents were provided with no prior information about speakers, results demonstrated that speakers' demographic and identity factors, particularly class and ethnicity, were crucial in determining how they were evaluated.

Effects were also found regarding how geographic areas were evaluated. The heatmaps presented in section 4.1 reveal systematic patterns in how different geographic areas are perceived. As predicted, if a speaker were evaluated negatively, they were most frequently identified, often erroneously, as coming from East London and southern Essex. In contrast, the speakers who were evaluated most positively were presumed, once again often erroneously, as originating from London and/or the western home counties, particularly South West London and Surrey. Whilst these patterns were strikingly consistent for all social status and solidarity measures, the effect was greatest for the former. These results demonstrate that, as a result of the movement of Cockney people and their dialect to Essex (Cole, 2021, Cole & Evans, 2020), negative evaluations of Cockney (Bishop et al., 2005; Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland 1975) have now been transposed onto Essex.

Nonetheless, the heatmaps cannot be interpreted independently of respondents' accuracy in the geographic identification task. The heatmaps depict the intersection between how speakers were evaluated and where they were thought to come from. If speakers from Essex are evaluated negatively but are consistently accurately identified as coming from Essex, the heatmaps would depict language attitudes held towards Essex speech stimuli and not necessarily towards the geographic area of Essex. Nonetheless, in this study, speakers who were thought to be from Essex were consistently evaluated negatively, regardless of whether or not they were indeed from the Essex or not. Although significantly better than chance, respondents performed the geographic identification task with only 12.3% accuracy (compared to 9.3% for chance). Further, accurately circling a speaker's home location is not necessarily synonymous with the respondent knowing where a speaker is from as they may have circled up to a third of the map. Thus, the heatmaps depict respondents' stereotyped evaluations of

different geographic areas and not how speakers actually from these areas were evaluated. As demonstrated, speakers from very similar locations were evaluated in remarkably disparate ways, which was strongly conditioned by demographic factors.

This effect was most notable for London. London is not only home to white, working-class Cockneys and BAME speakers of MLE, but also to middle-class professionals who are most likely to speak RP-like varieties. It is not surprising that previous research has found that the accent label 'London' holds ambiguous designations as well as being evaluated differently to the label 'Cockney' (Bishop et al., 2005). Correspondingly, in this study, neither the geographic area of London nor speakers from London were evaluated uniformly. Instead, language attitudes were most strongly conditioned by speakers' demographic, and to a much lesser extent, identity factors.

The imperfect mapping between the evaluations of geographic areas and socio-demographic groups is not to suggest that the two are not intricately related. It is no coincidence that, firstly, the most negatively evaluated geographic areas are East London and Essex and, secondly, the working class and/or BAME are the most negatively evaluated speaker groups. Indeed, these geographic areas are the most populated or, at least, have highest cultural prominence in relation to these socio-demographic groups. Nonetheless, the stereotyped evaluations of geographic areas only loosely translate to how speakers actually from these areas were evaluated. Whilst respondents perceive East London and Essex most negatively, not all speakers from these areas were evaluated negatively. Instead, working-class and/or BAME speakers from across South East England are evaluated most negatively, which is confounded if they are from East London or Essex.

In sum, this paper has demonstrated that disambiguating the language attitudes held towards socio-demographic groups and geographic areas is paramount to understanding the configuration of language attitudes in an area, particularly, for areas which have high cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. The results have revealed systematic patterns in the stereotyped evaluations of different geographic areas which does not perfectly map onto how speakers actually from these areas are evaluated. Instead, language attitudes towards speech stimuli was most strongly conditioned by speakers' identity and demographic factors, particularly class and ethnicity. In South East England, a hierarchy of accents pervades which disadvantages BAME and/or working-class speakers, particularly those from Essex or East London, whilst it simultaneously bestows speakers of the class-marked and de-localised standard variety with more favourable evaluations.

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## 7. APPENDIX

Dependent variable:

	Intelligent (1)	Friendly (2)	Trustworthy (3)	Different (4)	Correct (5)
<b>GLM Model 1</b>					
<i>Speaker ethnicity:</i> <i>White British</i>	2.89***	0.19	-0.09	0.423	6.3***
<i>Speaker class:</i> <i>upper-working</i>	2.84**	-0.45	0.68	-2.12	3.99***
<i>Speaker class:</i> <i>lower-middle</i>	9.35***	2.96***	3.07***	-5.38***	9.28***
<i>Speaker class:</i> <i>upper-middle</i>	14.65***	5.3***	5.74***	-8.19***	14.99***
<i>Speaker gender:</i> <i>male</i>	0.43	-6.19***	-4.67***	2.6***	0.76
<i>Respondent class:</i> <i>upper working</i>	0.28	0.84	3.54***	-4.4***	1.32
<i>Respondent class:</i> <i>lower middle</i>	4.04***	3.84***	6.21***	-6.09***	4.94***
<i>Respondent class:</i> <i>upper middle</i>	-0.23	-1.33	3.05**	-2.79*	0.4
<i>Respondent class:</i> <i>lower upper</i>	2.75	3.08	5.23*	-11.6***	5.22*
<i>Respondent class:</i> <i>upper upper</i>	2.07	6.85	3.23	7.17	-4.1
<i>Respondent</i> <i>gender: male</i>	-3.79***	0.09	-0.88	1.44*	-2.88***
<i>Respondent</i> <i>ethnicity: White</i> <i>British</i>	-2.99***	-1.95**	-0.55	-4.57***	-3.84***
<b>GLM Model 2</b>					
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>Bedfordshire</i>	-6.64*	0.62	-1.33	1.73	-4.68
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>Buckinghamshire</i>	-11.2***	4.45	5.12	-3.78	-9.31**
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>East London</i>	-17.62***	-3.07	-1.66	0.33	-20.65***
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>Essex</i>	-16.44***	-4.75	-4.58*	1.56	-15.16***
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>Hampshire</i>	-4.93	-10.63***	-3.66	-2.98	0.89
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>Hertfordshire</i>	-2.3	-3.77	-1.47	-4.51	-0.2
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>Kent</i>	-4.53	-2.25	-1.38	-4.27	-2.23
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>North London</i>	-10.68***	-0.49	-0.59	0.367	-11.03***
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>North West</i> <i>London</i>	-13.97***	0.38	3.34	-8.72*	-17.16***
<i>Speaker county:</i> <i>North East London</i>	-12.12***	-1.52	-2.55	4.50	-11.9***

