Linguistic innovation and change in multilingual urban contexts

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Urban vernaculars in European cities

*Rinkebysvenska* (Stockholm)

*Straat taal* (Netherlands)

*Kiezdeutsch* (Berlin)

*Jallanorsk* (Oslo)

*Københavnsk multietnolekt* (Copenhagen)

*Multicultural London English*

*Multicultural Paris French*

All have innovative features used by young people of recent immigrant origin and also by young people from longstanding local families
The actuation problem

How does a change begin?

(Weinreich, Herzog and Labov 1968, Question 5)


Research on multilingual urban vernaculars may allow us to answer the questions “why here and now? ….why not here and not now?” (Labov 2001:466):

Multicultural London English: the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety 2007-2010

Paul Kerswill, Jenny Cheshire, Sue Fox, Eivind Torgersen, Arfaan Khan
**Linguistic Innovators: project design**

- 96 young people aged 16-19

- 16 speakers aged 65+

- 2 locations: Hackney (inner London)  
  Havering (outer London)

- in Hackney, the adolescents were ‘Anglo’ and ‘non-Anglo’

- recordings in friendship groups and interviews; some self recordings

- corpus of approx. 1 million words
## Percentage of different ethnic groups in Hackney and Havering


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Hackney</th>
<th>Havering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race White/Black Caribbean</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race White/Black African</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race White/Asian</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Mixed race</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linguistic Innovators project: innovations

- a new pronoun: *it’s her personality man’s looking at*

- a new quotative: *this is me “I’m from East London”*

- new discourse markers:
  
  > I got the right moves innit but I ain't telling you though
  > **still**. **you get me**
  > this is me "**allow** man get off me” (Torgersen et al 2011)

- why…..for question frame: *I said “**why** you searching my** jacket** for?”*

- no *a/an* distinction: *it’s a picture of a alien eating a apple* (Britain and Fox 2009)
Innovations or changes?

J. Milroy (1992: 171): an innovation is the act of a speaker, whereas a change is not a change until it has been adopted by more than one speaker.

Milroy and Milroy (1985): speaker innovations are defined in terms of their success in subsequent diffusion

- Stage (i) a speaker innovation may fail to diffuse beyond the speaker
- Stage (ii) a speaker innovation may diffuse into the community and then go no further
- Stage (iii) an innovation becomes a change when it diffuses to further communities that the innovator has no direct tie with
Multicultural London English Project: project design

- Six age groups: 4-5, 8, 12, 16-19, c.25, c.40
- North London
- Female, male
- "Anglo" and "non-Anglo"
- Free interviews in small groups of friends; some self-recordings
- Phonological and grammatical analysis
- Perception tests
- c. 1.5m words transcribed
Pronoun *man*

*I don't really mind how . how my girl looks if she looks decent yeh and there's one bit of her face that just looks mashed yeh I don't care it's her personality man's looking at I'm not even looking at the girl proper like*

cf. Old English  
*Gif hine *man* ofslea, licgge he orgilde*  
If him man kill, lies he unpaid for  
If he is killed, he lies unpaid for*

“our language is at present singularly embarrassed for want of this most useful pronoun. There are probably few English speakers or writers who have not felt the awkwardness resulting from the our loss of this most useful pronoun” Earle (1871: 37)
Present day *man* is not quite like Old English *man*.

Some tokens have indefinite or generic reference (like OE *man* or French *on*) but others refer to the speaker.

Dexter: before I got arrested *man* paid for my own ticket to go Jamaica you know. but I've never paid to go on no holiday before this time I paid.

Aimee: and you got arrested

Dexter: a big three hundred and fifty pound. I got arrested so I'm thinking ah I got arrested I'm gonna tell them that I've got a holiday to go to so they gonna let me out. nah they didn't let me .. I was so upset..

Aimee: can't you get a refund? .
An innovation or a linguistic change?

