# Phoenix from the ashes?: The death, contact and birth of dialects in England.

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The dialect landscape of England has changed substantially over the course of the past century. There has been such considerable and ongoing dialect attrition that the language use reported across the country by Ellis' survey of 1889 seems, in many cases and in many places, quite distinct from that spoken just over one hundred years later. Later in this article, I survey some of the recent evidence of this attrition from sociolinguistic and variationist studies carried out in England. In doing so, and by highlighting the origins of some of the ongoing changes in English dialects, I hope to make three claims in particular: firstly, that dialect death is inextricably linked to dialect contact, and hence to understand how it fits into the overall picture of language change in England we need to appreciate the linguistic consequences of contact more generally; secondly, and apparently in contrast with some other speech communities, the attrition process has **not** led to a wholescale shift by the populace in the direction of RP (the traditional standard pronunciation of English in England) or Standard English. I will argue here, instead, that the dominant trend[1] is towards a number of new socially and regionally based, koineised, 'compromise' dialects, shaped by contact between local, regional, interregional and other, including standard, varieties. Finally, the developments currently affecting English dialects in England are not necessarily particularly new (see below and Ellis 1889, Nevalainen 2000, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2000), but are noteworthy because of their *spatial scale*, a scale that has resulted from some rather wide-ranging social and economic developments[2] which have accelerated contact between speakers of structurally distinct dialects. I will argue that from the ashes of the many dialects

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[1] I want to make it clear here that this is only a trend. Within the regions housing these koineised dialects, variation (sub-regional, social, ethnic, gendered…) still exists and will still exist, since the speech community will not react to pressures to change at the same time, same pace or with the same inclination.

[2] These include: urbanisation and counter-urbanisation; increased migration and immigration (though the linguistic consequences of the latter are still at a very early stage of exploration here in England); increased 'delocalisation' caused by the demands of the labour market; the increasing influence of large urban centres as foci of service provision and influence; and a British policy of New Town and urban overspill development aimed at solving the problems of post-War and subsequent inadequate housing and employment provision in the major urban industrial centres of the UK

undergoing attrition, new varieties are emerging, unlike the established working-class strong social-networked urban dialects, unlike the traditional rural dialects, and unlike the received standard dialect[3].

**Dialect Death…**

Dialect attrition is the eradication of a traditional locally embedded dialect (including accent) form or forms in favour of one originating either from outside the community or from another group within the same community. Evidence suggests that such attrition has been widespread in England over the past century, and has affected every structural level of the language. Despite this, there have been relatively few studies of the attrition process in action, for example through Labovian apparent time studies of individual speech communities. Much more research, as we will see later, has been interested in the distribution and spread of linguistic innovations, rather than the obsolescence of traditional local structures. I exemplify attrition here firstly by highlighting some of the studies which have noted attrition at the lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic levels, and secondly by looking at one seemingly dying feature, post-vocalic /r/, across a number of locations.

*Lexical attrition*

The Survey of English Dialects highlighted the depth of lexical variation across England in the first half of the 20th century (see Orton, Sanderson and Widdowson 1978). Since then, very few studies indeed have attempted to assess the level of lexical attrition that has occurred, or even to examine lexical variation beyond restricted employment/topic domains, although promising work by Llamas in Middlesborough[4] has developed techniques for the sensitive collection of lexical data (Llamas 1998; Kerswill, Llamas and Upton 1999; Upton and Llamas 1999). One indicative small survey that I will comment on here was conducted in 1991 by a regional newspaper, the *Eastern Daily Press* (EDP), based in Norwich. The newspaper drew up a list of what it considered local dialect words of Norfolk and north Suffolk, and distributed a questionnaire both among adults of varying ages and to a wide number of schools across the region testing whether the dialect words were recognised or not. The results of the recognition test are presented in Figure 2. The rate of lexical attrition is considerable and dramatic, with those over 60 recognising over three-quarters of the words, and those under 18 less than one word in five. The biggest drop appears between the 30-60 years and 18-30 years categories, suggesting the attrition was at its most vigorous in the 1960s. I analysed the results of the survey further to investigate which words were most likely to have lost recognition. I chose 16 of the words in the survey and traced

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[3] While we are gaining an increased understanding of the socio-economic and demographic developments that are causing this dialect attrition and new dialect formation, there are large holes in our knowledge of the English dialect landscape at the start of the 21st century. Much of what we know about some areas comes from the Survey of English Dialects of the 1950s and 60s - a traditional dialectological survey of mostly older rural working class men. Most speakers for this survey were born in the 19th century. Since the advent of variationist sociolinguistics in the 1960s, there have been very few quantitative investigations of the rural dialects of England (see Britain 2001 for views on why). Even some major English cities have seen few, if any, sociolinguistic studies (e.g. Manchester, Portsmouth, Southampton, Bristol, Leicester, Coventry, Oxford…).
[4] See Figure 1 for the location of the towns and regions mentioned in this article.

**Figure 1: Locations mentioned in this article.**



their geographical distributions at the end of the 19th century from Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* of 1898. The distributions are presented in Figure 3, which shows that not all of the words in the EDP survey were restricted to Norfolk and Suffolk at that time. The dotted area on the map shows regions in which at least one of the words in the EDP survey was used according to Wright. At least eight of the words were found more widely across East Anglia (e.g., Essex, Cambridgeshire and the Fens),

marked here by the lightly shaded area. All but one of the words in the survey were found by Wright (1898) in both Norfolk and Suffolk, marked by heavy shading on the map. I then looked at which words were recognised most of all by the people surveyed by the EDP – those with a wider currency across England, such as 'rum' (= 'strange, unaccountable') and 'squit' (='silly talk, nonsense'); those found right across East Anglia, such as 'dwile' (a floor cloth) and 'bor' (term of familiar direct or indirect address for a neighbour, acquaintance etc), or those restricted, back at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to Norfolk and Suffolk, such as 'harnser' (a heron) and 'planchard' (a boarded floor). The results, presented in Figure 4, are quite remarkable. Those words which were restricted to Norfolk and Suffolk in Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* were less than half as likely to be recognised by adults and *fourteen* times less likely by the under 18-year olds as those found beyond East Anglia. The lexical attrition, therefore, appears to affect historically *locally* embedded words more than words with a wider regional and national currency.

*Phonological attrition*

The extent of the loss of structural variation across the country has received greater empirical investigation than lexical attrition. Trudgill's extensive documentation of change in Norwich, the first major variationist study of a British dialect, for example, highlights a number of obsolescing phonological forms (Trudgill 1974a). These include:

- The traditional Norfolk distinction between ME /a:/ (e.g. 'made') and ME /ai/ (e.g. 'maid'). This distinction is now only found among older working class residents of the city (Trudgill 1974a: 76, 1988: 39-40, 1999: 129);

- The use of short [ɐ] in words such as 'nurse', 'bird', 'church' (Trudgill 1974a: 77-79, 1988: 40, 1996, 1999: 125-126). In his 1968 study only lower working class speakers used this form, and only in 25% of potential tokens;

- The use of a short [ʊ - ɤ] in a subsection of the GOAT lexical set (Trudgill 1974a: 113, 1999: 129), e.g. 'home' [hʊm].

- The use of a short [ʊ] in a subsection of the GOOSE lexical set (Trudgill 1974a: 115, 1999: 129), e.g. 'spoon' [spʊn].

Kingston (2000), in an analysis of the attrition of the rural dialect of Glemsford in Suffolk, found the replacement of local phonological forms to have been particularly marked among younger speakers in the community. She looked at the attrition of the use of schwa in unstressed syllables that was once common right across East Anglia and which is still prevalent further north in the region (cf. Trudgill 1986). Words such as 'wanted', 'boiling', 'dishes' and 'biscuit' are shifting from /ə/ to /ɪ/, hence [wɒnʔəd] has changed to [wɒnʔɪd], [bɔilən] to [bɔilɪn], etc. Furthermore she found that a locally