<i>Speaker county: RP controls</i>	-0.57	4.24	3.46	-5.73	-1.22
<i>Speaker county: South London</i>	-14.9***	-0.92	-3.21	8.35*	-17.53***
<i>Speaker county: South East London</i>	-12.9***	-2.97	-3.7	-3.84	-12.27***
<i>Speaker county: South West London</i>	-3.79	3.06	-0.02	-6.6	0.15
<i>Speaker county: Suffolk</i>	-17.27***	-2.07	-1.67	-3.93	-15.18***
<i>Speaker county: Surrey</i>	-11.62***	2.09	3.61	-0.58	-13.35***
<i>Speaker county: West London</i>	-10.54***	2.43	0.67	-6.88*	-6.81*
<i>Speaker county: West Sussex</i>	-12.63***	-13.07	-7.77**	-2.89	-10.49***
<b>GLM Model 3</b>					
<i>Speaker 'like' accent</i>	0.061***	0.002	0.04***	-0.05***	0.04***
<b>GLM Model 4</b>					
<i>Speak 'proud' of where they're from</i>	0.02*	-0.02**	0.01	-0.029**	-0.003
<b>GLM Model 5</b>					
<i>Speaker has 'typical' accent</i>	-0.003	-0.06***	-0.01	0.01	-0.02*
<b>GLM Model 6</b>					
<i>Speaker has 'south-eastern' accent</i>	0.001	-0.05***	-0.01	-0.02*	0.003
<b>GLM Model 7</b>					
<i>Speaker has 'London' accent</i>	-0.05***	-0.002	0.002	0.02*	-0.075***
<b>GLM Model 8</b>					
<i>Speaker has 'Queen's English' accent</i>	0.14***	0.03**	0.05***	-0.07***	0.14***
<b>GLM Model 9</b>					
<i>Speaker has 'Cockney' accent</i>	-0.09***	-0.01	-0.009	0.05**	-0.13***
<b>GLM Model 10</b>					
<i>Speaker has 'Estuary English' accent</i>	-0.008	0.01	0.014	-0.006	0.003

*Signif codes: p<0.05\*; p<0.01\*\*, p<0.001\*\*\**

Table 4. Coefficient and significance values for a series of gaussian generalised linear models assessing the role of both speaker and respondent demographic and identity data on language attitudes. In general, the working class, BAME, those from London or Essex, and those who identify their accent in geographically marked terms are those who are most negatively evaluated.

## Chapter 10. Thesis Conclusion

This thesis explored variation, change and the social meaning of phonetic features in South East England in the context of ongoing linguistic and social change, particularly, as a result of the Cockney Diaspora.

This thesis had the following research questions:

1. Are Cockney linguistic features found in Debden, an outpost of the Cockney Diaspora to Essex?
2. Is there evidence of phonetic change in Debden? If so, is it related to:
  - a. Socio-historical changes, in particular, the increase in social mobility from the 1980s?
  - b. Speaker gender?
  - c. The changes observed in other areas of the South East?
3. What is the social meaning of individual or collections of south-eastern linguistic features and how does this relate to the distribution and rates of change observed for these features in Debden?
4. Is there inequivalence in how the accents associated with certain geographic areas or used by certain speaker groups (e.g. class, ethnicity, gender) in South East England are evaluated on social status and solidarity measures?

In this chapter I summarise the relevant findings and implications for each research question in turn.

### **10.1. Research question 1: Has the Cockney accent moved to Debden?**

Previous research has investigated the reduction of Cockney in East London, but to my knowledge there has not been research into the English spoken in Cockney outposts in Essex. Whilst Fox (2015: 13) suggested that Cockney may have moved east into Essex, this has not been empirically investigated. This thesis has bridged this gap by examining to what extent Cockney linguistic features are found in a key outpost of the Cockney Diaspora: the Debden Estate.

