Language Variation and Change, **21** (2009), 1–38. Printed in the U.S.A.
© 2009 Cambridge University Press 0954-3945/09 $16.00
doi:10.1017/S0954394509000015

Was/were variation: A perspective from London

JENNY CHESHIRE AND SUE FOX
Queen Mary University of London

ABSTRACT

This article presents a systematic analysis of morphosyntactic variation in London English, investigating *was/were* variation in the speech of adolescents and elderly speakers in a multicultural inner London area and a less diverse outer London area. In outer London, dialect leveling to a mixed *was/weren't* system is well underway, as in many other areas of the U.K. Negative *weren't* is frequent and a grammaticalized invariant *weren't it* tag is developing. In inner London, variation in adolescent speech is strongly influenced by ethnicity, resulting in a lower overall frequency of *was* leveling and, in negative contexts, a mixed pattern of leveling to both *wasn't* and *weren't*. The patterns of variation of Anglo "heritage" inner London adolescents differ both from elderly speakers in the same area and from their peers in outer London. Our analysis confirms the need for socially realistic models of language change that take account of the social diversity of large multicultural urban cities.

Variation in the past tense forms of BE occurs throughout the English-speaking world. The historical record shows that usage has always been variable (Brunner, 1970; Forsström, 1948; Mossé, 1952; Visser, 1963), perhaps even as far back as Old English (Tagliamonte, 1998:157), and recent studies show that variation is still the norm. It is only in the standardized varieties that the forms have stabilized, with *was* used with first and third singular subjects and *were* elsewhere, though even here variation still exists with existential *there* subjects (Cheshire, 1999; Hay & Schreier, 2004; Walker, 2007).

Although variation is the norm, both the overall rates of variation and the dominant patterns differ from one location to another. There are two principal patterns, of which the most common across the English-speaking world is leveling to *was* across person, number, and polarity. Its frequency has led to this pattern being labeled a basic "vernacular primitive" (Chambers, 1995:242). Indeed, the basic nature of the pattern is supported by evidence from first language acquisition (Brown, 1973), interlanguage in second language acquisition (Schumann, 1978), and decreolization, where according to Bickerton

We are grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding the project Linguistic Innovators: the English of Adolescents in London (ref. RES-000-23-0680) of which the work reported here forms a part. We would also like to thank the following people for their comments, constructive criticisms, and general advice: David Adger, David Britain, Kirk Hazen, Arfaan Khan, and the three anonymous referees.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(1975:115), *was* occurs first (as an irregular lexical insertion) with *were* acquired later, in direct proportion to increasing overall acquisition of standard English features (Tagliamonte & Smith, 1999:12). Chambers (1995), in fact, argued that *were* only ever exists due to the pressure of standard English. *Was* leveling is a prime example of analogical change: BE is the only verb in contemporary English to make a person/number distinction in the past tense, so speakers might be expected to regularize the paradigm. As the third person singular form, the status of *was* in a hierarchy of basicness (Hock, 1986:214ff) makes it a natural choice for the pivot in analogical leveling (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram, 1994:276).

The second pattern of variation, involving leveling to *was* in contexts of positive polarity and leveling to *weren't* in contexts of negative polarity, as in (1),[1] also responds to what can be seen as basic system-internal pressures.

(1) yeah the teachers **weren't** that good because they **was** always off and we had to have supply teachers in that didn't know anything. Jennifer J/S/A 6:20