Figure 2: The recognition of Norfolk dialect words in the
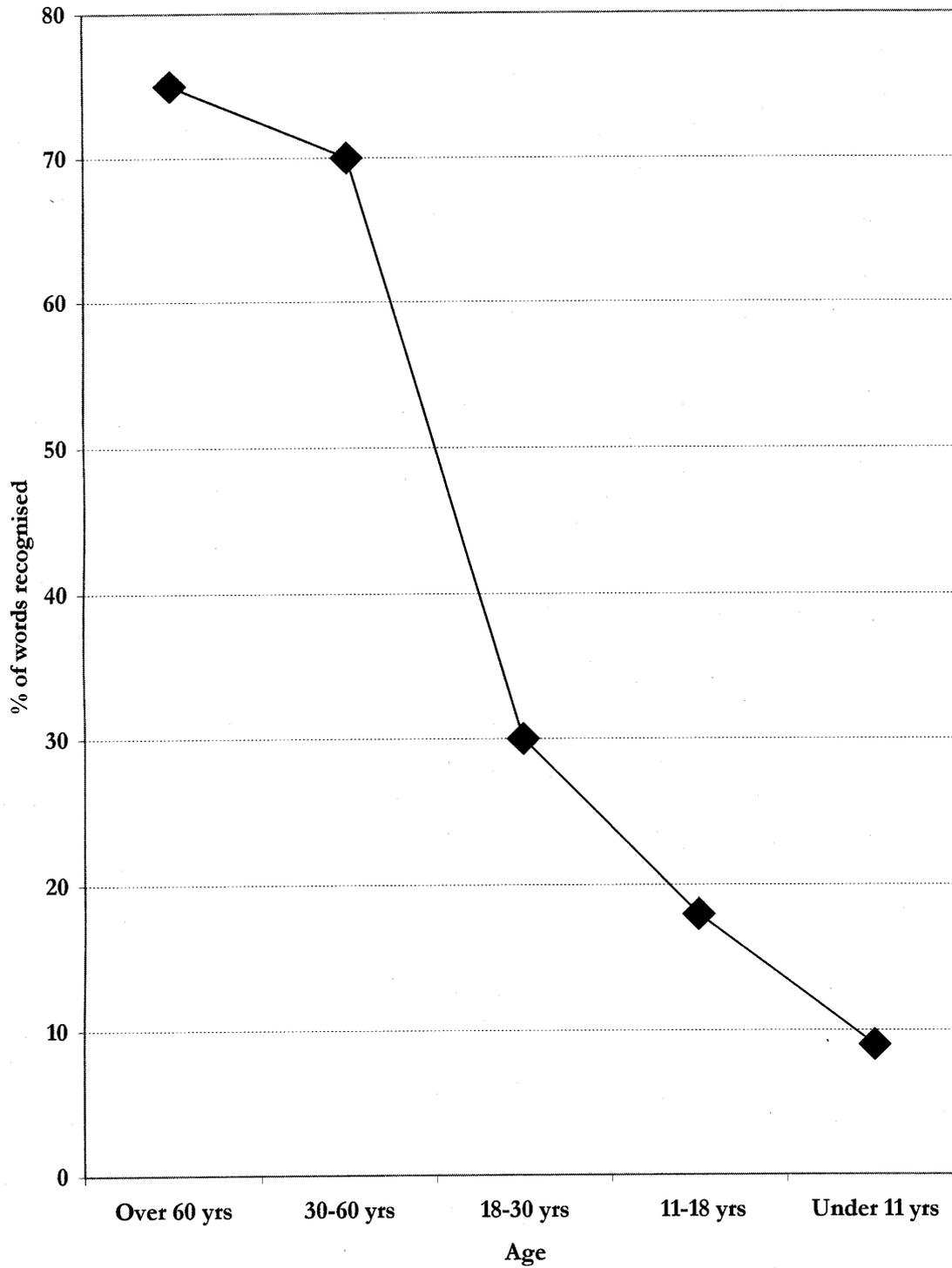May 10th 1993 Eastern Daily Press survey.

**Figure 3: The late 19ᵗʰ century distribution of dialect words used in the Eastern Daily Press survey of 1993 (from Wright 1898). Dots = at least *one* of the EDP survey words found in this area; light shading = at least *eight*; heavy shading = at least *fifteen* (of the sixteen words examined here).**
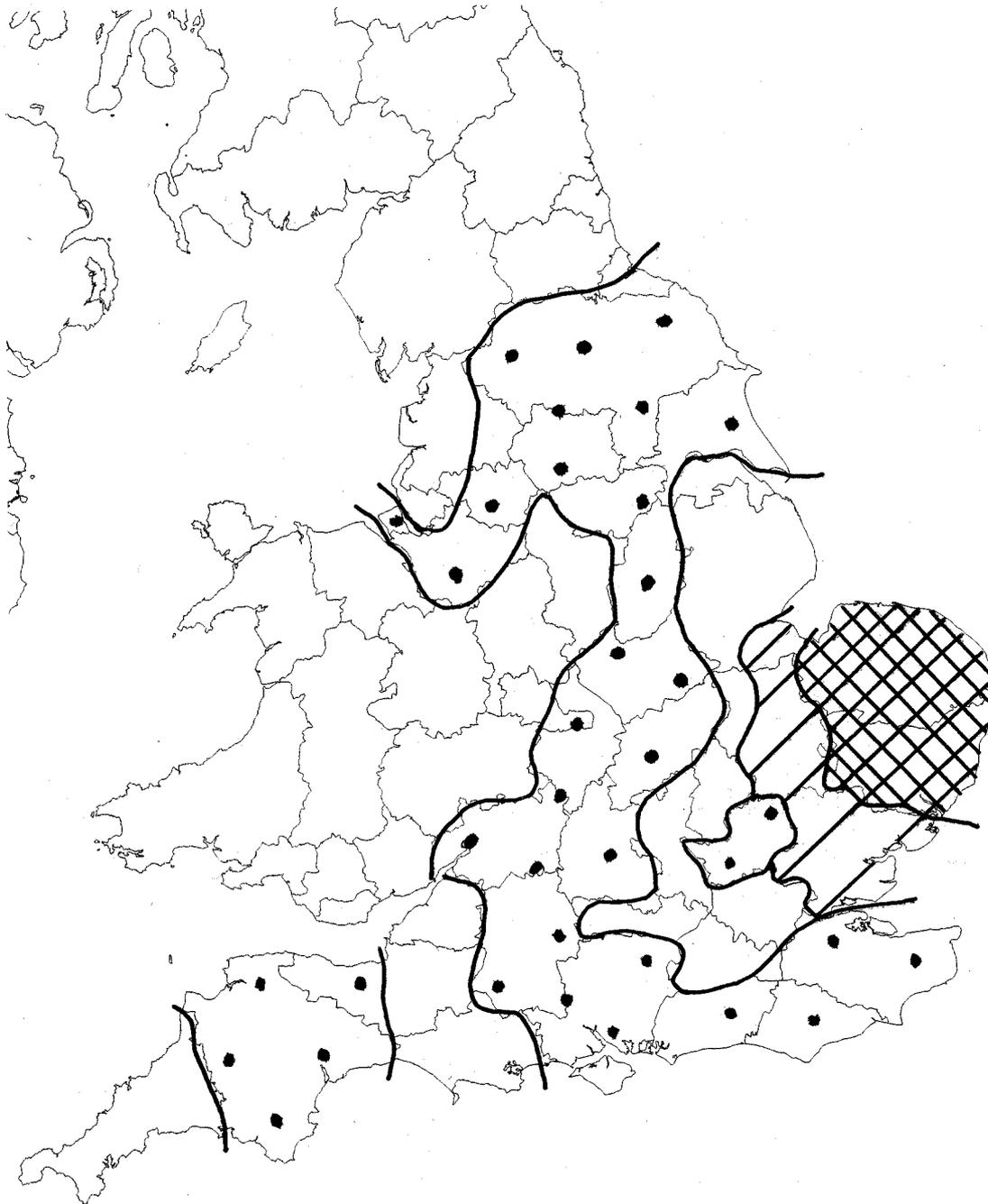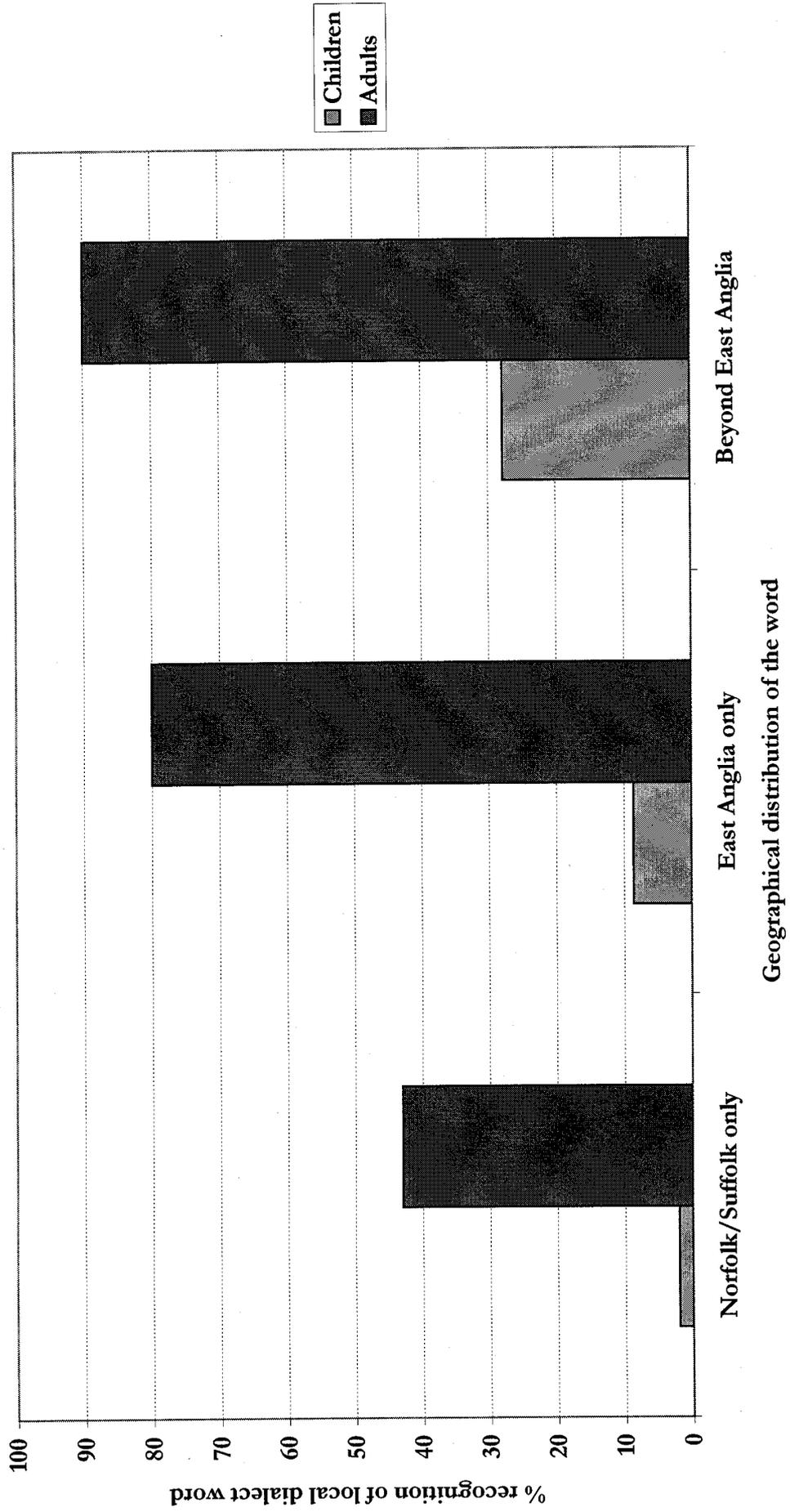
Figure 4: The use of local dialect words in the EDP survey
and their geographical distribution in Wright's (1898) *English Dialect Dictionary*

occurring breaking before certain consonants (e.g. 'bowl' [bɒuəl], 'comb' [kʌuəm]) was also on the decline (see Figure 5).