The corpus of adolescent speech has only 14 tokens, but

• the 14 tokens come from 6 different individuals, from both Hackney and the north London area

• there are anecdotal reports from students and from friends whose adolescent children use *man* as a pronoun

• a few younger children in the MLE corpus use *man* as a pronoun

• the pronoun *man* occurs in the film *Annuvahood* (Adam Deacon, 2011)

So this looks like a stage (iii) innovation
Replacement of subject *ye* by *you* in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (Nevailen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003: 60)
Grammaticalisation from noun *man*?

French \( on < \text{homme} \)  
OE \( \text{man}_{\text{pro}} < \text{man}_N \)

German \( \text{man} < \text{Mann} \)  
Swahili \( \text{mtu}_{\text{pro}} < \text{mtu}_N \)

Br. Portuguese \( a \text{ gente}_{\text{pro}} < a \text{ gente}_N \)

It looks as though the emergence of \( \text{man}_{\text{pro}} \) is in line with common developments such as these, involving **decategorisation** from a noun to a pronoun (no determiner, no plural marking) and **semantic change** (loss of [+male] feature)
Grammaticalisation?

“the decisive factors for triggering and continuation of a grammaticalization process are not to be found exclusively in the grammaticalizing items themselves, but also in changes in related linguistic categories and subsystems” (Deiwal 2002: 117)

The *man* pronoun may be developing from the noun *man*, but our data suggest that it is helped by relevant variation and change in:

(i) plural marking of the noun *man*
(ii) plural marking in other nouns
(iii) another change in the pronoun system of London English
(iv) changes in the use of the pragmatic marker *man*
singular/plural marking on the noun *man*

**Singular form**

*this time I’m gonna be a good man*

**Plural forms**

*they call up their guys yeah bare man outside school blud*

*a few drunk mans come and sit beside us*

*most Congo men they jam in Tottenham*

*most Congo mens in this country yeh. they look funny cos they got expensive clothes*

*he was stabbing up the mandem like*
### Number and percentage of singular and plural forms for the 6 *man* pronoun users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>man</em> [sing]</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>man</em> [plu]</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>men</em> [plu]</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mans</em> [plu]</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mandem</em> [plu]</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total plural forms</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Plural marking for the noun *man* is variable for these speakers.
Variation in plural marking on other nouns

We have basketballs after school

I got some more moneys

I’ve got like too many friend . I got thousand friends

Possible sources?

Variation in plural marking in interlanguage varieties of English

Also in post-colonial varieties of English (attested in Singapore, India, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Philippines, Nigeria etc)
Variation in second person plural pronouns

Present-day (standard) English has not only lost an indefinite pronoun, it has also lost distinct singular and plural second person pronouns

he told me yeah that youse lot was just messing around

man’s got to have to jump up to hit him he could just go bang bang and start hitting youse and that’s it

youse occurs in 14 of the Multicultural London English recordings; it also occurs in the Linguistic Innovators corpus
A perfectly normal development: most other varieties of English have developed a 2\textsuperscript{nd} person plural pronoun.

\textit{youse} in Ireland, Newcastle, Liverpool, Glasgow, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa

\textit{y’all} in southern USA, AAVE, South African Indian English

\textit{unu} in Caribbean English Creoles

etc.

(Wright 1977)

Key word *man*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency per million words in target corpus – Hackney (n)</th>
<th>Frequency per million words in reference corpus – Havering (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>656.5 (394)</td>
<td>163.9 (87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guy</td>
<td>413.2 (248)</td>
<td>62.2 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>156.6 (94)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>1286.3 (772)</td>
<td>761.4 (404)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

approx. 75 per cent of the *man* tokens are address forms/pragmatic markers
Frequent usage promotes semantic bleaching

*Man* as an address term and pragmatic marker has mainly lost the semantic feature of [+male]

As an address term it is used to female speakers as well as to male speakers, and by female speakers as well as male speakers

As a pragmatic marker it is multifunctional

Use as a punctor

Raymond: are you talking about that excel thing?
Will: no *man* that’s . no you’re talking about exel *man* . I went . that was before *man*
Ray: bare patches in your headpiece.
Will: what you talking about man (. ) you mug.
Ray: did your mum do it again?
Will: x <kisses teeth> oh you're a mug.
Ray: xx <laughing and claps hands> bare patches in your head blad.
Will: ba- patch (. ) do you (. ) get off ! I ain't got no patches in my hair man! it's just that where you wear the hat.
Ray: it's alright patches man.
Will: <kisses teeth> whatever man
How does the change begin?