Here *was* and *weren't* are transparent markers of polarity, meeting the functional need to distinguish clearly between negative and positive propositions. This time, the leveling pattern brings BE into line with other frequent English verbs that have distinct positive and negative forms. These include *do/don't* and *will/won't*, as well as present tense forms of BE in varieties that variably have *ain't* in negative contexts but *am, are, is* in positive contexts (Anderwald, 2001:18; Schilling-Estes & Wolfram, 1994).[2] The *was/weren't* pattern is very frequent in present-day Britain, although elsewhere it is attested only in a range of relatively isolated communities within the Mid-Atlantic coastal region of the U.S.A. (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2003:132). The dominance of the pattern in present-day England is clear from Anderwald's (2001) analysis of the British National Corpus, which indicated widespread leveling to *was* in positive polarity contexts and, except in the northwest Midlands, Scotland, and Ireland, parallel leveling to *weren't* in all areas for which there were sufficient data.[3] *Was/weren't* leveling is seen most clearly in parts of the Southwest and East Anglia (Anderwald, 2001:5, 6), and Britain (2002) confirmed that in the Fens, East Anglia, there has been a gradual shift over time from a wide range of variable paradigms and phonetically variant forms to a leveled *was/weren't* system. Levey's (2007) research in an eastern outer London suburb found a *was/weren't* system in the speech of children as young as 7 to 11 years (Levey, 2007); and in the Corpus of London Teenage English, the patterns are clearer still, with nonstandard *was* occurring only in positive contexts and nonstandard *were* only in negative contexts (again, see Levey, 2007).

Both leveling patterns derive from earlier dialects where nonstandard *was* and nonstandard *were* are both attested (Britain, 2002; Schreier, 2002; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2003), but the reasons leading speakers to choose one leveling pattern rather than another are unclear. In Tristan da Cunha, for example, the new variety of English that developed during the nineteenth century showed categorical leveling to *was* within four generations (Schreier, 2002). New

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Zealand English, however, which developed during roughly the same period, took a different course: although first generation New Zealanders used both generalized *was* and generalized *were* (Trudgill, 2004:15), by the end of the nineteenth century the past BE system had almost completely standardized (Hay & Schreier, 2004). Hay and Schreier attribute this standardization to the dialect leveling that was part of the process of new dialect formation. Dialect leveling (and dialect contact more generally) can also explain developments in the Fens, East Anglia (Britain, 2002); this time, however, the leveling was not to the standard English system, but to the *was/weren't* pattern. The same pattern has developed in eastern seaboard communities in the U.S.A., where, though, it apparently developed independently in communities that had little contact with each other (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2003:147).

The role of literacy and formal institutionalized education in inhibiting leveling (whether to the first or the second of the dominant patterns) is equally unclear. Tagliamonte and Smith (1999:22) argued that the relative absence of prescriptive norms can explain the quasi-categorical rates of *was* leveling in Samaná, where literacy is minimal and "whatever variable system the ancestors of the Samaná people had prior to their migration, the system-internal analogical levelling process has simply continued unchecked by normative pressures." Tagliamonte and Smith argued that in other communities, relative rates of leveled *was* can also be explained by the extent to which the community is marked off from the mainstream, whether in social, cultural, or economic terms, or in some other way. Tristan da Cunha is an important case in point: here, after the initial leveling process, variation was reinstated among younger, more mobile members of the community, who came into contact with standard English and now use *were* as well as *was*.

Chambers (2004:118) argued that in large urban areas generally a trend toward the use of standard English is likely to disrupt the basic pattern of leveled *was*, but recent research in the U.K. indicates a more complex scenario. In both Birmingham and York (see, respectively, Khan, 2006, and Tagliamonte, 1998), there is a decline in nonstandard *was*, but no evidence of an overall trend toward the use of standard English forms of past BE. This is because in both cities a decline in leveled *was* goes hand in hand with an increase in leveled *weren't*. In Birmingham—the largest urban conurbation in the U.K. after London—adolescents used more nonstandard *weren't* overall than nonstandard *was*, whereas older speakers used more nonstandard *was* but no nonstandard *weren't* at all (Khan, 2006). Tagliamonte observed a similar pattern in York, where although nonstandard *was* "appears to be fading away" (1998:184), nonstandard *weren't* is increasing. Similar trends are apparent in some of the coastal communities in the U.S.A. studied by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes. These investigators suggested that social stigmatization may contribute to the decline of nonstandard *was*, an "icon of prescriptivism" (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2003:149), and that, by contrast, leveled *weren't* is relatively nonsalient perceptually, and so less subject to stigmatization. The independent development of *weren't*, they suggested, is reinforced by *weren't* being assigned social symbolic status as an indicator of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

island identity for Ocracoke speakers (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram, 1994:298) or of in-group identity for European Americans in Hyde County, marking their distinctiveness from African Americans in the same locality (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2003:149). There are no reports of this kind with reference to the symbolic status of nonstandard *weren't* in Britain.

