

An aerial photograph of London, England, showing the River Thames winding through the city. The Tower Bridge is a prominent feature in the center. The city is densely packed with buildings, and the river is filled with boats. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark blue rectangle.

Language diversity and language change in London: the rise of Multicultural London English

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Linguistic innovators: the English of adolescents in London (2004–7)

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

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COUNCIL

Joyce, age 76

I used to work in an insurance office and on the switchboard .
and it we used to see him come in and out delivering the post
he was a postman um
the other little postman that used to come in
his name was . Wally
and we used to say "Wally what's his name"
and describe him say "oh you mean babyface"
cos he was quite yeah quite a nice face and with his hat on
so we said "yeah what's his name"
he said "well we all call him babyface . but his name's Fred"
so er this Saturday morning . he came in with the post
and we're just chatting
and he says to me "would you like to come to the pictures today .
tonight
I said "oh well"
I said "where do you live?"



he said "upper Clapton"
and I said "well I live in East Ham"
so he come down to East Ham
and er we went to the pictures there
and from then onwards we were always together
we were together nearly forty years .
he was my real my first really true boyfriend

Alex, aged 16

I mean I literally walked past two thugs that I didn't not knew but they just grabbed me by the hood swang me in a alley and had me at knifepoint. and I couldn't do nothing but I said. and they said "where you from?" I said "East London that's where I'm from" this is them "don't be funny" cos they're . I was right in a bit of East London so they said "don't be funny with me like that cos I'll stab you" and I said "I'm not trying to be funny" this is them "what area are you from . what part?" this is me "I'm from (name of place)" and then like they just said "oh yeah I don't like that area where area" and then like some hero. thank God there is some typical heros who. and it's like if you're short don't even bother come over because you're just gonna get stabbed yourself like.



I mean I literally walked past two thugs that **I didn't not knew** but they just grabbed me by the hood **swang** me in **a alley** and had me at knifepoint. and I **couldn't do nothing** but I said. and they said "where you from?" I said "East London that's where I'm from" **this is them** "don't be funny" cos they're . I was right in a bit of East London so they said "don't be funny with me like that cos I'll stab you" and I said "I'm not trying to be funny" **this is them** "what area are you from . what part?" **this is me** "I'm from (name of place)" and then **like** they just said "oh yeah I don't like that area where area" and then **like** some hero. thank God there is some typical heros who. and it's **like** if you're short don't even bother come over because you're just gonna get stabbed yourself **like**.



Web resource with MLE extracts

English Language Teaching Resources Archive

<http://linguistics.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/english-language-teaching>

Labels

Pejorative terms (invented, or at least propagated by the media):

- ***Jafaican***
- *Kanak Sprak*
- *Kebabnorsk*

Linguists' terms:

- ***Multicultural London English***
- *Kiezdeutsch*
- *Gatespråk*

Alex and his friends

Alex aged 16; born in Hackney; mother German; maternal grandfather Scottish; lived with her and Antiguan stepfather till 13; since then he and his brother have lived with Maltese grandmother; father Maltese/Ghanaian; father has never lived with them but he and Alex work together; Alex understands Maltese and speaks a little Maltese.

Brian aged 17, born in Hackney; mother born in London; her parents born in Antigua; father born in Jamaica; father's parents still in Jamaica; Brian has been to Antigua