Why here? Why in Hackney but not in Havering?

The main difference between Hackney and Havering is that Havering has **dialect contact** (in-migration from London and elsewhere in southeast England) while Hackney has **language contact**: there is a complex mix of languages in Hackney due to recent immigration.

Indefinite pronouns are common in the world’s languages, so children acquiring English in London may expect there to be one in English.

But so many languages are spoken in Hackney that the effect of language contact is unlikely to be due to direct language transfer. Instead, it is the **contact setting** that produces the cluster of changes that promotes grammaticalisation.
Why now?

The sociohistorical context in Hackney is important:

• Post-war slum clearances and decentralisation policies led to high out-migration of Anglos from the 1950s onwards

• High in-migration of population originating from countries other than the UK from 1950s onwards

• At first, there was segregation of immigrant groups and little contact with the indigenous community. Immigrants tended to maintain their home languages

• 2nd and 3rd generations of immigrant families now interact with each other, and with children from indigenous London families, from a very early age.
Children growing up in Hackney may acquire English at home, at school and, most importantly, through unguided language acquisition in multiethnic friendship groups. Many bilingual children have to take part in lively peer group interactions before they are proficient in English. This allows creativity and flexibility, and creates a pool of variants for the inner London young people that is influenced by:

- Creole varieties of English
- ex-colonial Englishes
- learner varieties (with the possibility of language transfer)
- the local London vernacular
- the English of the school and the media (an external normative effect)

Monolingual ‘Anglo’ English speakers are also exposed to all these forms.
Summary for *man* pronoun

It is common for indefinite pronouns to develop from nouns meaning ‘man’ or ‘people’, especially when there are other simultaneous relevant ongoing changes cf. *a gente* in Br. Portuguese (Zilles 2005).

Why here? Why in Hackney but not in Havering?

- there is language contact in Hackney, so the pool of variants is more diverse
- the sociolinguistic setting is different in Hackney, and this allows the take-up of new forms
- in particular, unguided language learning allows communicative pressures and communicative strategies to drive language use
The early adopters

The bilingual speakers are important for these innovations, but they are not the only early adopters. The importance of the bilingual speakers lies in their contributions to the pool of variants.

Early adopters of pronoun *man*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aimee</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tau</td>
<td>Congolese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>mixed race (German, Scottish, Maltese, African)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>‘Anglo’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>‘Anglo’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All have highly multiethnic friendship groups.
This is +speaker: a new quotative expression

i) this is them “what area are you from . what part?”
    this is me “I’m from East London”

ii) this is him “don’t lie . if I search you and if I find one I’ll kick your arse”

iii) this is my mum “what are you doing? I was in the queue before you”

iv) this is my mum’s boyfriend “put that in your pocket now”
I mean I literally walked past two thugs that I didn't not know but they just grabbed me by the hood swung 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 yeh I don't like that area where area" and then like some hero. thank god there is some typical heros who. it's like if you're short don't even bother come over because you're just gonna get stabbed yourself like .
The frequency in adolescent speech is low (61 (4.8% of all quotatives used) in the Linguistic Innovators corpus; 78 (6.1%) in the MLE corpus, but

- it is used by several different individuals
- it is used by other young Londoners too
- it is used by younger speakers in the MLE corpus
- it is used on TV by comedians who want to portray disaffected young people