Watt and Milroy (1999) show just how extensive has been the attrition of local vocalic variants of the dialect of Newcastle, in the north-east of England. Figure 6 shows the steep decline of three such variants: [ɔ:] realisations of the NURSE lexical set; [ʊə] variants of GOAT; and [ɪə] realisations of FACE, and highlights a common factor in all of the phonological attrition studies mentioned here – the leading role of women in the attrition process. Older women in the Newcastle study are more advanced in the attrition process than young men. In each case, as we will see later, however, it is not the standard RP variety that is taking over.

*Morphosyntactic attrition*

Kingston (2000) found that the traditional third person present-tense zero of East Anglia is being rapidly eroded in Glemsford (see Figure 5), with older speakers in her sample using the traditional zero form *nine* times more frequently than the young. Both Cheshire, Edwards and Whittle (1989) and Britain (2002) find evidence of the attrition of non-standard past-tense *were* in positive polarity clauses (i.e. in 1$^{st}$ and 3$^{rd}$ person singular contexts: e.g. 'I were', 'the grass were'). Cheshire et al's *Survey of British Dialect Grammar* showed that schoolchildren in Birmingham, in the urban heart of the Midlands, reported a much lower use of non-standard *were* than in the rest of the Midlands. Across the Midlands (but excluding Birmingham) 12 out of 14 schools in their survey reported the use of 'I were singing', but there were no reports of non-standard *were* in positive contexts at all in Birmingham itself (Cheshire et al 1989: 209). In the Fens, speakers born around 1900 used *were* in between 53% (for 1$^{st}$ person singular subjects) and 30% (3$^{rd}$ person singular noun phrase subjects) of all tokens. This shrinks to less than 5% of all tokens among those born between 1925 and 1945, and to less than 1% among those born after 1960 (Britain 2002: 32).

Cheshire et al (1989: 212) also report the attrition of the demonstrative adjectives 'this here' (as in '*This here* pen's run out – can you lend me another one?') and 'that there' (e.g. 'I wouldn't touch *that there* spider if I were you') in Manchester. Whilst 11 out of 14 schools in the north-west of England reported using these forms, only 1 school out of 4 in central Manchester reported using 'this here' and none reported 'that there'. Tagliamonte and Ito (2002: 249), in an analysis of zero versus –*ly* marking of adverbs (e.g. 'it tasted *real/really* good'; 'she drunk it down *quick/quickly*'), noted a sharp and statistically significant decline in the zero form, with those speakers over the age of 66 using the zero form almost three times as often as those under 35. The attrition of the zero form was particularly marked in the adverb *real/really*, which, furthermore, accounted for over 65% of all the adverbial tokens analysed.

Figure 5: Dialect attrition in Glemsford, Suffolk
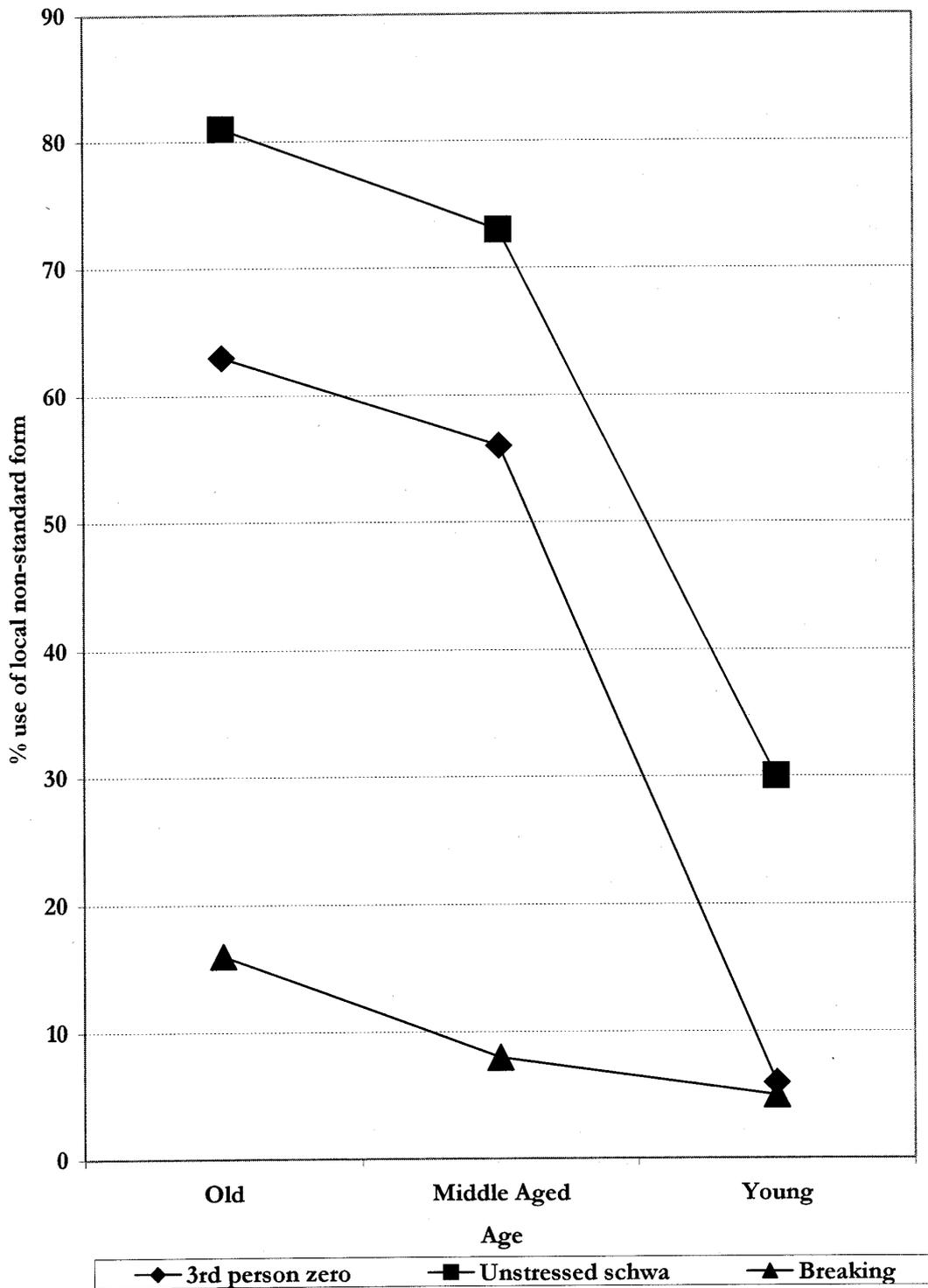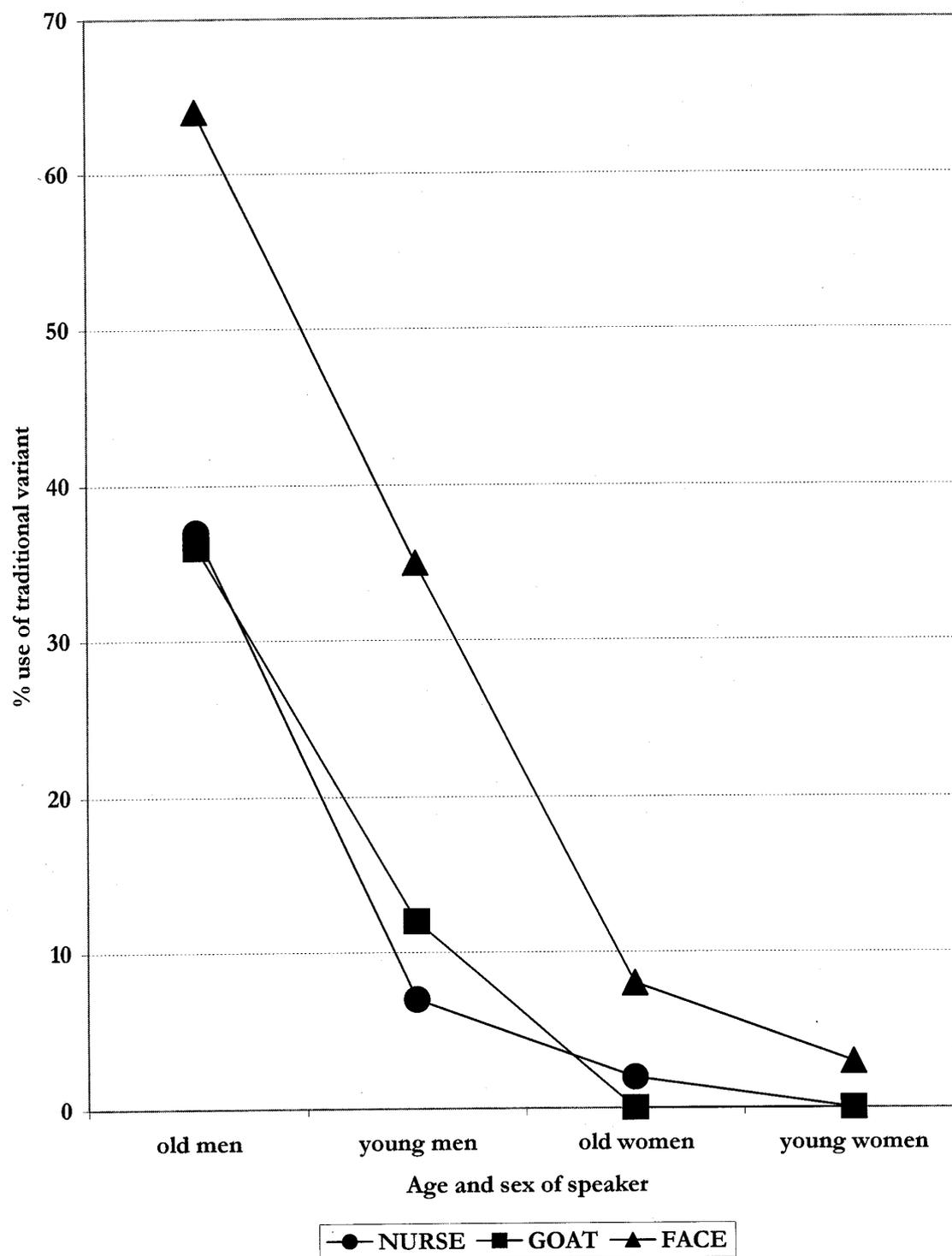(Kingston 2000, Bray forthcoming).