The results of Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are mostly congruent; what we think of as the Cockney accent has moved east to Essex (or at least, to Debden). Chapters 6 and 8 demonstrate that Cockney vowels are present there to a greater extent than previously observed in Hackney or Havering (Cheshire et al., 2011; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008), Tower Hamlets (Fox, 2015), Milton Keynes or Reading (Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005; Williams & Kerswill 1999). Chapter 6 established that a crossover in the MOUTH and PRICE trajectories (as found in traditional Cockney, Wells 1982) is present in the individual vowel systems of even the youngest speakers in Debden. All speakers in Debden produced MOUTH and PRICE in line with the shifted vowel system which is

characteristic of Cockney (Sivertsen, 1960; Wells, 1982). That is, although there is evidence of apparent-time change, all speakers have a backed onset for PRICE and a fronted onset for MOUTH in relation to SSBE forms. In concordance with the results of Chapter 6, paper 8 also found a backed onset for PRICE and a fronted onset for MOUTH in all age-groups. Similarly, this paper demonstrated that on the whole, a Cockney monophthong system has been maintained in Debden. For instance, all age groups have a raised THOUGHT vowel, a fronted GOOSE vowel, and somewhat fronted TRAP and STRUT vowels in line with descriptions of Cockney (Wells, 1982).

Chapter 7 investigated variation and change, and rates of co-occurrence between (H) and (ING). H-dropping and g-dropping have both been previously documented in the speech of working-class East Londoners ((H): Hudson and Holloway, 1977; Wells, 1982; (ING): Hughes et al., 2012; Labov, 1989; Mott, 2011). These traits appear to have been transplanted from East London to Debden. Whilst there is evidence of relatively recent change in (H), speakers over approximately 35 years have high rates of both h-dropping and g-dropping. Therefore, regardless of recent change, the traditional Cockney variants of (H) and (ING) were transplanted from East London to Debden where they continued across generations.

In summary, as suggested by Fox (2015: 13), Cockney linguistic features have “moved east” (or north-east in this case) from East London to Essex - or at least, to Debden - along with the communities who relocated.

## **10.2. Research question 2: Is there phonetic change in Debden?**

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 all concur that there has been linguistic change in Debden which is evident in apparent time. The results of these three chapters reveal abrupt linguistic change at a remarkably similar time-point. Change is most evident in speakers born in the period between 1982 and 1990. The results of these three papers coincide in demonstrating that young people in Debden are shifting away from Cockney and towards SSBE forms. There is no evidence of MLE targets for any of the linguistic variables analysed.

Chapter 6 found abrupt change in speakers aged <28 years who are shifting towards the regional standard (SSBE) in their production of the PRICE and MOUTH vowels. That is, the Cockney PRICE-MOUTH crossover is reversing in apparent time: the onset of PRICE is fronting, and the onset of MOUTH is backing. Chapter 8 also found change in the diphthong and monophthong systems towards SSBE targets that have emerged in the youngest age group (14-27 years). Whilst there is no evidence of significant change in the F2 dimension for PRICE, the onset is raising. The onset of MOUTH is lowering and

backing. The youngest age group also have lowered and backed TRAP and STRUT vowels and fronted GOOSE and FOOT vowels. In contrast, no change was found for the START or KIT vowels.

The fronting of the GOOSE and FOOT vowels in Debden is consistent with an advancement of Cockney vowel shift. Both FOOT and GOOSE are further fronted in Cockney than in RP (Wells, 1982). Nonetheless, in recent decades, GOOSE and FOOT fronting has been widely reported across South East England, including in SSBE (FOOT: Torgersen 2002; GOOSE: Harrington, Kleber & Reubold, 2008). Perhaps as a result of the ongoing influence of Cockney on the speech of South East England for decades (Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Wells, 1982, 1997), these traditionally Cockney features have been re-interpreted as forming part of the regional standard. A fronting of these vowels in Debden is consistent with change towards SSBE.

In terms of consonants, Chapter 7 found change towards the standard form for (H) but not (ING) in Debden. As speaker age increased, so too did the probability of h-dropping. This result is in keeping with recent observations in South East England (Williams & Kerswill, 1999) and London (Cheshire et al., 2008) where /h/ is in an advanced process of re-instatement. In Debden, speakers aged >35 years have a relatively high rate of h-dropping: between 40% and 70% for males and between 20% and 50% for females. In contrast, rates of h-dropping are substantially lower in speakers



aged  $\leq 35$  years. Amongst the youngest recorded speakers in the sample, adolescents, /h/ is almost completely re-instated. This was particularly the case for teenage girls in Debden who almost categorically produce /h/. In contrast, (ING) was stable; there were no significant age or gender effects or interactions between these variables in rates of g-dropping. In line with traditional descriptions of white, working-class East London speech, all age groups in Debden had high rates of the non-standard form (an average of 83% for males and 84.2% for women).

Whilst there is evidence that the Cockney accent has moved from East London to Debden where it is maintained to a greater extent than other areas of the South East including East London, change is also present. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 have evidenced linguistic change towards SSBE in Debden which has occurred for several (but not all) of the linguistic variables that were analysed. This change has occurred most abruptly in those aged between 27 and 35 years at the time of recording in 2017. Therefore, linguistic change in Debden emerged in those born between 1982 and 1990. The following sub-sections provide a deeper analysis as well as possible explanations for the linguistic change observed.

### **10.2.1. Research question 2a: Socio-historical change and language change**

It seems most likely that change towards SSBE reflects, more broadly, a speaker/community's ideological shift towards SSBE's class and status associations.