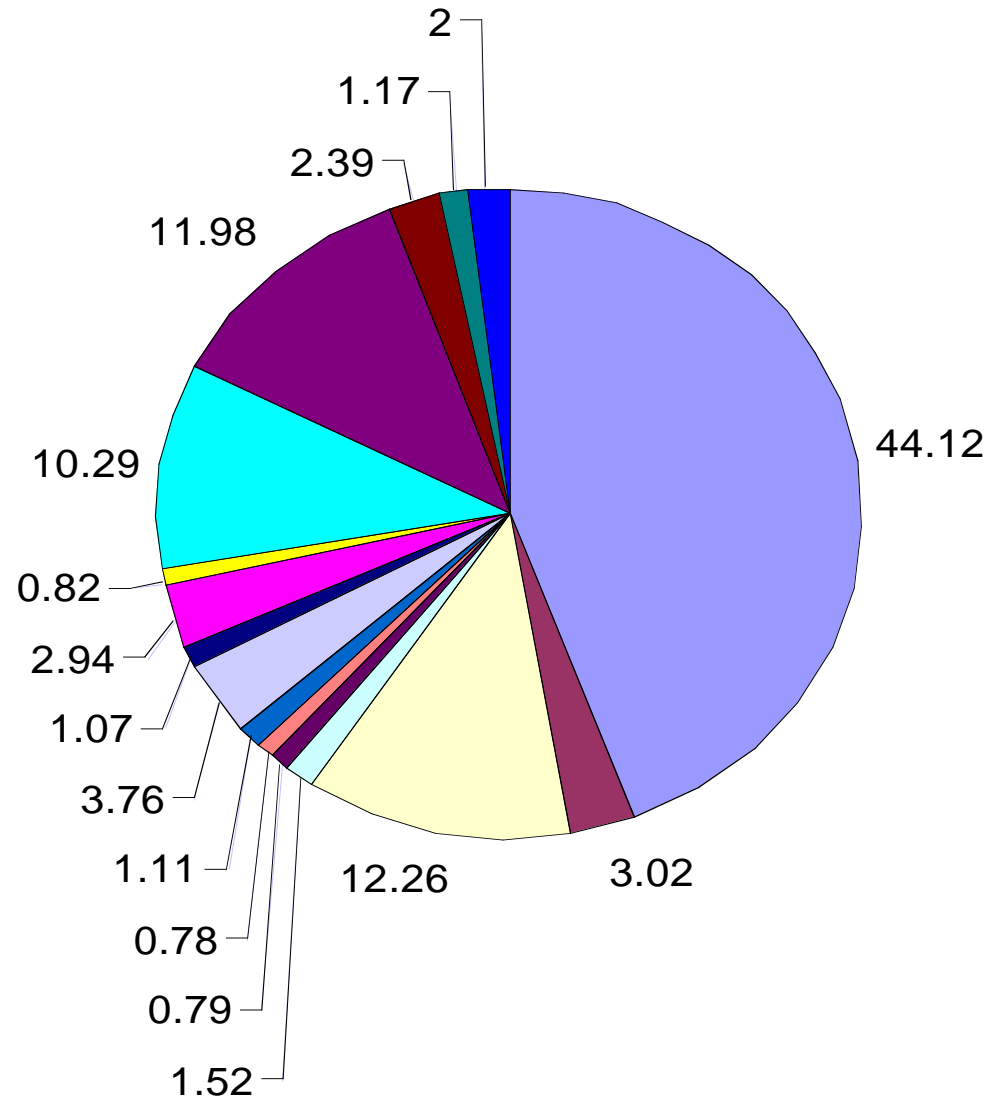
Zack: age 16; white British; born in Hackney; mother and father also born in Hackney, 'Anglo'

Grant: aged 17; came to London aged 2; mother and father both Portuguese and speak only a little English; he interprets for them; acquired English at nursery school

Dom aged 17; parents Colombian; came to London aged 2; parents speak no English; he and his younger sister interpret for them; Dom speaks English, Spanish, Spanglish; acquired English at school.

Multicultural London English: an ethnically neutral repertoire of linguistic features

Hackney ethnic group percentages



- White British
- White Irish
- White Other
- Mixed race White Black Caribbean
- Mixed race White Black African
- Mixed race White Asian
- Mixed race Other
- Asian Indian
- Asian Pakistani
- Asian Bangladeshi
- Asian Other
- Black Caribbean
- Black African
- Black Other