Figure 6: The use of traditional local Newcastle variants of the NURSE,
GOAT and FACE variables (based on Watt and Milroy 1999: 38, 36, 35)

*The demise of postvocalic /r/*

Since the reporting of attrition across England is relatively patchy, and involves a number of different linguistic features, I present here a brief portrait of the history of attrition of one feature across England, the ongoing loss of post-vocalic /r/ in words such as 'card' and 'fur'. By the early 19th century, this loss was already underway, as highlighted by Ellis's nationwide survey of 1889. Figure 7 shows the areas Ellis claims have lost (striped) or variably lost (dotted) postvocalic /r/, mainly a strip up the eastern coast of the country, including the whole of East Anglia. By the time of the Survey of English Dialects in the mid-20th century (analysing speakers born at the end of the 19th), this area of r-loss had extended further westwards to incorporate most of the Midlands, Yorkshire and much of the industrial north-west (Figure 8). We can comfortably assume, I believe, that the actual area of loss was much greater and had penetrated further into the west and south-west than Figure 8 shows, simply because the data come (deliberately) from the most conservative speakers of the community – old rural non-mobile men - and exclude those who are likely to have pushed further the innovatory drive towards r-lessness.

We have had no nationwide survey of /r/ since, but we do have reports from a number of locations in the rhotic former heartlands which suggests that postvocalic /r/ continues to be pushed back. Sullivan (1992) found only 8% rhoticity in Exeter, though given she had a purely middle class sample, this is not altogether surprising. Dudman (2000) found that in the Cornish town of St Ives, rhoticity levels among a group of working class adolescents born in 1987 were half that of a group of elderly speakers born between 1906 and 1924 – but, despite this, still reached 25% of all tokens among the young. Jones (1998) found that young speakers still retained some degree of rhoticity in some linguistic environments in rural east Devon and West Somerset but that there was a clear trend towards erosion. Williams' (1991) apparent time study of working class speakers on the Isle of Wight found that the young had completely lost rhoticity which had been variably retained by older informants. Two studies have been carried out in locations which, since the Survey of English Dialects, have seen rapid urbanisation through New Town development – Kerswill and Williams' studies (e.g. 1999, 2000) of Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire and Simpson and Britain's (in preparation) research on Telford in the West Midlands. Both found that rhoticity had been completely eradicated once New Town development began. The one study that provides some small comfort for the survival of rhoticity is Vivian's (2000) research on /r/ in Accrington, Burnley and Blackburn in central Lancashire. She found high levels of rhoticity being retained, even among young people, and especially in Accrington and Blackburn, though the trend is nevertheless towards loss and this loss is more marked in Burnley.

**Figure 7: Non-rhoticity according to Ellis' survey of 1889. The shaded areas are described as being non-rhotic, the dotted areas as being variably so.**
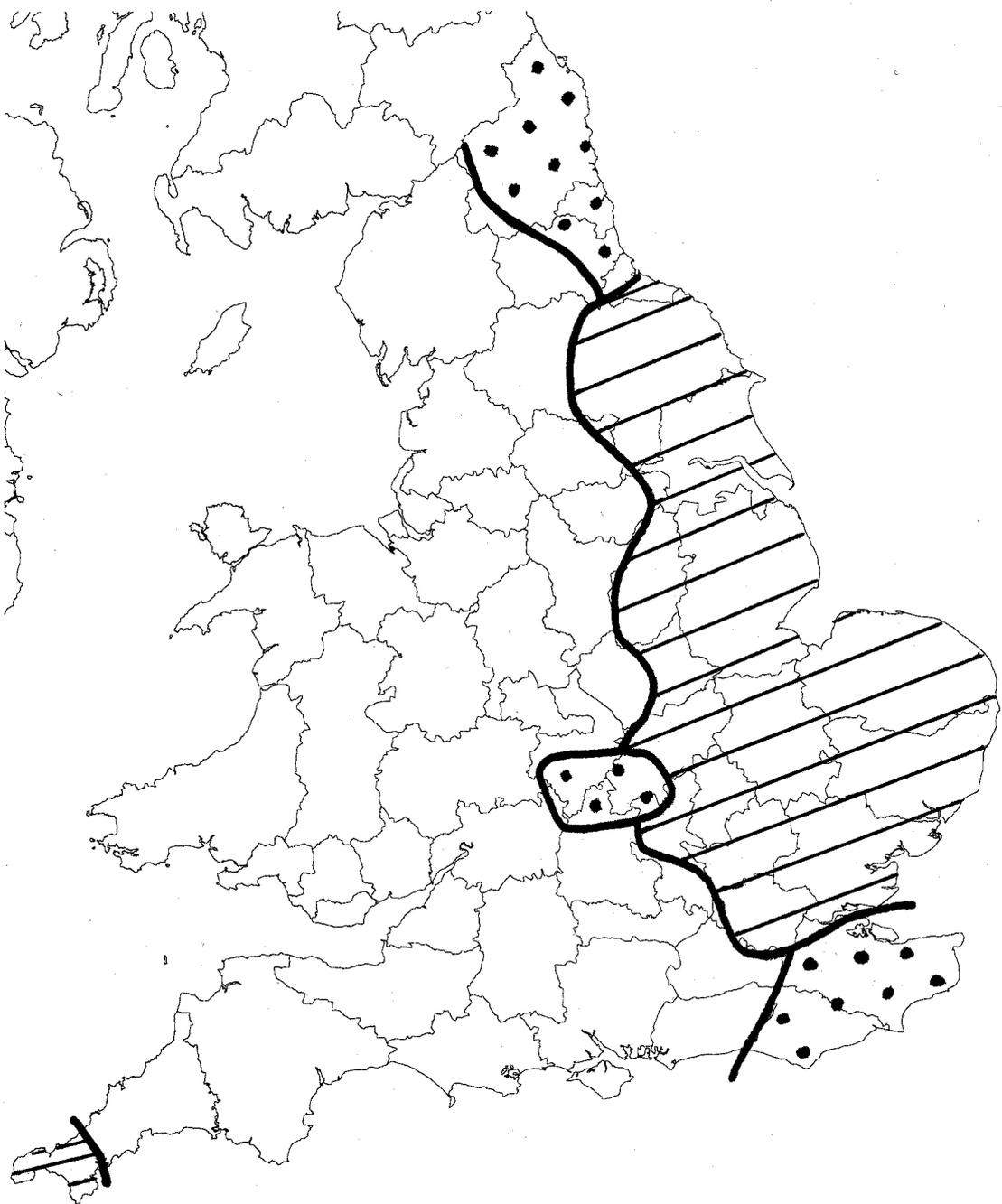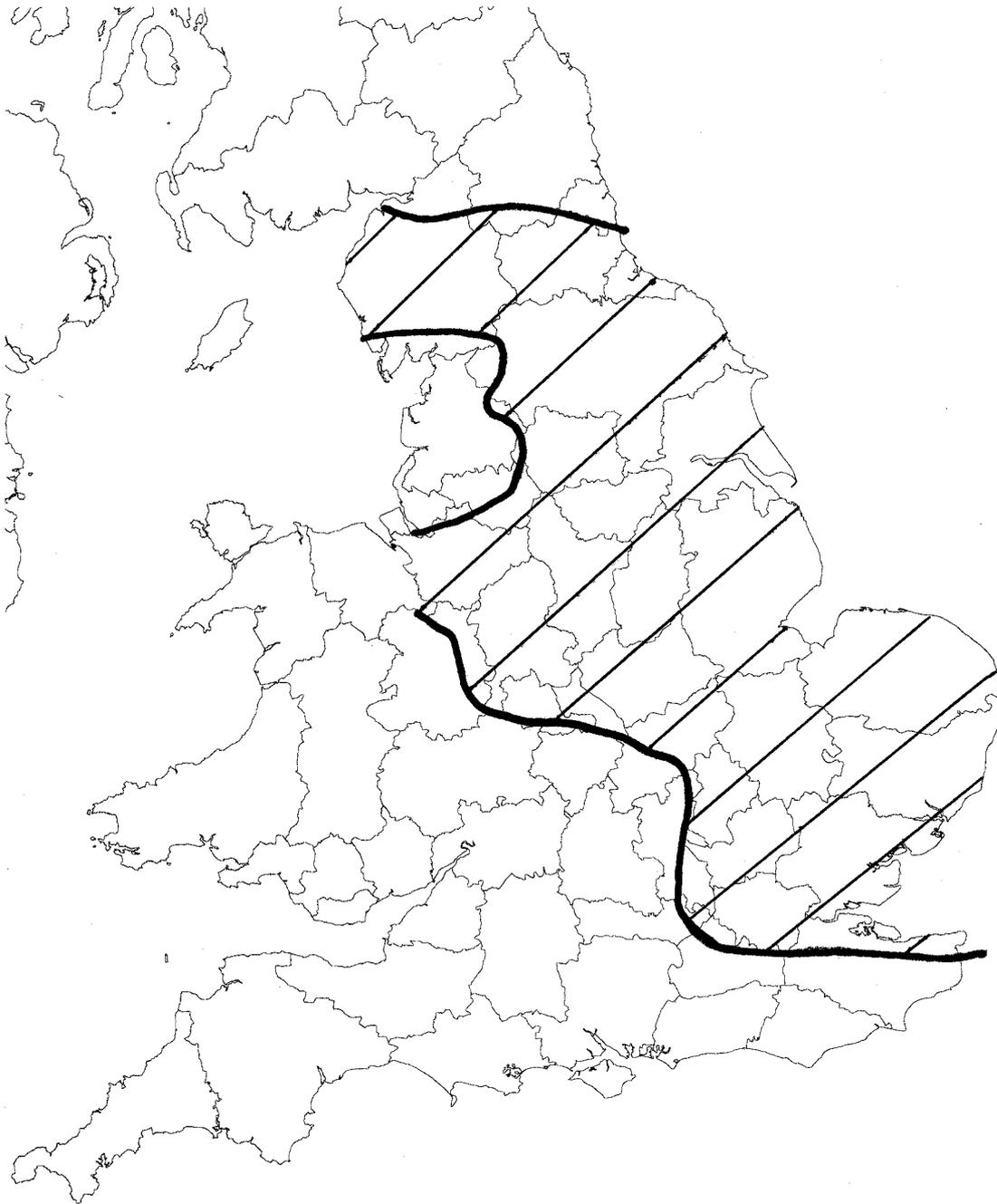
**Figure 8: Non-rhoticity in the Survey of English Dialects (from Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 95).**