So this looks like a stage (iii) innovation
### Linguistic Innovators: quotatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hackney elderly</th>
<th>Havering elderly</th>
<th>Hackney young</th>
<th>Havering young</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>say</em></td>
<td>70.8% (261)</td>
<td>73.5% (200)</td>
<td>27.4% (351)</td>
<td>31.2% (328)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>think</em></td>
<td>4.1% (15)</td>
<td>10.3% (28)</td>
<td>12.8% (164)</td>
<td>6.1% (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>go</em></td>
<td>4.6% (17)</td>
<td>0.4% (1)</td>
<td>11.7% (150)</td>
<td>26.5% (279)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>zero</em></td>
<td>18.9% (70)</td>
<td>12.9% (35)</td>
<td>15.1% (193)</td>
<td>12.3% (129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>be like</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>24.4% (313)</td>
<td>20.8% (219)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>this is (speaker)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.8% (61)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tell</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9% (24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>others</em></td>
<td>1.6% (6)</td>
<td>2.9% (8)</td>
<td>2% (26)</td>
<td>3.2% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL N</strong></td>
<td>370</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>1282</td>
<td>1052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is +speaker in inner London
Percentage BE LIKE in London: the adolescent peak
Percentage use of *this is* + speaker with number (N) of tokens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>age 5</th>
<th>age 8</th>
<th>age 12</th>
<th>age 16-19</th>
<th>age 30-35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N= 27</td>
<td>N= 13</td>
<td>N= 38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no adolescent peak-- if there is a peak at all, it is with the 8 year olds
Quotative functions:
(1) and then this is the man. "you gonna get fired"

(2) this is the boy "boom"

Non-quotative functions:
(3) he’s sitting on a chair this is him like he’s drunk or something

(4) I been on it this is me I’m scared I’m like this...it go slow and then I say “yeah”

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

(6) alright right this is this is me knocking at the door yeah and I'm knocking at the door yeah and this is the dog "<makes gesture?>". he just went and this is the dog "woof woof woo"
This is +speaker: quotative and non-quotative uses in inner London

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>8 yr olds</th>
<th>12 yr olds</th>
<th>16-19 yr olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>quotative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses</td>
<td>51 (N = 27)</td>
<td>87 (N=13)</td>
<td>93 (N=38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>non-quotative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses</td>
<td>49 (N= 26)</td>
<td>13 (N=2)</td>
<td>7 (N= 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why do the 8 year olds use *this is +speaker* more frequently, and with non-quotative functions?

Some bilingual children use many *this is* sequences

Afraan  no no no xxx

Uzay  to . *this was* . he . *this this was this* . thi thi thi this thi

Dumaka  *this this was* (name) [Arfaan: yeah] to (name) bom bom ..

Uzay  ey <Arfaan laughs> . no . *he was doing like this* to (name) .

Dumaka  [no xxx xxx I didn't say . I didn't I didn't say

Uzay  [Arfaan: ah ah ah] <laughs> and why you lying

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
The narrative style of the 8 year olds is also relevant

The 12 year olds and 16-19 year olds use *this is* +*speaker* almost exclusively to introduce reported direct speech (*this is them “don’t be funny”*)

The 8 year olds use *this is* +*speaker* equally to report direct speech and to report nonlexicalised sound and gesture

*this is the dog* "<makes gesture?>".  
*he just went and this is the dog* "woof woof woo"

The 8 year olds are the only speakers who report nonlexicalised sound with any frequency
content of the quote (all quotative expressions)

- **4-5 years**: Direct speech (90%), Inner thought (10%)
- **8-9 years**: Direct speech (80%), Inner thought (20%), Non-lexicalised sound (10%)
- **12-13 years**: Direct speech (80%), Inner thought (20%)
- **16-19 years**: Direct speech (90%), Inner thought (10%)
8 year olds have a lively narrative style: *this is* + *speaker* performs states, actions, gestures, funny noises and also reported speech.

Quotative forms that introduce mimesis have a strong pragmatic force that promotes innovation (Güldeman in press). This encourages take up of *this is* + *speaker/protagonist* by the bilingual speakers’ monolingual friends.