Tagliamonte and Smith (1999:21) pointed out that "the more we know about how different communities have responded to the antithetic pressures leading to levelling and standardisation, the more we will come to understand these processes themselves." The focus on London English in this article, therefore, should allow us to better understand several of the issues raised by previous analyses of past forms of BE. First, there is the question of the extent to which we can equate proximity to an urban center with speakers' use of standard English forms. As the largest urban center in the U.K., we might expect to find lower rates of both leveled *was* and leveled *weren't* in London than have been reported elsewhere. On the other hand, London has been claimed to be the source of some recent phonetic innovations in the U.K. (Foulkes & Docherty, 1999). Although morphosyntactic innovations in British English have been less studied, London may well play a similar role as a source of present-day changes in the grammatical system. This seems to have been the case in the past, when London was influential in promoting dialect mixtures and in spreading morphosyntactic innovations (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003:165)—though admittedly Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg's evidence comes from the Tudor and Stuart periods, when English was only beginning to be standardized. If London is a source of morphosyntactic innovation, we might expect to find higher rates in London of the *was/weren't* pattern attested throughout Britain, rather than lower rates.

Second, an analysis of variation and change in present-day London English may help to tease out the effects of dialect contact and language contact on *was/were* variation. Leveling of the past BE paradigm is often explained as a consequence of dialect mixture, and even in situations where language contact might be thought to have a role, its effect is downplayed, denied, or ignored (see, for the early stages of New Zealand English, Trudgill [2004:5] and, for Tristan da Cunha English, Schreier [2002:80]; see further, Kerswill & Williams [2005:1024] for the general view that language contact plays a minimal role in situations of new dialect formation). Dialect mixture has been acknowledged as important in the development of London English (see, for example, Ellis, 1889:110), again with little or no mention of the role of language contact. We would argue, though, that the long history of London as a destination for immigration from overseas as well as for in-migration from other parts of the British Isles makes it difficult to ignore the possible effects of language contact. Our analysis therefore attempts to take some preliminary account of both language contact and dialect contact.

Despite its importance as a research site for the study of ongoing changes in Britain, London has not so far been the subject of a systematic sociolinguistic analysis, other than by Fox (2007) and Kerswill, Torgersen, and Fox (2008),

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

both of which focus on phonological variation. We are currently analyzing a range of morphosyntactic variables, none of which has previously been analyzed systematically in London English. The analysis reported here is the first to be completed and is therefore the first sociolinguistic account of morphosyntactic variation and change in the capital. There are no earlier sociolinguistic studies on which we can draw. Although there is much variation in past forms of BE in our data, to date we have no evidence of variation in the present tense forms of BE (other than in existential contexts), and we focus only on past BE forms here.

We begin by briefly reviewing the effect of the internal linguistic factors that previous researchers have found to constrain *was/were* variation, to set the scene for our own analysis.

INTERNAL CONSTRAINTS ON *WAS/WERE* VARIATION

Polarity

Anderwald (2002:182) pointed out that any generalization strategy is strongly preferred in negative contexts. This is borne out by the increase in leveled *weren't* forms in British English, which is attested even in locations where leveled *was* is declining, as we have seen (see also Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2003). Schilling-Estes and Wolfram (1994:289–290) explained this restructuring of the past BE paradigm as a remorphologization of both *was* and *were* as transparent markers of polarity. From a functional perspective, distinguishing positives from negatives is more important than distinguishing subject person and number, particularly as English clauses typically have overt subjects. Schilling-Estes and Wolfram further noted that the negativity expressed by the negative marker *not* becomes less transparent as *not* is transformed into the phonologically dependent *–n't* clitic; as a result *weren't* has emerged as a phonologically distinct negative allomorph that cannot be mistaken for the positive. They also point out that the development of *weren't* may be reinforced by natural phonological tendencies (1994:294). The encliticization of *–n't* to *was* places the final consonant of *was*, [z], in an intersonorant or intersyllabic environment that is favorable to weakening. In some varieties this, with assimilated rounding of vowels after [w], may result in *wasn't* and *weren't* converging phonetically and perceptually. Britain (2002:36) similarly argued that forms such as [wɔːnt] or [wɒnʔ], which were commonly found in the Survey of English Dialects data (Orton & Tilling, 1971) but not in the Fens today, may derive from phonetic processes reducing [wɒznt], and that they have been reanalyzed as *weren't* and adjusted accordingly.