Much like in Milton Keynes and Reading (Kerswill & Williams, 2005), shift towards SSBE in Debden is not simply reflective of dialect levelling towards a majority variety. Instead, the linguistic change observed in Debden represents a shift towards a supra-local, variety. That is, in this instance, increased contact with speakers of SSBE is not a sufficient explanation for the linguistic change observed in young speakers.

It seems no coincidence that linguistic change in Debden has coincided with the wide-scale socio-political changes of the 1980s. The lives of many working-class families on council estates in Essex were impacted greatly by the introduction of neoliberal policy in the early 1980s (Biressi & Nunn, 2013, 2014; Rye, 2015). The governmental policies of this era moved away from redistributive policies and sought to extend market rule and dismantle class distinctions. As a result, council estates in Essex (including Debden) experienced heightened variation along traditional class measures such as educational attainment, employment type and home-ownership status. It seems probable that as a result of the (potential for) increased social mobility in Debden, linguistic change has emerged in the generation that were born in or after this social change.

These findings accord with previous work which has established that dialect levelling is most prevalent in areas with higher social mobility (Williams & Kerswill, 1999). Williams and Kerswill compare the rate and degree of dialect levelling observed in

both Milton Keynes and Reading to the northern town, Hull. They find that dialect levelling has not occurred to the same extent in Hull as the two southern towns. The authors posit that the reduced dialect levelling in Hull is explained by the relatively lower social mobility in the town. They suggest that in Hull there is limited social mixing in many schools, a strong tendency for families to live in the same housing estate for several generations, and high unemployment rates. As a result of these factors, they believe that children in Hull “remain unconvinced of the value of education as a passport to social mobility and have little incentive to modify their accents” (Williams and Kerswill, 1999: 160).

In much the same vein, prior to the 1980s, Debdenites had little incentive to modify their accents as educational and employment opportunities were limited, and social networks were mostly contained within the local sphere. In contrast, the socio-political changes of the 1980s have afforded an increased potential for social mobility for those born in the 1980s or later. This social change has incentivised linguistic change towards the supra-local standard variety, SSBE. It is possible that young speakers reject Cockney linguistic features as they are stigmatised and strongly associated with working-class and ‘improper’ speech (Giles, 1970; Giles and Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland, 1975; Wells, 1982). As such, there is an ongoing incentive for the working

class in Essex to modify their accent in order to receive more positive social evaluations and to achieve greater social mobility.

In summary, it seems that as a result of the wide-scale social and political changes that took place throughout the 1980s, language change is observed most dramatically amongst those born in and after the introduction of these changes. As a result, speakers are shifting away from traditional Cockney forms and towards more pan-regional, south-eastern forms.

### **10.2.2. Research question 2b: Gender and language change**

This thesis investigated whether there are gender effects in the linguistic variation observed in Debden and whether either gender is leading language change. Chapter 8 demonstrated that as well as some linguistic differences between men and women, there were also gender differences in identity. Although a Cockney identity is not available for young men, the identity is possible for some young women, likely as a result of their lifestyles which are grounded within and reflect the matrifocal nature of Cockney (Cohen 2013; Young & Willmott 1957). This supports the work of Cohen (2013) who found that Cockney culture was matrifocal and that a Cockney identity was matrilinear. That is, although young women in the Isle of Dogs still identified as Cockney, the erosion of job succession from father to son in dock workers meant that young men no longer feel a strong sense of Cockney identity. Similarly, in Debden, some young women do not

live lives that differ drastically from the lives of young women in East London in the 1950s. In contrast, as a result of de-industrialisation, the lives of many young men in Debden differ greatly to the lives of young men in East London in the 1950s. The different trajectories of lifestyle changes between (some) men and women in Debden may have resulted in the differences in identity between men and women in Debden.

In terms of linguistic gender differences, Chapter 8 found that THOUGHT, KIT and LOT were more backed and TRAP was more fronted and raised in men compared to women. For these vowels, men's productions were more in line with traditional Cockney variants than women's. Fronted productions of LOT and THOUGHT vowels and lowered and backed productions of TRAP were also most prevalent in the youngest age group (14-27 years). This suggests that for these vowels, women are leading change. No significant gender effects were found for any other vowel. There were also no significant interactions between gender and age group with the exception of the F2 values for the MOUTH onset. For this vowel, there was a gender effect for the 14-27 years group alone; men had a more backed MOUTH onset than women. As this change was only found in the 14-27 years group, it did not represent a systematic gender difference in the production of this vowel.

In line with these findings, Chapter 6 found some differences between males and females in linguistic production. Dynamic differences in the vowel trajectory were found

between men and women for the PRICE vowel. The F2 trajectory in PRICE was significantly affected by gender with females overall ahead of males with respect to onglide fronting. In contrast, there were no significant gender effects for the MOUTH vowel and no significant interactions between gender and age group for either vowel. Chapter 7 found that rates of h-dropping were higher in men than women (48.4% for men compared to 23.3% for women), and also higher in older speakers than younger speakers. There were no age or gender effects for (ING), and no significant interactions between age and gender for either (H) or (ING).