*Clinging on to life?*

Sometimes dialects under the potential threat of attrition, particularly relatively isolated rural ones, but also traditional and well-established long-standing urban ones, appear to resist erosion, and occasionally

change in ways which diverge from the incoming innovation. These resistance strategies can be relatively short-lived (see below) – often appearing as a last gasp before final attrition – or be more systematic and widespread. Work in the USA by Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes (see for example, Wolfram 1997, 2001; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1995; Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999) has provided us with some indication of the sorts of communities likely to undergo these more systematic and structural attempts to resist attrition. They contrast two communities – Ocracoke off the East Coast of North Carolina and Smith Island in the Chesaspeake Bay of Maryland – which appear, on the surface, to be rather similar. Both were once relatively isolated but today more and more speakers from both islands are coming into contact with people from the mainland and are moving away to seek better employment prospects. Both share some distinctive dialect characteristics: a back and raised nucleus of /ai/: [ʌ$^{\text{I}}$] and a front gliding realization of /au/: [æ$^{\text{I}}$]. However, whilst Ocracokers appear to be losing these distinctive features, residents of Smith Island are increasing their use of them and continuing, therefore, to diverge from neighbouring dialects (see Wolfram 2001: 770). The important socio-demographic distinction between the two communities is that while Ocracoke is becoming a popular destination for short- and long-term residence by non-islanders, few people are moving onto Smith Island and many are leaving, resulting in a concentration of the dialect among the few that remain. Such small communities, where there is little inward migration to disrupt local dialect norms, and a gradual movement away of those motivated by economic mobility, appear to be the loci of non-mainstream 'resistant' change. Such communities are, of course, becoming increasingly rare. This is perhaps particularly true of England, which, over the past half-century, has seen both a considerable urbanisation and gentrification of the countryside with its supposed 'green and pleasant land' drawing in middle class residents and second-home buyers to rural villages in many areas, particularly of the south. This, coupled with the lack of dialectological coverage over the past 40 years, means we know, as yet, of no English equivalents of Smith Island.

We do have evidence, however, of perhaps more temporary or short term divergence from threatening innovations: the emergence of so-called hyperdialectalisms – changes which extend the local form to linguistic contexts where it was previously not used. One example of such a divergent shift was evident in the Survey of English Dialects (SED) data on the rhotic side of the rhotic/non-rhotic dialect boundary in western England along the border with Wales. Here, contact with advancing non-rhoticism has led to the emergence of rhotic forms in words with no etymological <r>: the word 'last', for example, in a number of locations along the English-Welsh border, was pronounced as [la$^{\text{I}}$st]. Figure 9 shows the results of an analysis of non-etymological /r/ that I conducted from the SED data (see Trudgill and Britain, forthcoming, for more details). It highlights just how widespread this phenomenon is beyond the rhotic isogloss. As mentioned earlier, the SED presents the data for old rural men (see Figure 8), so the battlefield for the survival of /r/ was going on at the time further west.

The analysis shows that the epenthesis of /r/ in words such as 'calf', 'slaughter', 'yawning', 'straw', 'always' and 'brought' is common, as it is at the end of <–ow> words such as 'window' and 'tomorrow' (since many English varieties reduce the word final /ʌu/ in such words to [ə]). Trudgill (1986:75) claims that this 'hyperdialectal' /r/ is a reaction against incoming non-rhoticity: 'the r-ful pronunciation… becomes a local dialect symbol, and the use of that pronunciation a way of indicating dialect and local loyalty'. It was not found at that time in the rhotic heartlands further to the south-west in Devon and Somerset. What is particularly noticeable from Figure 9 is the continuous band of higher occurrence of non-etymological /r/ which separates two bands of lower rates of /r/. If Trudgill is right, this could have been the site of the most intensive struggle at the time for the survival of postvocalic *etymological* /r/, since the non-etymological reaction is at its greatest there[5].

Other examples of such 'hyperdialectisms' have been noted. Vivian (2000) found hyperdialectally rhotic forms in the Lancashire town of Accrington – situated on an island of rhoticity surrounded by urban and rural non-rhotic varieties. She found 'lager' variably realized as [largɚ] and 'sauce' as [sɔrs] (see, further, Trudgill and Britain, forthcoming). And Trudgill (1986: 68-9) noted that in Norwich, which traditionally preserved the Middle English distinction between **ɑ:** and **ai**, (daze = /deːz/; days = /dæiz/, respectively), some youngsters, during the latter period of the attrition of this phonological split in the city, were found to be using /eː/ in *both* lexical sets, whereas the merger was in the direction of /æi/ in both sets. He later reports, however, that the struggle appears to have been lost (Trudgill 1999: 129).

**…and Dialect Birth.**
Of course, if speakers give up the use of some traditional dialect form, they have to replace it with something. What this something is (and where it comes from) has been the prime focus of a great deal of contemporary variationist dialectological research in England. This interest has perhaps been heightened by the fact that the 'something' is also usually not a pre-existing standard variety. I discuss below what I consider to be three of the main sources of new dialect forms replacing many of the traditional local structures which we have seen are being eroded. All three rely on dialect contact as a driving influence, and all three are in many ways related.

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[5] The band to the east could well be an area where the battle to retain /r/ is being lost, and the area to the west of the central band where the battle is beginning. No research has been conducted in this area since, however, for us to know the fate of /r/, nor the extent to which non-etymological /r/ is prevalent. Nor do we know if non-etymological /r/ is beginning to be used in new locations as the rhoticity isogloss pushes ever further westwards.