Tags provide an important context for leveling to *weren't* in England. In York, Tagliamonte found that leveling to *weren't* increased dramatically in tags across the generations, with *weren't* used predominantly when the subject of the tag was *it* (1998:179). Anderwald's survey of the British National Corpus data (2002:178) also reports nonstandard *weren't* as favored in tags in 9 out of 12 British dialect areas.[4]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

It seems likely that *weren't* generalization is a relatively recent phenomenon in the histories of English dialects. Nevalainen (2006:360) found no difference in negative contexts between the use of *was* and *were* in the regional component of the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, which covers the period from 1410 to 1681 (although, as she pointed out, negative forms of past BE are not very frequent in her data). Hay and Schreier (2004:228) reported *was* leveling in early New Zealand English (although this was later reduced), which suggested that it was present in the speech of early colonizers from Britain, but they found no evidence of *weren't* leveling. Ellis (1889), however, indicated that *weren't* certainly existed in East Anglia and Wiltshire in the late nineteenth century, and Kökeritz (1932) gave examples of *weren't* in Suffolk in the early twentieth century (see Britain, 2002:21). The Survey of English Dialects confirms that by the 1950s, nonstandard *weren't* was clearly a dialect feature in England (Tagliamonte, 1998:184). We cannot conclude from these early studies that a mixed *was/weren't* system necessarily existed, but such a system was attested for Reading, southwest England, in the late 1970s. Cheshire (1982:44–45) reported high rates of nonstandard *was* (83%) in adolescent speech in Reading, with nonstandard *were* used very rarely other than in negative contexts (where it occurred at a rate of 37%). If inner London is the source of innovations, then, we might expect our analysis to discover high rates of *weren't*, and perhaps also *was*, among young speakers in this location.

Grammatical subject

Tagliamonte (1998:158) noted that a synthesis of contemporary research on *was* leveling reveals a constraint hierarchy for the effect of the grammatical subject that is "surprisingly consistent across varieties," namely NP existential > *you* > NP plural > *we/they*. Chambers (2004:141) similarly refered to "the remarkable regular hierarchy of subject types," though he proposed a slightly different constraint hierarchy (2004:133): NP existential > *you* > *we* > NP plural > *they*. There is agreement on the poles, then: *they* is thought to favor nonstandard *was* the least, and existential subjects the most, followed by *you*. Kortmann and Haser (in press) argue that this fits with a usage-based explanation based on the notion of entrenchment: the higher discourse frequency of *they* relative to *we*, they suggest, makes *they were* more entrenched and less likely to be replaced by the generalized *was* form.

Tagliamonte's more recent research, however, surveying *was/were* variation in 13 different communities, suggests that it is premature to generalize (Tagliamonte, 2009). She finds no regular relationship between leveled *was* and different pronoun subjects, although in most of the communities, existential contexts clearly favor *was* leveling, and NP subjects tend to favor *was* leveling over third plural pronoun subjects.

The latter phenomenon is sometimes referred to as an aspect of the Northern Subject Rule. In contemporary varieties, it is seen at its most extreme in Buckie, Scotland, where *was* occurs after 81% of all plural NPs but never after *they*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Smith & Tagliamonte, 1998:116). The pattern is commonly found in U.S. varieties too (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram, 1994:285). In southern England, though (which is only beginning to be explored), the effect appears to be reversed or nonexistent. In East Anglian varieties, for example, *was* occurs more frequently with *they* than with a plural NP (Britain, 2002), a pattern that has been described as the Southern Subject Rule (Rupp, Britain, Fox, Bray, Baker, & Spurling, 2005). In the Corpus of London Teenage English, both *they* and plural NPs have a roughly equal, slightly inhibiting effect on *was* (Levey, 2007). The constraint hierarchy in the East Anglian Fens data was NP existential > *you* > *we* > *they* > NP plural (Britain, 2002:26). Regional differences in the effect of plural NPs on the use of nonstandard *was* may relate to changes in the overall frequencies of this nonstandard form, with leveling to *was* occurring alongside leveling of a previously operative constraint (Britain, 2002:38). Britain observes that although older speakers in the northwest Fens show higher rates of *was* with NP plural subjects than with *they*, the effect of these subjects is reversed for younger speakers, whose use of nonstandard *was* is dramatically higher than that of the older Fens speakers. Nevalainen's analyses (2006) indicate that a decline in *was* leveling rather than an increase may similarly overturn the effect of the constraint: during the period of 1440–1519, plural NP subjects favored *was* in the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, but the effect was lost alongside the gradual decline of *was* leveling between 1440 and 1681.