In summary then, in comparison to females, males produce several linguistic features more in line with traditional descriptions of Cockney: backed THOUGHT and LOT vowels; raised and fronted TRAP; centralised KIT; backed PRICE onset; higher rates of h-dropping. Nonetheless, for other linguistic variables there were no significant gender effects: MOUTH, GOOSE, FOOT, START, STRUT, NURSE, DRESS, FLEECE, (ING). Thus, it is not simply the case that for all linguistic variables in Debden, men more frequently produce vernacular variants than women. However, for the linguistic variables where gender differences were found, there is some evidence for Labov's principle that women are more likely to disfavour features which are noted for their negative features are instead, favour prestigious features (2001: 279-284, 319).

There is also some tentative evidence overall that women lead change towards prestigious forms (see Labov, 1990:213 as revised in 2001). The linguistic change observed in apparent time in Debden represents shift towards incoming prestige variants. The linguistic variables that were in a process of change towards prestige forms were also most prevalent in the speech of women (fronted LOT and THOUGHT; lowered and backed TRAP; fronted onset of PRICE; lower rates of h-dropping). Nonetheless, there are no significant interactions between the age and gender for any of these variables. This suggests that whilst older women have significantly higher rates of the prestigious forms than older men, young women also have significantly higher rates of the prestigious forms than young men. Overall, women in Debden tend to use higher rates of prestigious variants whilst men have higher rates of Cockney variants. There is also evidence of community-level change towards SSBE forms which are most prevalent in the speech of women.

Initially, the linguistic production results seem in contradiction with the identity data. Whilst young women are more likely to maintain an affiliation with a Cockney identity, the opposite is found in terms of linguistic differences. Women were more likely to shift away from traditional Cockney forms. However, this is not necessarily a contradiction. As will be explored in section 10.3, this discrepancy is found because

traditional Cockney linguistic features are no longer interpreted as Cockney amongst many young people in Debden but are, instead, are most strongly associated with Essex.

### **10.2.3. Research question 2c: Comparing Debden and other areas of the South East**

We have established that linguistic change away from Cockney and, more broadly, towards south-eastern norms has emerged abruptly in Debden amongst the generation born between 1982 and 1990. What remains to be understood is why Debden differs to other areas of the South East. The rate and perhaps also the targets of linguistic change in Debden differ to those observed in the south-eastern towns of Milton Keynes and Reading or to those observed in Hackney and Havering (in inner and outer East London respectively).

MLE features have emerged in inner East London, e.g. in Tower Hamlets (Fox, 2015) and Hackney, and to a lesser extent in Havering (Cheshire et al., 2011; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008). In contrast, there is no evidence of MLE targets in Debden. This is initially surprising as Debden shares many social, geographic, historical, and demographic similarities with Havering. Debden is as close to central London as Havering and the two communities have a similar demographic make-up. Whilst the inner East London borough of Hackney has high rates of ethnic and linguistic diversity, both Havering and Debden are more ethnically homogenous. According to the 2011 Census, 85.7% and 90.5% of the populations of Havering and Epping Forest District



(where Debden is located) were of White ethnicity, compared to 54.7% in Hackney (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Debden and Havering also have similar socio-historical backgrounds. As part of the Greater London Plan, Debden was built in Essex and the Harold Hill Estate was built in Havering. The two estates are architecturally almost identical and were both populated by East Londoners in the early 1950s. It is not surprising then that descriptions of the vowel system of older speakers in both Havering (Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox, 2008) and Debden are in keeping with a traditional Cockney vowel system.

Although Debden and Havering share a similar socio-historical and demographic background, the different trajectories of linguistic change may, in part, be related to subtle differences in the communities' socio-historical circumstances. Whilst Debden is officially in Essex, Havering is in Greater London. The London Government Act 1963 saw the areas that now constitute the boroughs of Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Havering, and Barking and Dagenham transferred from Essex to Greater London. It has previously been evidenced that speakers orientate their speech production towards the general speech norms of the county in which they live (Llamas, 2007; Montgomery & Moore, 2017). As summarised in Section 2.2, much recent variationist work has explored the construction and interpretation of place which is often symbolically defined and delineated. This is because we know that linguistic production forms part of identity establishment which

involves choices about who a speaker wishes to align to (see Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Eckert & Labov, 2017). It is possible that the official geographic location of Debden and Havering has impacted the targets of linguistic change. Young speakers in Debden may look ideologically outwards to the home counties whilst young speakers in Havering look inwards to inner East London.

Similarly, whilst many young speakers in Debden label their accent as “Essex”, it seems unlikely that young speakers in Havering would define this accent with the same label (see Bourdieu’s [1991: 239] “the power of naming” and Watt’s (2009) “selective belonging”). The high cultural prominence (Montgomery, 2012) of the county of Essex, and in particular South West Essex, may increase the likelihood of young people in Debden identifying with an Essex accent. The county of Essex, its associations and its accent have become increasingly prominent and available to wide-spread audiences. For instance, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, British Newspapers have published articles which attempt to contextualise and document the Essex accent. Furthermore, TV sitcoms such as *Birds of a Feather* and more recently the docusoap *The Only Way is Essex* have aired stereotyped depictions of Essex and its dialect. Debden is not only located in Essex but is situated in Loughton in South West Essex - one of the main filming locations of *TOWIE* and an area strongly associated with the Essex Man and Essex Girl iconographies (Biressi & Nunn, 2014). Essex is a county with high cultural

prominence which leads to a high social salience of the stereotyped perceptions of Essex (particularly for South West Essex and Loughton) and its associated accent.