MLE project: ethnicities of young speakers, 5-17

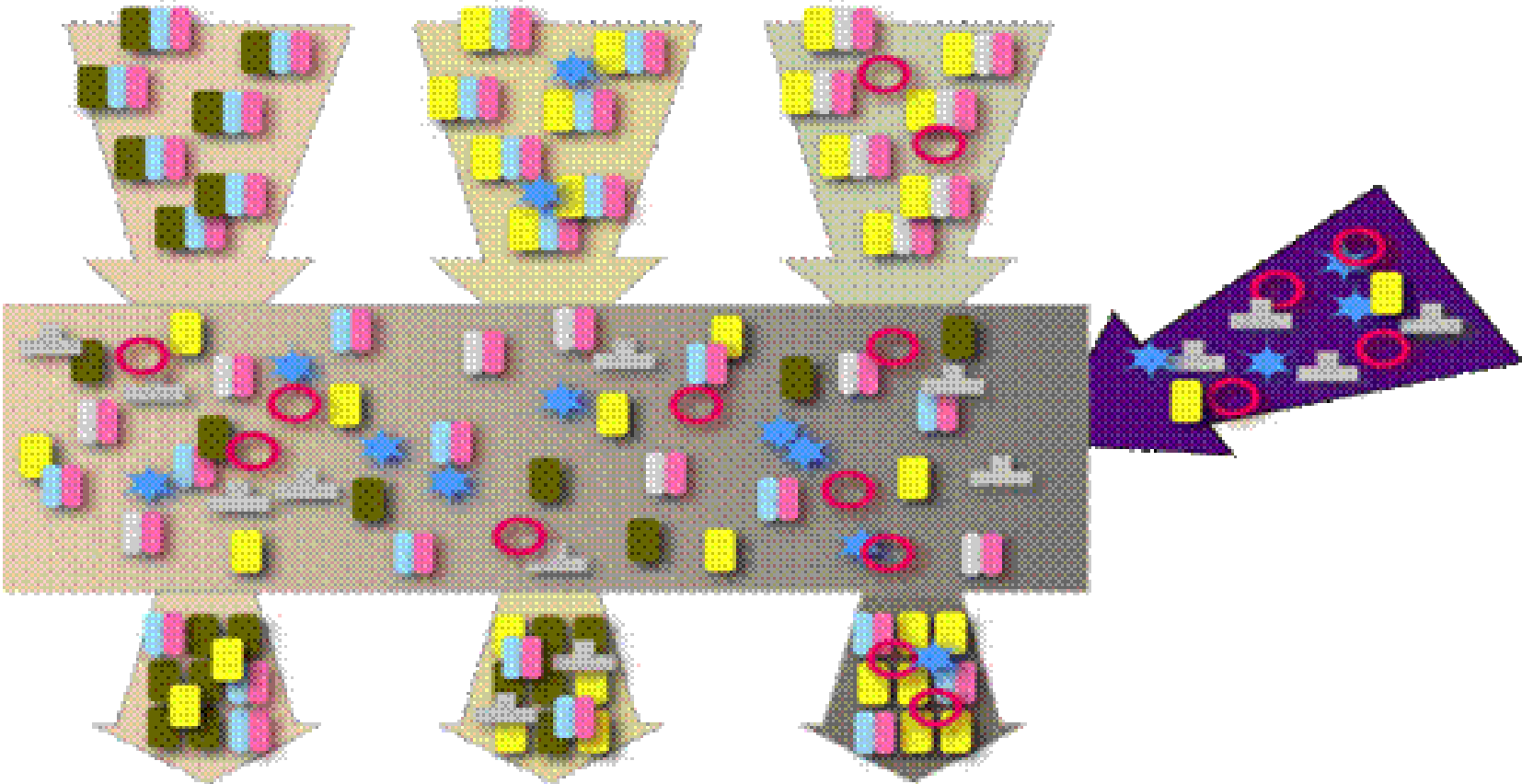
Anglo	19	Bangladeshi	2
AfroCaribbean	12	Ghanaian	2
Mixed race	10	Moroccan	2
Turkish	8	Kurdish	2
Nigerian	6	Portuguese	2
Bengali	3	Somali	2
'Black African'	3	Albanian	1
Turkish	4	Filipino	1

Children acquire English from each other, and they all speak different kinds of English

- many different learner varieties of English
- Englishes of the Indian subcontinent and Africa
- Caribbean Creoles and their indigenised London versions
- African English Creoles (e.g. Sierra Leone, Nigeria)
- traditional 'Cockney' features from 'Anglos'
- standard English from various sources

All children, bilingual and monolingual alike, are exposed to all these features from a very young age

The feature pool (Mufwene 2001)



Mufwene.uchicago.edu/feature_pool.html

Interaction in an 8 year old peer group

(Uzay is Turkish, Dumaka is Nigerian)

Uzay to . **this was** . he . **this this was this** . **thi this thi this thi**
[simultaneous speech not transcribed]

Dumaka **this this was** Ulash [Arfaan: yeah] to Noam bom bom ..

Uzay ey <Arfaan laughs> . no . **he was doing like this** to Lauren.

Dumaka [no xxx xxx I didn't say . I didn't I didn't say
[simultaneous speech not transcribed]

Uzay look you're laughing **he was doing like this** to

Dumaka I didn't I didn't I didn't I swear/

Arfaan [Uzay: uh uh] okay okay

Uzay and **he's doing like this** .