In many varieties, *you* seems to frequently occasion higher rates of nonstandard *was* (see, for example, Feagin, 1979; Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Schreier, 2002:84; Smith & Tagliamonte, 1998) but, other than this, the main consistency lies in the repeated high frequencies of *was* with existential subjects. Thus an analysis of the effect of the grammatical subject on the use of nonstandard *was* in London English will provide further data to help decide on the extent to which there is a consistent grammatical subject hierarchy across different varieties of present-day English, and whether there is a frequency-based dimension to such a hierarchy.

Existential constructions and word order

Plural NP subjects in existential constructions consistently favor *was*, even in varieties where in other contexts nonstandard *was* is declining, or virtually nonexistent (see, for example, Britain & Sudbury, 2002; Hay & Schreier, 2004; Khan, 2006; Moore, 2003; Tagliamonte, 1998). The constraint often overrides other strong influences on the use of leveled *was*, such as collective nouns as subject (Tagliamonte, 1998:167). This is not a new phenomenon. As Traugott (1972:134) noted, agreement in English existentials has been relatively infrequent for centuries, perhaps as far back as Old English (Pietsch, 2005:156; see also Visser, 1963:62). Nevalainen's (2006) analyses showed minimal variation in the factor weights for the existential subject constraint over time.

Chambers (2006) suggested that in existential constructions, where the thematic subject is postverbal, a "look-ahead" mechanism is required if the subject is to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

trigger agreement. It has also been argued that the prevalence of *was* with plural NP subjects in existential constructions reflects the ongoing lexicalization of *there was* (and present tense *there's*) into an invariant prefabricated expression used to introduce new topics into the discourse (Cheshire, 1999; Crawford, 2005; Eisikovits, 1991). There is no reason why both explanations should not be possible. Existential constructions are frequent in speech, so the frequent collocation of *there* and *was*, whether or not the result of a failure to look ahead, could promote lexicalization.

Nonexistential contexts with postverbal subjects occur far less frequently in speech and are rarely included, therefore, in analyses of *was/were* variation. Where they have been taken into account, the results appear to confirm a failure to look ahead. For example, Tagliamonte (1998) noted some rare contexts with adverbial fronting followed by subject-verb inversion, as in (2), where agreement does not occur.

(2) and on that island was the cooling towers (Tagliamonte, 1998:169)

In inner city Sydney English, interrogatives with subject-verb inversion similarly favor *was*, as in (3), though again the number of tokens was low.

(3) who was you with? (Eisikovits, 1991:250)

Further support for the need to assume a look-ahead mechanism to trigger agreement comes from studies showing that agreement is less likely to occur when the subject is preverbal but separated from the verb. Thus relative *that* favors nonstandard *was* in Buckie (Smith & Tagliamonte, 1998:120) and Appalachia (Hazen, 1996), apparently continuing a Middle English tendency for relative markers to favor leveling to *was* (Forsström, 1948:207). In the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, too, leveled *was* occurred with relative pronouns, despite being infrequent overall with personal pronouns (Nevalainen, 2006:364). Collective NPs and coordinated NPs are also widely held to be usual sites for nonstandard *was*, perhaps, as Tagliamonte suggested, because in these cases, number interpretation is not straightforward (Tagliamonte, 1998; see also Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1991:189).

Tagliamonte (1998:173–174) analyzed separately the effect of proximity between the verb and the subject for both preverbal and postverbal third plural NP subjects, finding in each case that frequencies of nonstandard *was* increase with greater numbers of intervening words.[5] Another way of framing this might be to say that the further ahead one has to look, the less likely there is to be subject-verb agreement.