As children mature their narrative style involves less mimesis, and *this is* + *speaker* becomes used to report only direct speech. Even so, it tends to be used at moments of high drama (Fox, Susan, in press. Performed Narrative: the Pragmatic Function of this is + speaker and other quotatives in London adolescent speech. In Ingrid van Alphen and Isabelle Buchstaller (eds.). *Quotatives: Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* Amsterdam: Benjamins)
Summary for the new quotative expression

It is common to have deictics in quotative expressions

e.g. Belfast
  <EXTREMELY HIGH PITCHED> Here was I “then I must be hard of hearing or something - you rapped the door and I didn’t hear you”... out the back and everywhere they were. here’s me “have youse took leave of your senses?” <HIGH PITCHED> he says - uh - “get everybody up, everybody up” (Milroy and Milroy 1977: 54)

Glasgow:
  I was like that “on you go” (Macaulay 2001: 9)

French: j’étais là “mais qu’est-ce que tu dis?”

Identificational quotatives that focus on the speaker as the source of the quote are common across languages (Güldemann in press)
Why here? Why in Hackney but not in Havering?

The language contact setting in Hackney means that some young speakers use prefabricated chunks as a way of maintaining the pace of speech in lively peer group interactions.

Unguided language learning allows communicative pressures and communicative strategies to drive language use.

The narrative style of the younger speakers is one such communicative strategy.

Normative flexibility allows the take-up of the new quotative
Users of *this is* + *speaker* in the 8 year old group

- Uzay (Turkish)
- Dumaka (Nigerian)
- Junior (AfroCaribbean)
- Howard (‘Anglo’)
- Ben (‘Anglo’)
- Charles (‘Anglo’)
- Stacey (‘Anglo’)

Early adopters of *this is +speaker* (*Linguistic Innovators* corpus)

Raymond  AfroCaribbean
Dom  Columbian
Alex  mixed race (German/Scottish, Maltese/African)
Tina  mixed race (Anglo, Indian)
Zack  ‘Anglo’
Kim  ‘Anglo’
Laura  ‘Anglo’

All have highly multiethnic friendship groups
who as topic marker
English relative markers

• *that/Ø*: strategies since Old English

  1) *I used to move with a lot of people that sold drugs*

  2) *I didn't like the person I was with*

• *who/which/whom/whose*: introduced in ME

  3) *the new underfelt which I’m gonna have*

  4) *the girl whom you described as intelligent*

  5) *the boy whose arm is broken*

  6) *I'm the only one who's gone to college*

• *what* (nonstandard):

  7) *that’s just as far as them trees what I noticed*
Hackney subject relativisers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relativiser</th>
<th>65+ N</th>
<th>16-19 N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zero</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

total N (65+): 11          total N (16-19): 581
Havering subject relativisers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>total N (65+): 129</th>
<th>total N (16-19): 421</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- that
- zero
- who
- which
- what
That is the dominant relativiser form for Hackney adolescents (and Havering adolescents)

The loss of whom and whose means that the wh-relativiser system does not exist for young speakers: for them who is now an independent particle, occurring almost exclusively as a subject relativiser with human antecedents.

There are well-attested links between
• subjects and humanness
• humanness and topic
• subjects and topics

Who is used with human subject referents. Why not use it with referents that are topics, too?
Using a relative form to introduce a 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 [S: mhm] so he is kinda short. people were swinging him about in my area. I thought "what?" . now i lived near him then [S: mm] in north one. I still had my house in east london cos that's where I've lived born and raised

Topic persistence of ‘my medium brother’ = 5/10 (0.5)
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 all different types of families 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 (Serena_Lola 1.13.51)
Topic persistence of referents of nouns marked with *who* and *that*

Hackney adolescents: Chi square 85.236, df 1, 2-tailed p value < 0.0001
It is common in other languages for topical referents to be given special grammatical marking (Givón 1995:65), while less topical referents are left unmarked.