Dumaka I didn't how could I do that . liar liar pants on fire



By age 16, language use has become more focused, with some variable features remaining as the distinctive features of Multicultural London English

The frequency of use of MLE features correlates with ethnicity (most features are used more often by non-Anglos than Anglos)

Frequency also correlates with a speaker's friendship network; the more friends a young person has from different ethnic (language) backgrounds, the more often they use MLE features (whether they are monolingual white British speakers ('Anglos') or not)

Multicultural London English is a new dialect

a dialect: “the particular combination of English words, pronunciations and grammatical forms that you share with other people from your area and your social background” (Trudgill 2004: 2)

It is also a new contact variety

a contact variety: “ a language that arose by some historical process other than normal transmission [from caregiver to child]” Thomason (2009)

Vocabulary

- *ends* neighbourhood, area *what ends you from?*
- *wagwan* what's up?
- *Creps* trainers *gimme them creps man*
- *yard* home *You out tonight? No I'm chilling in my yard*
- *batty man* gay man
- *deep* rude, horrible *that was deep*
- *long ting* takes a long time/is tedious/is not interesting *shall we walk to College? no that's a long ting*
- *blood, bredren* 'friend'

The founder principle

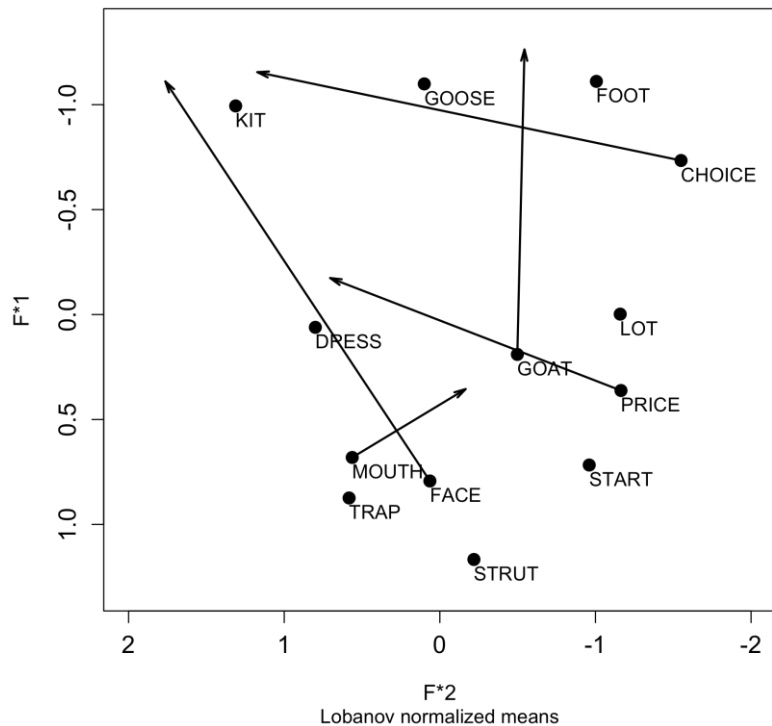


Term from population genetics

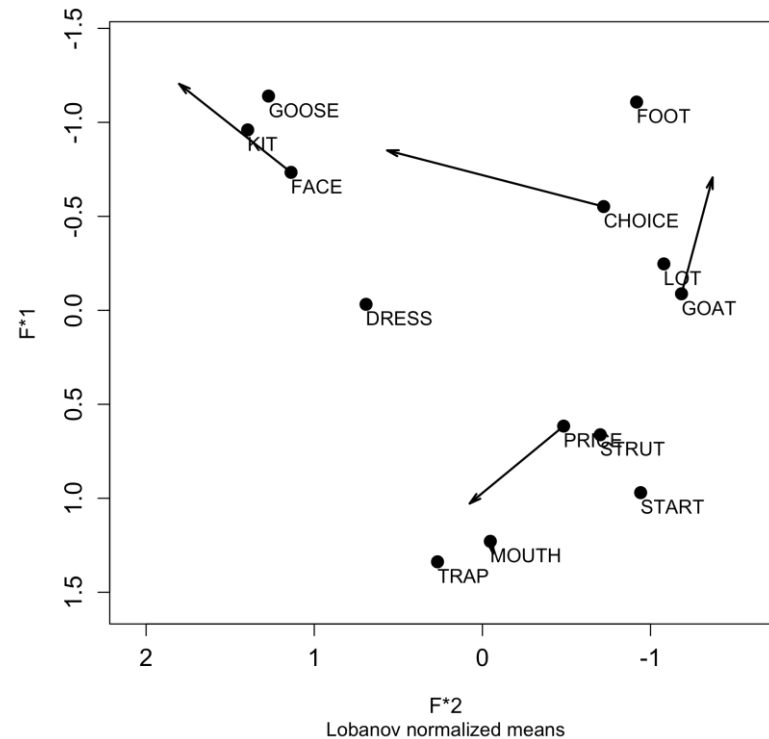
The language of the first immigrant groups survives and affects the language of the area, despite the arrival of later languages