Thus the universal tendency for existential subjects to favor nonstandard *was* may reflect a basic processing constraint, such that the linear word order of spontaneous speech makes speakers resort to the "vernacular primitive" or basic default form *was* (Chambers, 2003:266; Schilling-Estes & Wolfram, 1994:276) in contexts where the subject is produced after the verb and cannot easily trigger

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

agreement. We test this in our analysis by analyzing the effect of both existential contexts and interrogative contexts on *was/were* variation. However, we analyze existential contexts separately, because although the thematic subject is postverbal in both expletive *there* clauses and interrogative clauses, current formal syntactic models (such as the Minimalist program) hold that these two clause types differ in the position of the thematic subject relative to the structural subject. In expletive *there* clauses, the position of the thematic subject is lower than that of the structural subject. This is not so in interrogative clauses, despite the fact that the subject and verb are inverted in the surface structure such that the verb precedes the subject. Thus although an elaborate generative apparatus is needed to explain the structure of existential clauses (Meechan & Foley, 1994; Tagliamonte, 1998:169, 185), the grammar of interrogative clauses does not differ from clauses where the subject takes the usual preverbal position. The distinctiveness of existential contexts is further confirmed by Moore's (2003) analysis of past BE forms in Bolton, Lancashire, a U.K. city where *were* leveling exists. In Moore's data, leveled *was* occurs in nonexistential contexts with a frequency of only 2% ($n = 20$ of 1035); in plural existentials, on the other hand, *was* is the favored form (58%; $n = 38$ of 66). Tagliamonte (1998:169), similarly, stated that "existential constructions are a special case when it comes to *was/were* variation," and in New Zealand English, *was/were* variation has developed differently in existential and nonexistential contexts (Hay & Schreier, 2004). Existential constructions constitute a distinct syntactic context from the other contexts in which *was/were* variation occurs, then.

THE LONDON PROJECT

Our analysis forms part of the research project *Linguistic Innovators: the English of Adolescents* in London. This is a sociolinguistic investigation of the English spoken by adolescents in two different locations in London, one inner East London area (Hackney) and another further to the east (Havering). Most of the fieldwork involving the adolescents was carried out in a college of further education in each of the locations. The two sites are important in relation to the sociohistorical changes that have taken place in London, and we focus here on developments following the end of World War II.

The inner London site is associated with the dense, social networks of the traditional white working class families who lived in this part of London, known somewhat globally as Cockneys, and who spoke the traditional dialect of the area, also known as Cockney. However, in the postwar slum clearance and reconstruction of London, many of the original inhabitants were transferred to new estates further east or to the new towns of Harlow and Basildon, both in Essex (for a fuller discussion see Fox, 2007). This left an aging population in the inner London site until, with the arrival of foreign immigrants, the population started to increase. The proportion of immigrants to the total population rose from 105 per 1000 in 1951 to 192 in 1961 and 240 in 1966.[6]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Many of the arriving immigrants were West Indian and this group today makes up 10.3% of the total population, but the area is multicultural in nature and home to many other minority ethnic groups including Black Africans, Asians, Chinese, Moroccan, Greek Cypriots, and Turks. Many of the children are bilingual, speaking at least one other home language in addition to English. Baker and Eversley (2000) recorded 26 different languages spoken as a first language by schoolchildren in Hackney (a figure that does not take account of Creole languages).

Figure 1 shows the percentages of the different ethnic groups in the population of the borough of Hackney (the category "White Other" includes, we assume, members of the Turkish and Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities). Although the Asian Bangladeshi community constitutes just 2.9% of the population, the area where the fieldwork was carried out was on the border with a neighborhood in the adjoining borough where the Bangladeshi community makes up over 75% of the population, so there is a large Bangladeshi presence in the Hackney college where we carried out the fieldwork. Figure 1 shows that the White British population accounts for 44.1% of the total.