Old English used variation between the presence or absence of the demonstrative determiner *se* to mark topical referents (Epstein 2011).

Why here? Why in Hackney but not in Havering?

Bilingual speakers may be used to having topic markers in their other languages and look for a topic marker to use in English.

*Who* is very suitable for this use

Unguided language learning allows communicative pressures and strategies to drive language use
### Early adopters of topic marker *who*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friendship network score</th>
<th>Topic persistence <em>who</em></th>
<th>Topic persistence <em>that</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.36 (351/980)</td>
<td>0.20 (390/1760)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.28 (96/340)</td>
<td>0.20 (78/400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.25 (66/260)</td>
<td>0.08 (8/100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

network score 5 = up to 80% of friends a different ethnicity from self
network score 4 = up to 60% of friends a different ethnicity from self
network score 3 = up to 40% of friends a different ethnicity from self
The beginnings of a change: mysterious?

Not mysterious, but problematic for variationist analysis:

- at the start of a change numbers of tokens are too low for statistical analysis

- at the start of a change innovations may be multifunctional, so a linguistic variable cannot be set up

- innovations may be part of a cluster of related changes, which all need to be identified and analysed

- some changes are ‘camouflaged’ (Spears 1982): the forms appear to be the same, but they are used with new functions

- since numbers of tokens are low, and we do not know what we are looking for, it is easy to miss an innovation
external factors that promote the actuation of linguistic changes

• Much diversity in children’s language backgrounds
• Unguided group second language acquisition
• Much diversity in the way that children acquire English
• Lack of a focused target model for the acquisition of English
• Flexible language norms
• Bilingual children having to communicate with their friends in English before they are proficient
Identifying interdisciplinary themes

These are similar factors to those that give rise to the emergence of Creole languages.

Principles from contact linguistics may help to explain the actuation of linguistic changes in Hackney.
The Founder Principle (Mufwene 2001)

Newcomers adjust to forms established by earlier groups

London vernacular features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% (n) negative concord e.g. <em>we didn’t do nothing</em></th>
<th>% (n) nonstandard <em>them</em> e.g. <em>look at them people</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hackney 65+</td>
<td>13.54 (96)</td>
<td>25.6 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havering 16-19</td>
<td>54.6 (227)</td>
<td>61.3 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16 speakers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackney 16-19</td>
<td>63.7 (289)</td>
<td>77.5 (111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18 speakers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonstandard vernacular London forms tend to have higher frequencies in Hackney adolescent speech than in Havering.
The Founder Principle (2)

Mufwene (2001): newcomers adjust to forms established by earlier groups

Caribbean Creole Englishes

- *man* as address form and pragmatic marker is frequent; a second person plural pronoun exists;

- Mark Sebba’s recordings of London Jamaicans in the 1980s have a few tokens of *this is* +speaker; COLT corpus (1993) has a few tokens from “ethnic minority” speakers e.g. he goes “this is for you” *this is me* “thanks” (embryonic forms?);

- particles (e.g. *a*) have focusing and presentative functions; relative clauses are used for focusing (Christie 1966)
But indefinite pronouns, identificational quotatives and particles marking different kinds of discourse prominence also exist in many of the other languages spoken in Hackney.
Factors determining selection from a feature pool (from contact linguistics e.g. Siegel 1997)

Similar forms in many substrate languages:
  (indefinite pronouns, identificational quotatives, features marking discourse prominence)

Semantic transparency: one form, one meaning (who)
  cf. reallocation in dialect contact

Frequency: ?
Although problematic, analysing the start of a language change is part of the agenda of both contact linguistics and variationist linguistics, as is the study of variation:

“variation is absolutely essential to the selection process … without it there are no alternatives available for selection”

(Ansaldo 2009, Contact Languages: Ecology and Evolution in Asia, CUP, p. 108)
Thank you!

And thanks to

Sue Fox, Paul Kerswill, Arfaan Khan and Eivind Torgersen