London: vowels

elderly Anglo speaker e.g. Joyce



young non-Anglo speaker e.g. Alex



Language change in London vowels is driven by the **frequency** of near-monophthongs in the feature pool

Language change is also driven by simplification

*I was right in **a bit** of East London*

*they swang me in **a alley***

Simplification of indefinite and definite article allomorphy

variation in the plural forms of *man* has led to a new English pronoun

- *most Congo **men** they jam in Tottenham*
- *a few drunk **mans** come and sit beside us*
- *most Congo **mens** in this country yeah. they look funny cos they got expensive clothes*
- *he was stabbing up the **mandem** like*
- *they call up their guys yeah bare **man** outside school blood*

<i>men</i>	<i>mens</i>	<i>mans</i>	<i>mandem</i>	<i>man</i>	TOTAL
21.2 (7)	3.3 (1)	27.3 (9)	9.1 (3)	39.4 (13)	100 (33)

as a plural noun, *man* refers to a group of people. The context makes it clear what kind of group the speaker is thinking of:

you man are all sick though

*if it's like a big rave the majority of the **man** go together*

man as a pronoun



*I don't mind what my girl looks likeit's her personality **man's** looking at*

With *man*, Alex can position himself as a member of a group of like-minded people, and validate his opinion by suggesting that anyone would think this way.

*didn't I tell you **man** wanna come see you not your friends . I date you not your friends” “*

Alex is reporting what he said to his girlfriend when she brought along her friends on a date with him.

With *man*, he can suggest that anyone would react like this.

Filling a gap in English

Young MLE speakers are creating discourse particles to mark different kinds of information structure in English

English is unusual amongst the world's languages in not having a word or particle that marks important information

Hindi, Bengali, Sylheti: *kii* 'what' can mark a new topic

[talking about what the family will do on holiday]

aamaar kii aami hētei cole jaabo
my what I emph on foot walk will go
'as for me, I can even go walking'

[goes on to talk about walking in the countryside]

English-based Creoles have particles for topic marking and emphatic focusing

e.g. *a di bwai Meiri hit*

Mary hit the boy/it was the boy Mary hit

New discourse functions of *innit*

innit can mark a new topic

*yeah I know . I'm a lot smaller than all of them man and who were like "whoa" . I mean the sister **innit** she's about five times bigger than you innit Mark? (Tina)*

innit can also emphasise something that the speaker has just said:

Alan: *or if it got too big, we used to to have a graveyard next to our school . we used to take it there or the cage. that's how it was now*

Brian: *yeah*

Alan: *if you got beef **innit** take it to the cage. or the graveyard*



New discourse functions of *who*

Who can also mark a new topic

I've done three things cos of my mum and one thing for my little brother.
my medium brother *who* moved to Antigua

cos **he's** got a spinal disorder

so **he** grows kinda slow

so **he** is kinda short

people were swinging **him** about in my area.

I thought "what?" .

now I lived near **him** . then . in North one.

I still had my house in East London

cos that's where I've lived

born and raised



cf. relative *that* (not a topic marker)

when disasters happen like public and national things happen that's when people come together and no longer see it as a . as us being a different race because at the end of the day . **people that were on the bus** were all different types of people

so therefore got affected by the same thing

so natural and national disasters that happen in Britain

everyone feels it

and sometimes I think like religiously speaking

sometimes I think . like them things . should happen

but there is still a benefit from like disasters

because people do come together

and we realise that people do get affected

so yeah . so I' m definitely a Londoner



A new development for *like*?

In young people's speech, *like* may be becoming specialised as a marker of topic continuity (information structure) when it occurs before a noun or pronoun

and he goes "ah no get off the bike" yeah so like he kind of shoved me off the bike

and I got kicked out of school . like I weren't allowed into any school

Like is so frequent, it has lost its meaning of approximation or focus, and has a new function

Logophoric pronouns in Yoruba and Igbo

ó sìrì nà **ó** byàrà

he_i said that he_i came (ó ('he') refers to the same person)

ó sìrì nà **yá** byàrà

he_i said that he_j came (ó and yá ('he') refer to different people)

ó and **yá** highlight referents that speakers want their listeners to pay attention to (they encode the speaker's attitude and disambiguate reference).