The outer London site is an area to where many of the traditional white working class East London families migrated. It contains two large housing estates constructed to deal with the incoming population from the slum clearance program in London. It is an area that was once rural and firmly situated in the county of Essex but was transferred to Greater London from Essex by the London Government Act 1963, to become part of one of the outer London Boroughs created in 1965. Today it is no longer rural and is generally referred to as part of the East End of London, perhaps a reflection of the population movement. In contrast to the inner London site, the population is predominantly white—95.2% according to the 2001 Census figures. It is also predominantly monolingual.

These two sites provide us with the means to test the claim that inner London is the source of linguistic innovation as well as to begin to consider the effect of the complex urban dynamics of gender and ethnicity on the English spoken in London (see Harris, Leung, & Rampton, 2002:44). Our project focuses on the speech of adolescents in the two locations on the assumption that it is in adolescent speech that linguistic innovations are likely to occur (Chambers, 2003; Eckert, 2000).

The participants

The aim of the project was to obtain a selection of speakers aged 16–19 years, all of whom had been born and raised in the two locations studied. We wanted the speakers to reflect the ethnic makeup of the local population, but because we also aimed to take account of friendship groups, we could not determine in advance which ethnic groups would be represented in our sample. Ethnicity is notoriously difficult to define, and we assumed that although it may be highly salient within and between some friendship groups, for others it might be largely irrelevant. Thus we were less interested in the effect of ethnicity per se than in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

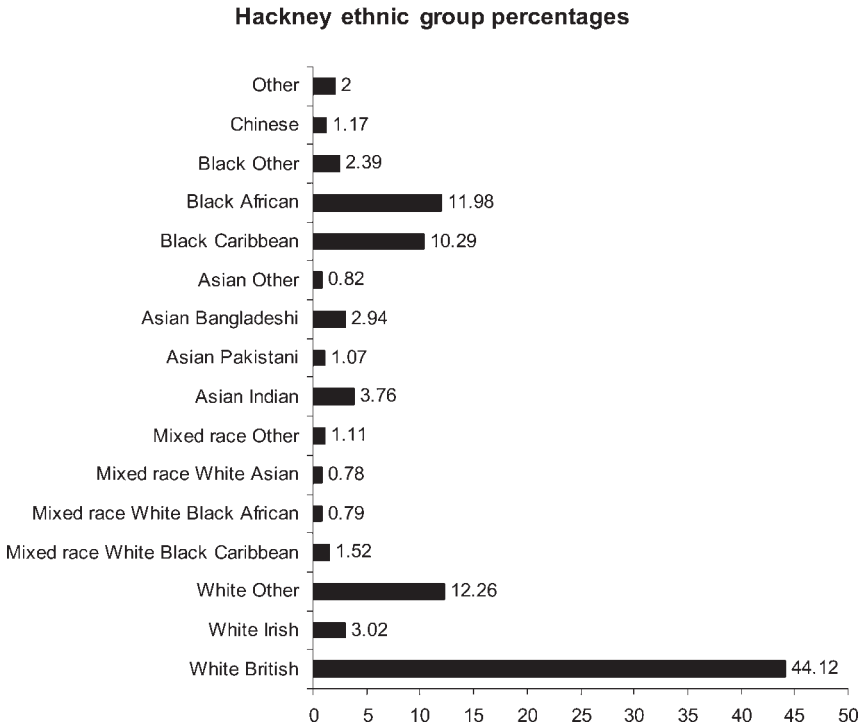


FIGURE 1. Population by ethnic group in Hackney. *Data source:* Census 2001.

using it as a broad social variable to ensure that our sample reflected the multiculturalism of the local area, and as a potential indication of the multilingualism that is characteristic of inner London. Our usage has something in common, then, with the way that speaker sex is often used in variationist research, as a methodological, exploratory social variable. The variable is purposely broad and unrefined, as this allows it to be easily taken into account at the data collection stage (Milroy & Milroy, 1997:53). However, by including it in our analysis, we did not wish to impose our own classifications on the speakers. Each individual was therefore asked to give a self-definition of "where they belong" in terms of their own identity, and these are the definitions we use for the minority ethnic groups.