**Figure 9: Non-etymological /r/ in the west of England, based on an analysis of the SED Basic Materials for the West Midlands (Orton and Barry 1969-71). Shading denotes areas with at least 7 (out of a possible 20) words containing a non-etymological /r/. Dotting denotes at least 3 such examples.**
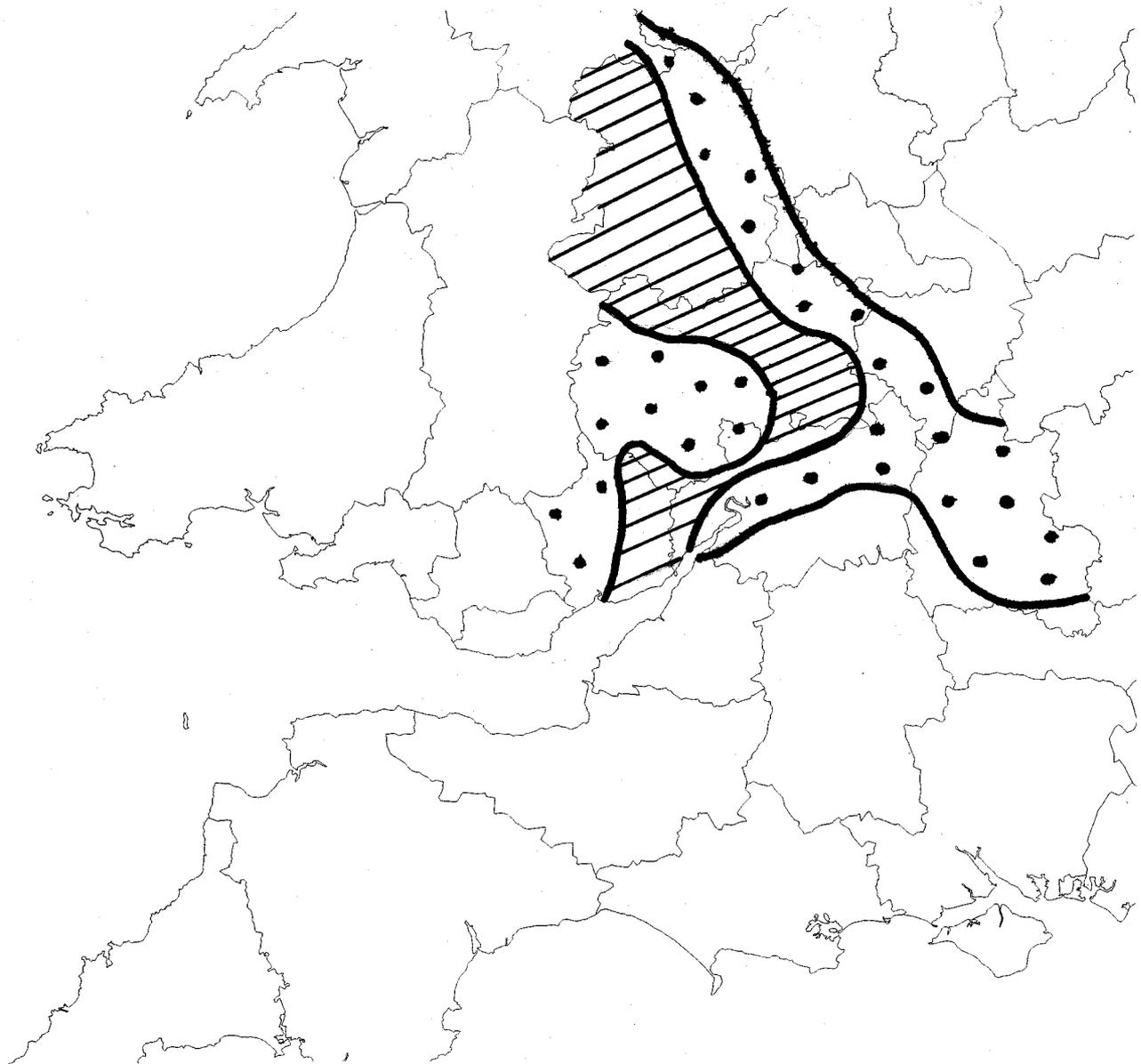


*Geolinguistic diffusion*

The diffusion of a linguistic form from a community in which that form is the norm to a community in which it is foreign necessarily involves dialect contact between speakers of the old and new forms (Trudgill 1986). Sometimes the new form seems to win straightforwardly, but sometimes as we will see, the diffusion of the innovation leads to linguistic compromise or a re-evaluation of the social meaning

of the incoming form. Key to understanding the outcomes of contact and diffusion is the nature of the linguistic accommodation that occurs when speakers of different dialects meet. Since linguistic accommodation, especially between adults, is often both incomplete and imperfect (see Trudgill and Britain, forthcoming, for more details), the accommodatory process in contexts of diffusion can, for instance, lead to the emergence of new intermediate forms (present neither in the innovating nor in the traditional dialects) which appear to represent the stabilization of incomplete accommodation (interdialect).

A number of patterns have been noted when researchers have investigated the successful (and unchanged) diffusion of an innovation. These include:

- *'wave'* or *'contagion'* diffusion (Trudgill 1986; Bailey, Wikle, Tillery and Sand 1993; Britain 2001, in press), whereby innovations, over time, radiate out from a central focal area, reaching physically nearby locations before those at ever greater distances.

- *'urban hierarchical'* diffusion (Trudgill 1974b, 1983, 1986; Callary 1975; Gerritsen and Jansen 1980; Bailey, Wikle, Tillery and Sand 1993; Hernandez Campoy, 2003) whereby innovations descend down a hierarchy of large city to city to large town, to town, village and country;

- *'cultural hearth'* diffusion (Horvath and Horvath 1997, 2001, 2002) whereby the innovation gains a foothold in both town and country in one particular region before diffusing to other parts of the country; and

- *'contra-hierarchical'* diffusion (Trudgill 1986; Bailey et al 1993), whereby innovations diffuse *against* the urban hierarchy, arising in rural areas and spreading to urban ones.

The late 20th century saw the appearance of a number of apparently London or South-Eastern forms in towns and cities well away from the capital, and beyond the usual reach of its socio-cultural functional zone. These include: the fronting of /θ/ to [f] such that it merges with /f/ (and causing 'fin' and 'thin' for example to become homophones); the fronting of non-initial /ð/ to [v] (e.g. 'mother' [mʌvə]); the vocalisation of /l/ (e.g. 'milk' [mɪɣk], 'bold' [bɐɣd]); the labiodentalisation of /r/ to [ʋ] (e.g. 'France' [fʋɑːns], 'red' [ʋɛd]) and the glottalisation of /t/ to [ʔ] (e.g. 'better' [bɛʔə], 'can't' [kɑːnʔ]). Table 1 below charts what is known about the distribution of these features in England at the end of the 20th century. It is interesting to note that a number of the most vigorously spreading – /θ/ and /ð/ fronting and /l/ vocalisation, for example, are highly unmarked forms, and acquired early by most Anglophone children, unlike their standard counterparts. The widespread diffusion of these forms may well have been facilitated by their unmarkedness, and this may go some way to explain why these forms are used most by those (children and adolescents) who have least socio-geographical mobility and who are therefore less likely than adults to come into contact with

Table 1: The distribution of TH-fronting, /l/ vocalisation, labio-dental /r/ and /t/ glottalisation across England.

| Location | Fronting of /θ/ and /ð/ | Vocalisation of /l/ | Labiodental /r/ | /t/ glottalisation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **London** (Tolfree 1999) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Colchester** (Johnson and Britain 2002, Meuter 2002) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Reading** (Kerswill and Williams 1999) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Milton Keynes** (Kerswill and Williams 1999) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Norwich** (Trudgill 1999) | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| **The Fens** (Britain, forthcoming) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Derby** (Docherty and Foulkes 1999, Foulkes and Docherty 2000) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Birmingham** (Mathisen 1999) | ✓ | ✓ | few | ✓ |
| **Hull** (Kerswill and Williams 1999) | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Liverpool** (Newbrook 1999; Sangster pc) | x | x | few | x |
| **Sheffield** (Stoddart, Upton and Widdowson 1999) | ✓ | x | ? | ✓ |
| **Middlesborough** (Llamas 1999, 2000) | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Newcastle** (Docherty and Foulkes 1999) | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ |

diffusing forms from other urban centres (Trudgill 1986). The presence of some of these forms well away from the South of England may well, of course, not be due to diffusion at all, but to independent developments in different locations, again supported by their lack of markedness.

At the more local level, Trudgill (1983, 1986, 1988, 1999) plotted the diffusion of a number of London forms across urban East Anglia. Whilst some were diffusing rapidly – such as /r/ labiodentalisation and /θ/ and /ð/ fronting, others, such as the vocalisation of /l/, the fronting of /ʌ/ to [ɐ - a] (e.g. 'cup' [kɐp]) and the use of /ə/ instead of /ɪ/ in unstressed syllables (e.g. in 'wedding', 'washes' etc)

were much less successful in their diffusion northwards (but see Kingston 2000 and above, for more recent research on this latter variable).

Much of the geolinguistic diffusion literature to date appears to suggest that the spreading innovation obliterates everything in its path, leaving a new dialectological landscape devoid of evidence of its past. The role of local dialects in the path of the advancing innovation has received much less attention – compare the paucity of research on forms undergoing attrition with the vigorous upsurge in studies on innovation diffusion. There has been an assumption that the process involves little more than 'a sequence of distributional changes' (Gregory 1985:304) rather than a process which had locally specific outcomes, and which may be resisted both by local identity practices and local linguistic structural pressures. Exploration of these consequences is important since we cannot assume that an innovation will be evaluated in the same way in its new destination as it was where it came from. A stigmatised working class urban feature from an innovatory hub may well, when diffused to smaller towns and cities represent a rather prestigious urban chic, or the reverse, a largely unstigmatised form from the city may be castigated as the language of unwelcome 'townies' swamping local village life. In the south of England, the use of glottal stops for /t/, particularly intervocalically (in, say, 'butter' or 'letter') has been endowed with significant social meaning, characterised as a predominantly male and working class variant (though glottal stops in word-final, preconsonantal position are commonplace even among BBC newsreaders) Researchers of Newcastle English found, however, that the use of glottal stops was on the increase, with the change led by *young middle class women* (J. Milroy et al 1994; Docherty, Foulkes, J. Milroy, L. Milroy and Walshaw 1997). Clearly in Newcastle, a glottal stop encodes a rather different social meaning in the speech community than it does in the south. We cannot assume, therefore, that if feature A diffuses from place X to place Y[6] it will carry the same connotations in the two places. Similarly, relatively little research has investigated whether the diffusing form remains *linguistically unchanged* when embedded in its new speech community – are the linguistic constraints on the variability the same in the source as in its new home, for example? The constraints on the use of glottal stops in Newcastle appear somewhat different to those found in southern England, for example (Docherty et al 1997).