Like may now behave in the same way as **yá** in Yoruba

Tolerance of variation

leads to a more frequent use of traditional London vernacular features

- *and I couldn't do **nothing*** (Alex)
- *when I come to this country I didn't speak **no** English* (Isabella)
- *look at **them** people* (Brian)

	% (n) negative concord	% (n) nonstandard <i>them</i>
Hackney 65+	13.54 (96)	25.6 (39)
Havering 16-19 (16 speakers)	54.6 (227)	61.3 (31)
Hackney 16-19 (18 speakers)	63.7 (289)	77.5 (111)

Tolerance of variation leads to more frequent use of widely diffusing features

Bare noun phrases

I'm going school now

we need to go toilet

Many young people do not have *to* after the verbs GO and COME; this is more frequent in MLE

This continues a pattern found in a few expressions in English generally
e.g. *I'm going home*

Language change or a temporary youth style?

In **language change**, new generations continue to use new language forms

- in our research, Anglo and non-Anglo 8 year olds have an MLE vowel system
- Children as young as 5 also have this vowel system

5 year olds and 8 year olds also use the reduced *a/an* indefinite article system

8 year olds use the new *this is* +speaker quotative:

Howard: *alright right this is **this is me knocking at the door** yeah*
<pretends to knock> *and I'm knocking at the door yeah and*
this is the dog <makes gesture> *look and **this is the dog** "woof woof woo"*



In **language change**, new forms spread beyond their original location

In **Birmingham** and in **Manchester**, adolescents use MLE short diphthongs in PRICE, GOAT and FACE (Khan 2006, Drummond 2016)

The *man* pronoun is used by adolescents in Manchester (Drummond 2016) and by young people in Birmingham (*One Mile Away*, Channel 4 documentary)

Third-generation Italian speakers in Bedford are **losing *a/an* allomorphy**, and this is spreading via multiethnic peer group networks (Guzzo, Britain and Fox 2008)

'You get me?' tweets
by location

FIG.2d

(Katherine Watt
(2013). Twitter study
of selected MLE
features. BA
dissertation,
Birkbeck, University
of London)



48 tweets

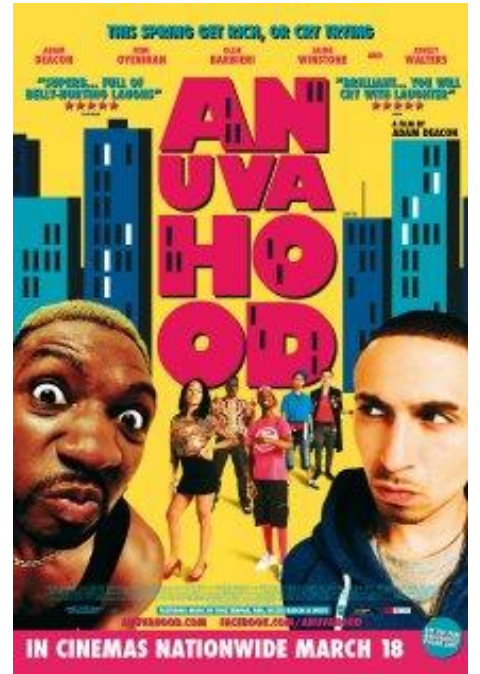
Recent research (Stuart-Smith et al 2013) suggests that changes may initially diffuse from London

but they only take off when innovative variants become linked with social meanings

and engagement with spoken media can be an accelerating factor.

In TV performances and cult films (e.g. *Anuvahood*), the actors who use MLE features portray 'cool', tough young people from minority ethnic groups, in multiethnic communities.

Grime musicians and young people talking about Grime on YouTube use the *man* pronoun and other MLE features.



For some young people in London, MLE is a style of speaking that they opt into and out of, depending on what kind of persona they want to project.

On the other hand, the new linguistic features could have been generated independently in different multilingual English cities.

To hear more MLE extracts (with transcriptions and commentaries):

<http://www.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/englishlanguage/teaching/>

There are also suggested Language Investigations based on recent research in Linguistics

The Linguistics Research Digest has summaries of recent research in Linguistics relevant to English Language teaching

<http://linguistics-research-digest.blogspot.co.uk/>

Who speaks it and when?

- Multiethnolects occupy a continuum:



- Vernacular speakers of Multicultural London English (MLE) are usually working class
- Elements of MLE, especially slang, available to other speakers, including middle class, as style