It is likely that the geographic location of Debden and the high social prominence of Essex increases the likelihood of young people in Debden firstly labelling their accent as “Essex”, rather than using more general, pan-regional terms. Secondly, young Debden speakers are more likely to shift towards an “Essex” accent which they associate with more general, working-class, south-eastern norms. In contrast, young speakers in Havering are shifting towards MLE, in line with trends found in inner East London. Despite the similar socio-historical backgrounds of Havering and Debden, young speakers are shifting towards different linguistic targets as a result of the communities’ official, geographic locations and the accents associated with each area. This demonstrates the relationship between a speaker’s sense of place and their linguistic production and identity (see Montgomery & Moore, 2017).

Whilst the targets of linguistic change in Debden and Havering differ, the change observed in Debden is more analogous to that observed in Reading and Milton Keynes. In both Milton Keynes and Reading, traditional Cockney productions of MOUTH and PRICE were found in older speakers whilst younger speakers favoured forms that more closely resembled SSBE. Nonetheless, change towards SSBE occurred at an earlier stage in both these towns than in Debden. Change had occurred in Milton Keynes amongst the

children recorded in the early 1990s. In contrast, significant change is not observed in the Debden vowel system in speakers born before 1992. Furthermore, change was at a more advanced linguistic stage in the 1990s in Milton Keynes than that observed presently in Debden. For instance, in Milton Keynes, whilst Cockney variants of the MOUTH vowel were found in older speakers, productions most closely resembled the SSBE form [aʊ] in young speakers (Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005). In contrast, in Debden, even the youngest speaker group (adolescents) produce the MOUTH vowel with a somewhat fronted onset in comparison to SSBE.

Why then has change emerged later and to a lesser extent in Debden compared to Milton Keynes and Reading? Firstly, the targets of change may differ between Debden and the latter two south-eastern towns. As already mentioned, young speakers in Debden are not shifting towards SSBE per se, but away from Cockney and towards more general, working-class, south-eastern norms which they associate with an Essex accent. As will be explored in more depth later in this chapter, for young people in South East England, an Essex accent has come to exemplify a south-eastern, white, working-class accent. In contrast, an Essex accent is not a likely target of change in Milton Keynes or Reading as the towns are not geographically situated in Essex. As a result, the targets of linguistic change in Milton Keynes and Reading appear to more closely resemble SSBE forms than the targets for linguistic change in Debden.

Secondly, and perhaps most convincingly, change is observed to a lesser extent in Debden compared to Milton Keynes and Reading as the communities do not have the same starting point for change. Debden and Milton Keynes were constructed with similar ends: to ease the over-population of East London. The early inhabitants to Milton Keynes came from more heterogeneous backgrounds than the original inhabitants of Debden. In the period 1967-1988, 76.2% of those who migrated to Milton Keynes had moved there from other areas in the South East, and of those, only half were from London (Kerswill & Williams, 2000: 78). In contrast, almost the entirety of early inhabitants of Debden were moved directly from East London as part of the Greater London Plan (Abercrombie, 1944). Whilst all of South East England has been linguistically influenced by Cockney throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Wells, 1982, 1997), Debden was populated by Cockneys. As a result, Debden, Milton Keynes and Reading likely had different starting points in the observed linguistic change. It is likely that at construction, Debden had a higher prominence of Cockney linguistic features than both Milton Keynes and Reading.

Similarly, Debden's East London heritage and the importation of Cockney culture to Debden (e.g. pie and mash shops) may have encouraged greater and prolonged maintenance of Cockney features. This has likely been intensified by the relative separation of Debden from the surrounding area (e.g. separate schools, high street,

station). Furthermore, Cockney culture is associated with strong family and kinship ties, and close-knit community (Young & Willmott, 1957). The changes found in Milton Keynes have been linked to limited close-knit social networks in the community (Torgersen & Kerswill 2004). Therefore, the close-knit nature of Cockney culture may have inhibited linguistic change away from Cockney features in Debden.

In summary, as a result of the idiosyncratic demographic, social, cultural and historical background of Debden, linguistic production has taken a unique course. The linguistic change in Debden has different starting points, targets and rates of change to those observed in other speech communities in South East England and London.

### **10.3. Research question 3: Social meaning and language change**

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there has previously been little more than anecdotal evidence that some Cockney linguistic features have been re-evaluated as an Essex accent. For instance, the British newspapers *The Sun* and *The Guardian* have both run articles suggesting that an Essex accent is “nouveau Cockney” (Nunn, *The Guardian*, 2 Aug 2012; Pharo, *The Sun*, 20 April 2017). This is also reminiscent of the CD released by the Essex Records Office. This CD sought to document and raise awareness of the traditional Essex accent which the Essex Records Office believe is in decline as a result of the spread of a London accent (Essex County Records Office, 2012a).

Chapter 8 substantiated these claims that some Cockney linguistic features have been enregistered as an Essex accent. It was found that young people in Debden have a vowel system that has not substantially diverged from a traditional Cockney vowel system. However, unlike their parents and grandparents, most young people in Debden have rejected a Cockney identity. This is coupled with a community shift away from identifying one's accent as Cockney, and towards identifying one's accent as Essex. Whilst there is some overlap in how young speakers identify their accent (i.e. they identify their accent simultaneously in more than one way), all young speakers (<28 years) considered their accent most strongly to be an Essex one. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this process has advanced faster in males than females. Therefore, whilst young speakers in Debden do not have a vowel system that differs substantially from the older speakers, they consider their accent to be an Essex accent.