Furthermore, as both Yapa (1997: 359) and Gregory (1985: 319) note, traditional diffusion models treat the non-adoption of an innovation as 'a passive state where the 'friction of distance applies a brake to innovation…rather [than] an active state arising out of the structural arrangements of society'. As highlighted earlier, diffusion necessarily implies contact, and therefore non-adoption is more likely to be explained by the local contest between adopting the innovation and retaining the traditional form

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[6] (or, perhaps better, if feature A arises in two different places, X and Y, since we may wish to be more non-committal about whether, for example, glottal stops spread to Newcastle *from London*).

than with the spatial impetus for the innovation to spread further. Johnson and Britain (2002), for example, have shown that the advance of the vocalisation of /l/ is blocked or considerably decelerated by the absence of a clear-dark /l/ distinction, and it is notable that those areas which have or had until recently a clear /l/ in both onset and coda resist /l/ vocalisation: e.g. traditional East Anglia (Trudgill 1999, Bray, pc) has low or no vocalisation, whereas it is found at much greater levels further away from the purported source of London (e.g. Derby (Docherty and Foulkes 1999), the Fens (Britain in press, forthcoming), Birmingham (Mathisen 1999)).

The contact between innovation and traditional form within a speech community witnessing diffusion can sometimes lead not to the victory of the innovation, nor to the survival of the traditional form, but to the emergence of an interdialectal compromise. Trudgill (1983: Chapter 4) reports such compromises in his discussions of the diffusion of a merged variant of /ou/ (in words such as 'moan' and 'mown') across East Anglia replacing the local split system which preserved the historical distinction between Middle English (ME) /ɔ:/ (realised today in Norfolk as /ʊu/, e.g. 'moan' [mʊun]) and ME /ou/ (now /ʌu/ in Norfolk, e.g. 'mown' [mʌun]). He found, for instance, that many middle class residents of Norwich, and several working class inhabitants of the towns of Ipswich, King's Lynn and Lowestoft were producing an intermediate diphthong [ɵʊ] for words in both the MOAN and the MOWN sets. In these cases, neither the incoming merged /ʌu/ form nor the traditional split forms had emerged victorious, but a phonetic compromise born from the consequences of linguistic accommodation between the innovation and the local form had emerged. Similar findings come from my own research in the Fens on the same variable. One recent development across southern England and beyond has been the fronting of /ʌu/, such that forms such as [nɐɨ] for 'know' are not infrequent. In the eastern Fens, where older speakers retain the traditional MOAN-MOWN distinction mentioned above, adolescents regularly front words in the MOWN set but front those in the MOAN set much less frequently, if at all. Hence 'rows' is typically realised by them as [rɐɨz] and 'roses' as [rʊuzəz] (see Britain forthcoming, for further detail).

Geolinguistic diffusion, then, is not as straightforward as the simple victory of an innovative form over a traditional one. Both forms compete and accommodate to each other in local speech communities, where the innovation may take on a quite distinct social meaning from the one it held in its place of origin. The accommodation between innovation and conservative form can sometimes lead to new hybrid forms emerging, present in neither original dialect, but clearly derived from contact between them.

*Intra-regional koineisation*

Since diffusion depends on contact, it is not altogether unsurprising that where breaks in contact frequency are found, we also find that linguistic breaks – isoglosses or dialect transitions - occur (Chambers and Trudgill 1998). These breaks often arise because of physical barriers to inter-regional communication (although this is becoming less important because of the widespread application of technology to overcome such obstacles). They are also shaped, however, by routinised human activity within speech communities. Giddens has argued that routines form 'the material grounding for the recursive nature of social life' (1984: xxiii), and channel everyday human behaviour into a set of self-perpetuating socio-geographical 'grooves'. The geographies and histories of our social networks and those of the social, economic and political institutions which guide our daily lives in the West (Britain 1997, 2001, in press) are played out, routinised and reproduced within functional zones usually centred around (or in the sometimes distant shadow of) one or a number of urban areas. The later life-paths of speakers and their institutions are often strongly guided by past practices, by attitudinal considerations and by physical factors, and hence *regions* are formed (Britain 2001). Intra-regional mobility, whilst breaking down networks and routines at the very local level, reinforces *supra-local* structure. Whilst this supralocalisation of English society (and its linguistic consequences) has been ongoing for well over a century now, improvements in transportation routes, the shift from primary and secondary to tertiary sector employment as the backbone of the economy, the expansion in higher levels of education (at sites often well away from the local speech community), the normalisation of long(er)-distance commuting, labour market flexibility and the consequent geographical elasticity of family ties and other social network links have meant that these supralocal functional zones are probably larger than ever before.

The previously mentioned social and geographical mobility within these supralocal zones has led to dialect contact between the varieties spoken within them. The result has been the emergence over time of regional koines - levelled supralocal varieties which are replacing some of the linguistic diversity that once reigned within individual regions. This levelling is not entirely new. Ellis, back at the end of the 19th century, highlighted a number of locations where 'localisms' or 'provincialisms' had given way to more regionally widespread forms. He described the region covering the South Midlands, Oxfordshire and London as 'an area of continual conflict and mixture of the South, West, Midland and Eastern populations'…'a mutilated Southern character' (Ellis 1898: 110). For London and the rest of the South East of England he notes that:

> 'the composite nature of a very shifting population in this district renders the
> growth of any dialect proper impossible (ibid.:119)…There are so many causes
> for interference with the natural development of speech, and the population is so
> shifting, that it would be misleading to suppose that there was any real hereditary
> dialect or mode of speech….the enormous congeries of persons from different

parts of the kingdom and from different countries, and the generality of school education, render dialect nearly impossible (ibid.:225)…For the rural portions of the SE district, I have very slender information. My informants find a shifting population, and nothing distinctive to record. They imagine that if there is nothing different to their hearing than uneducated London speech, there is nothing to report (ibid.: 234-5)…the inhabitants of this locality are mainly strangers from every corner of the country who have settled here for a brief space and never remain long. They represent any and no special pronunciation' (ibid.: 235)

Even further back, Nevalainen (2000) and Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2000) provide extensive evidence of the role of koineisation and supralocalisation in the rise of the Chancery Standard in the 15th and 16th centuries. Research interest in this dialect supralocalisation at the end of the twentieth century was driven, however, by a recognition that levelling was operating at a much larger scale and perhaps with greater intensity than at any time before, and we now have considerable sociolinguistic evidence that intra-regional mobility is breaking down linguistically local zones in favour of larger supra-local ones, creating a smaller number of geographically expansive *regiolects* (see, for example, J. Milroy, L. Milroy and Hartley 1994; J. Milroy, L. Milroy, Hartley and Walshaw 1994; L. Milroy 1999; Watt and Milroy 1999; Watt 2002). J. Milroy et al (1994), for example, demonstrated that in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the highly local [ʔt] variant of /t/ is losing out, particularly among younger female speakers, in favour not of the standard [t] variant, but, as we saw earlier, the regionally more widespread but non-standard glottal form [ʔ]. Similarly, Watt (2002) found that the regional Northern non-standard variants [eː] and [oː] of the FACE and GOAT variables respectively were taking over in Newcastle from the much more locally current [ɪə] and [ʊə] variants (also discussed earlier), with the national standard forms serving as insignificant minority variants and used only among middle class speakers.

Such supra-local koineisation is also underway, as Ellis noted over a century ago, in south-eastern England, much to the excitement of journalists and politicians, the emerging regiolect having been named 'Estuary English' (for discussions see Maidment 1994, Parsons 1998, Peys 2001, Przedlacka 2001, etc.). Relatively little empirical work has yet been conducted to assess its real geographical spread or its penetration through the social hierarchy (though see Przedlacka 2001, Britain forthcoming), but it is assumed by linguists to have resulted from dialect contact processes (accommodation, koineisation – including levelling, interdialect formation, etc) working on the mix of dialects on the London – RP continuum as well as local varieties beyond the capital city. Figure 10 below attempts to highlight how this regional koineisation takes place in contexts of dialect contact (see also Trudgill and Britain, forthcoming).

# Figure 10: A diagrammatic model of accommodation, koineisation and new dialect formation.

Stage 1: Initial dialect contact: accommodation between distinct dialects brings about an interdialect

Dialect

Dialect

Dialect

Accomodated
Interdialect

Dialect

Dialect

Dialect
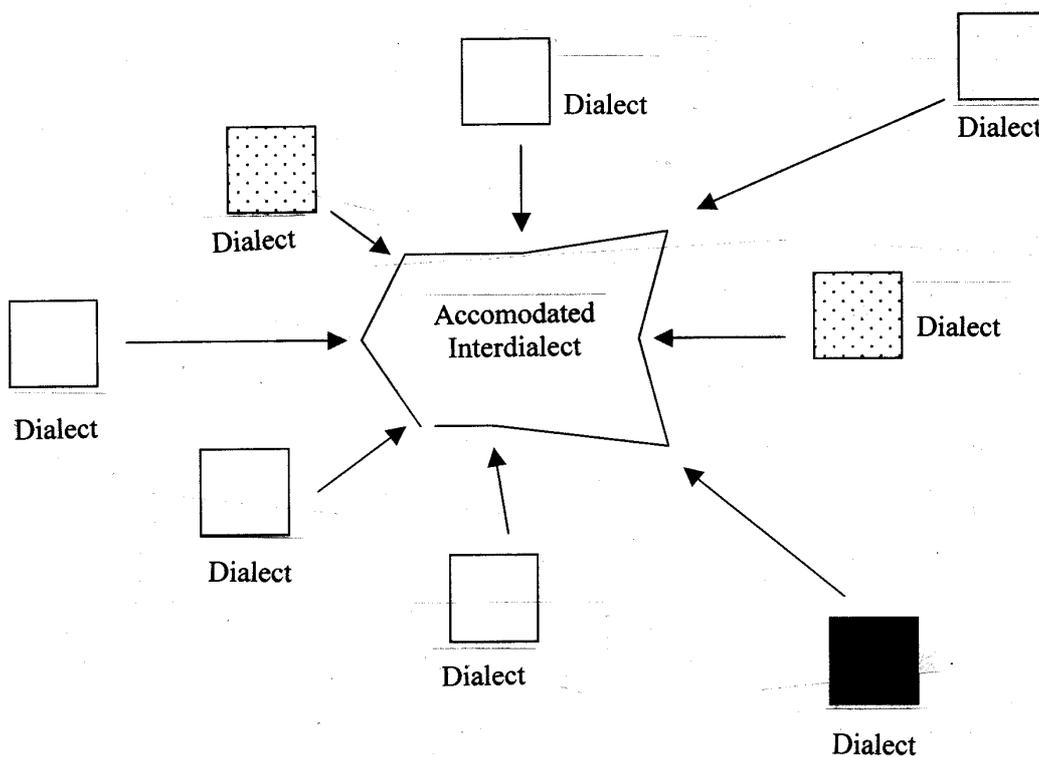
Dialect

Dialect

Stage 2: Children acquire interdialect and continue focussing (which can be disrupted by new non-native dialects present in the community)