The linguistic traits which are most prevalent in the youngest age group (lowered NURSE vowel, backed STRUT vowel, fronted THOUGHT vowel, fronted GOOSE vowel) are also found in those who least associate with a Cockney accent and identity, and to a lesser extent, an East London accent and identity. In contrast, there are no apparent-time changes for the linguistic features which are not significantly associated with identifying one's accent as Cockney (e.g. centralised KIT and backed START). This suggests that young speakers are moving away from features which are associated with Cockney.

Chapter 7 also found that the social meaning of linguistic features in Debden is related to whether or not the variables are in the process of change. As mentioned, both h-dropping and g-dropping have previously been documented as features of Cockney (h-dropping: Wells, 1982; Hudson & Holloway, 1977; g-dropping: Hughes et al., 2012; Labov, 1989; Mott, 2011). In Debden, h-dropping is a locally meaningful, dialect feature with indexicalities related to the community's Cockney heritage. In contrast, g-dropping does not carry local interpretations and more generally indexes working-class or "improper" speech. The features' distinct but overlapping social meanings firstly produces an implicational relationship between the two features. Whilst a speaker can index "working-class" without indexing "Cockney", the reverse is not possible. Thus, although g-dropping can occur alongside h-retention, h-dropping cannot occur alongside the velar variant of (ING). Secondly, /h/ has been re-instated with rapid change observed in speakers aged  $\leq 35$  years. In contrast, (ING) has a stable social distribution and is not in a process of change (except for *-thing* words).

The presence of linguistic change for some linguistic features but not others can be explained by the features' social meanings in the context of the demographic and social changes which have occurred in South East England in recent decades. For centuries, Cockney culture and people have been perceived as epitomising and essentialising the white, working class in South East England (section 3.1).



Correspondingly, dialects in South East England are typically conceived as a linguistic continuum which parallels the class continuum from the most vernacular, localised and working-class dialect, Cockney, to the supra-local and higher-class dialect, RP, or in modern times, SSBE (Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Hughes et al., 2012; Wells, 1982, 1997). Nonetheless, as a result of the Cockney Diaspora, Essex has become the epicentre of the white working class after the mass relocation of East Londoners to the county as part of the Cockney Diaspora (Chapter 3). These social changes have had linguistic consequences.

In modern times, an Essex accent has become the end point of the linguistic continuum in opposition to SSBE. That is, what is now considered to be an “Essex” accent is the white, working-class accent which most closely resembles Cockney. Similarly, as discussed in more detail in the following section, Chapter 9 revealed that young speakers from across South East England associate white, working-class speech strongly with southern Essex. As a result, as also demonstrated in Chapter 9, the accent associated with Essex is the most consistently stigmatised. An Essex accent has come to exemplify and epitomise white, working-class speech in South East England. This accent incorporates some features of Cockney but not others.

As a result, some linguistic features in Debden are in a process of change whilst other features have been maintained. For instance, as shown in Chapter 7, in Debden,

young speakers are moving away from localized linguistic features that index the community's Cockney heritage such as h-dropping and the [-ɪŋk] form (and potentially the velar form) of *-thing* words. In contrast, young speakers have maintained traditional "Cockney" features that represent broader, southeastern, and perhaps working-class norms, such as the alveolar form of (ING) for non-*thing* words. Furthermore, young speakers are increasingly favoring the nonstandard alveolar form for *-thing* words and not the "standard" velar [-ɪŋ] variant or the most vernacular, traditional Cockney [-ɪŋk] form. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 8, the GOOSE and FOOT vowels are fronting in Debden which is consistent with more broad, south-eastern norms, but is not indicative of a shift towards what many might consider to be RP or SSBE.

It would be an over-simplification, then, to consider SSBE as the primary target for linguistic change in Debden. In reality, young speakers are moving away from linguistic features which hold local associations with Cockney and, instead, favour features which more broadly index south-eastern working-class speech. These features are most predominantly found in and associated with Essex. Cockney linguistic features (or, more aptly in modern times, Essex linguistic features) are the end point on a linguistic continuum which is diametrically opposed to SSBE. Therefore, a shift away from Cockney and towards broad south-eastern, working-class norms encompasses a shift towards SSBE productions.

#### **10.4. Research question 4: language attitudes in South East England**

The results of Chapter 9 reveal inequivalence in how different geographic areas and speaker-groups are evaluated. In terms of geographic location, East London and southern Essex are most negatively evaluated on social status and solidarity judgements. These results demonstrate that, as a result of the movement of Cockney people and their dialect to Essex, negative evaluations of Cockney (Bishop et al., 2005; Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland 1975) have now been transposed onto Essex. In contrast, parts of London, the western home counties and particularly South West London and Surrey are most positively evaluated. Although these patterns are strikingly consistent for all social status and solidarity measures, the effect was greatest for the former.