Non-native
dialect

Non-native
Dialect

Etc.
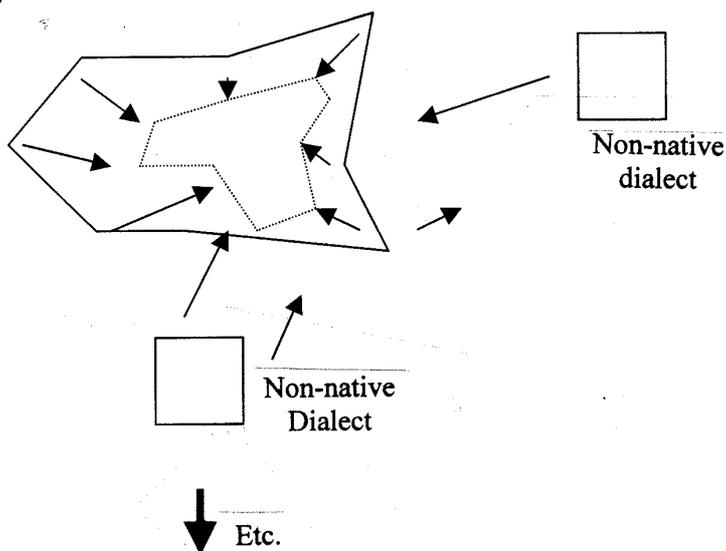
In the initial stages, diversity is assumed to be at its greatest (represented here by distance between the dialects represented in the Figure). As speakers of these dialects converge with each other through contact induced accommodation (the arrows in the Figure), so the linguistic difference between them becomes less although since adult accommodation is often inaccurate and incomplete (Trudgill 1986), the linguistic outcomes of this contact may well, as we saw earlier, lead to the birth of new interdialectal forms that existed in none of the original dialects. Alternatively, forms which were present in the majority of original dialects may well survive and level away competitors. New dialect acquirers (e.g. children) in such a high-contact speech community will be faced with a still somewhat heterogeneous target variety focussed to some extent by the accommodation processes underway (Stage 2), and they, in turn, will continue to narrow the linguistic differences, but may be diverted somewhat in this task by newcomers to the community who extend again the range and distinctiveness of variants in the local 'pool'[7]. As generations pass, however, the socio-geographical sphere of the contact becomes more and more embroiled in the dialect focussing process such that the new regiolect becomes the dominant code of the area. The linguistic *shape* of this accommodated dialect is, of course, somewhat more complex than Figure 10 is able to display and will depend on such factors as: the proportions of different migrant groups from different places in the mixed dialect community (see, for example, Trudgill 1986, Mufwene 2001); the *social ecology* of the new speech community (Mufwene 2001) – considering, for example, the degree of social contact and mixing between different groups, interaction with newcomers and the development of social norms; differing degrees of markedness and naturalness of the competing variants (Trudgill 1986, Mufwene 2001); the perceptual salience of different variants in the mix (Kerswill and Williams 2002; Trudgill and Britain, forthcoming); and the relative 'complexity' (Chambers 1992) of the competing linguistic variants.

Given the rise both in the tertiary sector of the economy, where the linguistic marketplace appears to stigmatise strongly local dialects, and in mass higher education, it is to be expected that this south-eastern regiolect would be spoken by the ever increasing 'central' classes of society (see L Milroy 1987 and J Milroy and L Milroy 1985 for a discussion of the role of these classes in linguistic change). Its spread into upper middle class groups has led to it being labelled the 'new RP', whilst at the other end of the class spectrum its use has been castigated by politicians and journalists as a sloppy rival to London's Cockney (see, for example, Parsons 1998, Przedlacka 2001). There is, of course, variation within this regiolect and there is little agreement as to what its linguistic characteristics are – some often cited forms, such as glottal stops, are not specific to the variety at all, whilst other candidates are often labelled as 'Cockney' and not 'Estuary' even though they too are spreading rapidly across the region.

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[7] It has been suggested that the founding population of a new speech community plays the greatest part in shaping the ultimate dialect of that community. Subsequent immigrants, it is expected, will deflect this influence to any great degree only if they come in considerable numbers (Mufwene 2001).

And local varieties still exist, partly because the regional koineisation is still underway, partly because distinct local dialects form part of the mix that has engendered the regiolect in different places – the East Anglian version of the regiolect is distinct from, say, the Sussex version, since, obviously, East Anglian dialects helped shape its very emergence – and partly because of particular local circumstances – some areas of the south-east have higher concentrations of wealth than others, some have higher concentrations of ethnic minorities than others (whose dialects inevitably shape ongoing local linguistic changes[8]), some, as we will see next, have witnessed even more extreme levels of dialect contact than the rest of the region, and so on.

*Local dialect contact*

As a result of the very poor quality of housing in many of Britain's urban centres, both before and after World War II, successive governments embarked on a number of large-scale programmes of slum clearance and urban redevelopment. As part of this, 'New Towns' were built – some pretty much from scratch and others, later, representing major expansions of already sizeable towns. These New Towns were supposed to provide complete self-contained new communities for their residents, with carefully integrated industrial, entertainment and infra-structural provision. In the late 1960s and early 1970s this New Town development was supplemented, especially in the south-east, by so-called 'overspill' development – like New Towns in that large new residential areas were built for former residents of urban areas, but not as grand in scale or provision. Overspill developments often manifested themselves as very large housing estates on the edge of smaller towns (e.g. Thetford, in Norfolk; Haverhill and Sudbury/Cornard in Suffolk). The linguistic consequences of overspill development has been little explored (however see Bray, forthcoming; Watts, forthcoming), though it is highly likely that they have acted as conduits for the spread of urban forms into more rural parts of the country. New Towns, however, have received much more attention from sociolinguists. Paul Kerswill and Ann William's large research project on perhaps the most well-known New Town of England – Milton Keynes – has substantially advanced our understanding of the outcomes of dialect contact in progress (esp. Kerswill and Williams 2000). Their explorations of the emerging Milton Keynes English among children exemplified many of the component processes of koineisation highlighted by Trudgill (1986) and also noted the advanced progress of a number of rapidly spreading innovations in the South-East. A large majority of the migrants to Milton Keynes, however, were from the South-East itself and so the dialects that did come into contact there were structurally relatively similar already. Similarly, Simpson and Britain (in preparation) found that the New Town of Telford in the West Midlands, deriving most of its migrants from the Birmingham area is, on the whole, developing a somewhat levelled urban West

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[8] Susan Fox, for example, (Fox, forthcoming) is investigating the local variety of English spoken in an area of Tower Hamlets in London - one of the supposed homes of Cockney. In Tower Hamlets today, over 60% of the adolescent population is of Bangladeshi origin, leading to interesting patterns of variation among both Bangladeshi and White youth there.

Midland dialect with relatively few features that distinguish it from other parts of the conurbation. One New Town study where the contact was more radical is Judy Dyer's research on Corby in Northamptonshire, a former steel town where around 3 in 10 of the population have *Scottish* ancestry (Dyer 2002: 101). She found that whilst for some linguistic features the Scottish forms had been levelled away by majority English variants (the Scottish COT-CAUGHT merger had been mostly lost, for example (Dyer 2002: 105), others had survived much more successfully (e.g. monophthongal [o] variants of the GOAT variable) and were being used as markers of local (as opposed to ethnic) identity by adolescents in the town.

*Conclusion*

I have exemplified in this discussion a number of features of dialects in England which were relatively healthy a hundred years ago, which are now dead or dying. This obsolescence has not led to a substantial increase in the proportion of speakers of RP or Standard English (see, Trudgill 2002: Chapter 16 for a detailed discussion of this). Instead, and because extensive social, economic and geographical mobility is weakening social networks and delocalising our life-paths, we are being brought into much more regular and intensive contact with speakers of other dialects than ever before. This contact has had important linguistic repercussions for the dialect landscape of England. More and more, locally distinct dialects are being replaced by supra-local or regional koines which are characterised both by the levelling of marked or minority features, and by interdialect caused by imperfect accommodation between speakers of different dialects in contact. It would be wrong to assume, however, that these koines have eradicated all diversity within their spheres of influence, since local social or demographic developments can provoke specific local outcomes of radical contact (witness the New Town dialects, studied by Kerswill, Williams and Dyer and those of communities where ethnic diversity is engendering new dialect formation (Fox, forthcoming)) and since our heterogeneous society fights, manipulates or succumbs to pressures to converge with differing degrees of enthusiasm and vigour .

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