Nonetheless this does not entirely translate to how individual speakers actually from these geographic areas are evaluated. Speakers from very similar locations are evaluated in remarkably disparate ways. This effect is most notable for London. London is not only home to white, working-class Cockneys and BAME speakers of MLE, but also to middle-class professionals who are most likely to speak SSBE-like varieties. Although there is also a trend for speakers from certain areas, especially London and Essex, to be evaluated most negatively, language attitudes are most strongly conditioned by speakers' demographic, and to a much lesser extent, identity factors.

Across the South East, working-class and/or BAME speakers are evaluated most negatively (particularly on social status measures), which is confounded if they are from East London or Essex. In addition, as England's standard language is de-localised and class-marked, speakers who associate their accent with geographically diffused and supra-local terms such as 'Queen's English' are evaluated most positively. In contrast, those who identify their accents as 'London', 'Cockney' or 'typical', or even those who indicate they are 'proud' of where they come from, are evaluated negatively. The lowest social status and solidarity judgements are made of white, working-class speakers from Debden. This supports a wide range of studies demonstrating that Cockney linguistic features are negatively evaluated (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Powesland, 1975). The Cockney Diaspora has seen the negative evaluations of Cockney have been transposed onto Essex.

In sum, in South East England, a hierarchy of accents pervades which disadvantages BAME and/or working-class speakers, particularly those from East London or Essex. Simultaneously, the linguistic hierarchy bestows speakers of the class-marked and de-localised standard variety – most frequently the white middle class - with more favourable evaluations. In addition, as a result of the Cockney diaspora, the county of Essex has come to epitomise white, working-class speech, and as a result, has absorbed the previously documented negative evaluations of Cockney.

### **10.5 Contributions, limitations and future research**

This thesis has contributed firstly, to methodological approaches to analysing language variation and change, particularly, through an expansion and automation of data collection, analysis and visualisation techniques. In Chapter 6, dynamic analyses of vowel trajectories using GAMMS allowed for statistical modelling of fine-grained variation and change in trajectories throughout the production of each vowel. In Chapter 7, a novel methodology analysed to what extent linguistic features cluster together in the speech of individual speakers by assessing rates of co-variation between features when they occur within differing numbers of phonemes. Chapter 9 demonstrated the potential, flexibility and expansiveness of digitalised methods and analysis in the perceptual dialectology paradigm.

Secondly, this thesis has contributed to our understanding of the social meaning of linguistic features, particularly, in relation to language change. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, this thesis has demonstrated that the linguistic labels we use to define different accents or dialects are not static or stable, and that even within the same community, these labels are adopted and interpreted differently (see Chapter 8). Similarly, the differing social meanings held by linguistic features can lead to an implicational relationship between them (Chapter 7). This work demonstrates that linguistic features do not operate independently but collectively take on social meaning

such that they may be used in stylistic projections or experience community-level change. These results provide evidence for a necessary departure from analyses of single linguistic features in absence of their surrounding linguistic and social context. Future research could explore to what extent the methodological contributions and theoretical implications of these results are generalisable to other speech communities.

Thirdly, this thesis has contributed to our understanding of language variation and change in South East England in relation to the Cockney Diaspora. Previous research has suggested that MLE has displaced traditional Cockney (Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox 2015). However, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 revealed that, although recently emerging linguistic change is present in Debden, Cockney linguistic features were transplanted there along with the Cockney communities who relocated. Additionally, Chapter 9 demonstrated that for young people from across South-East England, the area most strongly associated with white, working-class, south-eastern speech is Essex and not East London. This thesis has shown that as a result of the Cockney Diaspora there has been a re-configuring of how language is produced and perceived across South East England.

A potential limitation of this thesis is that the distribution and social meaning of several key, Cockney linguistic features were not analysed (e.g. t-glottalling and th-fronting). These variables could be explored in future work. A further limitation is that

linguistic production data was only analysed for Debden speakers. Whilst I have demonstrated that Cockney linguistic features were transported to Debden, this may not be sufficient evidence to conclude that Cockney has “moved east” (Fox, 2015: 13) to Essex. Future research could explore the distribution of linguistic features and their social meaning in other speech communities, for instance, in Essex towns or estates that were also formed as part of the Cockney Diaspora (e.g. Basildon; the Harold Hill Estate; Harlow; the Becontree Estate). Whilst Debden is geographically very close to East London, other towns/ estates which were formed as part of the Cockney Diaspora are found in central Essex (e.g. Harlow). As a result, it is possible that young people in these communities identify with and use Cockney linguistic features to a lesser extent than young people in Debden. Other potential research sites for similar work are the post-war estates or towns which were built in counties other than Essex and were populated by Londoners (e.g. the town of Stevenage in Hertfordshire). Finally, future research could focus on Essex towns which were not constructed as part of the Cockney Diaspora for instance, Debden’s surrounding towns (e.g. Loughton; Buckhurst Hill; Chigwell; Theydon Bois; Epping etc.) or in parts of North Essex such as Colchester which are typically considered to form part of East Anglian English (Ciancia, 2020; Trudgill, 2008). This potential future research could explore to what extent Cockney linguistic features are

found in these communities, how these features are labelled and evaluated, and how these results compare to the Debden findings.

Whilst there is much opportunity for future research, this thesis provides a thorough account of language variation, change and social meaning in Debden, Essex. This work has contributed to our understanding of how linguistic features are produced, distributed, evaluated and interpreted in South East England, particularly, as a result of the Cockney Diaspora to Essex.



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