In the event, we obtained two very different data sets. Our sample for inner London consists of 49 adolescent speakers, 27 male and 22 female. Half of the speakers have a "white London" background in that previous generations of their families have relatively local roots. We term this group of speakers "White Anglo." The remaining half are the children or grandchildren of immigrants. Their self-classifications allowed us to divide them into four other main ethnic groups, with each group containing four or more speakers: Black Caribbean, Mixed race (White/Black Caribbean), Black African, and Bangladeshi. We

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

placed together in a sixth group, "Other," those speakers claiming to belong to an ethnic group for which our sample included just one or two speakers. This group consisted of individuals describing themselves as Moroccan, Chinese, Colombian, Portuguese, or Middle Eastern. The ethnic diversity of our sample reflects the diversity of the local population, then, though not necessarily in the same proportions as the 2001 Census figures.

Our sample for outer London consists of 36 adolescent speakers, 19 male and 17 female, predominantly of White British background, also reflecting the local population. All participants from both locations are in post-16 education, taking vocational courses such as bricklaying, painting and decorating, and catering, and are generally from working class backgrounds. In addition, we recorded conversations in each borough with 8 working-class Anglo adults aged 65–80 (4 women, 4 men) to act as a reference point for comparison with the speech of the adolescents. All of the elderly speakers in this sample were born during the period of 1918–1940, before the large movement of population from the East End of London to the suburbs further east and beyond.

The data

Our fieldwork yielded a corpus of approximately 110 hours of recorded conversations, each recording ranging in length from about 45 minutes to 3 hours. This amounts to over 1,000,000 words, which have been orthographically transcribed. All of the adolescent recordings, with the fieldworker present, took place in the colleges attended by the adolescents and were made after an initial observation period. Although some of the adolescents have been recorded individually, most of the recordings were with friendship pairs or small self-selected groups. The conversations were informal and mainly unstructured, with topics led by both the fieldworker and the participants. In addition, we have a small number of self-recordings made by the adolescents either in the college or off-site. The recordings for the elderly speakers were, in the main, conducted in the speakers' homes.

METHODS

We began by analyzing the speech of a subsample of 32 adolescent speakers (16 from each site) and 12 elderly speakers (6 from each site). The 2769 tokens from these speakers revealed no use of *were* in standard *was* contexts of positive polarity, other than a small number of instances of *as it were*, which we assume to be a formulaic expression (and therefore exclude). It was decided therefore that in contexts of positive polarity, for the remaining speakers, only the use of *was* in standard *were* contexts would be coded. In negative polarity contexts, though, all tokens of *wasn't* and *weren't* were extracted and coded, for all speakers. In total, 5328 tokens of past tense BE were analyzed.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Coding and analysis

Each token from the recordings was coded for a number of linguistic and social constraints noted in the literature to be relevant to the use of nonstandard *was* or *were*. We discuss here the factors found to be significant: polarity, subject type, word order, and clause type (declarative, interrogative, or tag), as well as age, gender, and ethnicity. For the word order factor group, each token was coded according to whether it occurred (a) in preverbal position or (b) in interrogatives with postverbal subjects. The results are presented first for positive polarity contexts and then for negative polarity contexts. As explained earlier, there is no theoretically grounded reason for including expletive *there* clauses alongside other "subject" types; as these clauses were analyzed independently, we deal with them in a separate section.

RESULTS

Affirmative contexts

In this corpus of London English, nonstandard *were* never occurs in positive standard *was* contexts, making the following sentences impossible:[7]

(4) *I were really angry.
(5) *She were running down the road.

The analysis in this article, therefore, for affirmative contexts, is restricted to the use of nonstandard *was* in standard *were* contexts. Table 1 shows the use of this form for the adolescent and elderly groups in both inner London and outer London.

The first thing to note is the striking difference between the inner London and outer London elderly speakers. Overall, the inner London elderly speakers have 51.5% use of nonstandard *was* compared with only 19.2% among the outer London elderly speakers, a statistically significant difference (chi square = 36.1806, $p < 0.001$). As both sets of speakers are White Anglos and are of similar social backgrounds, this seems to suggest that these are regional differences. The elderly speakers in outer London tend to use more standard features generally, perhaps an indication of less contact with London speech patterns. The area was formerly rural in the county of Essex.

There is also a difference between the two sites among the adolescent speakers, but this time the situation is reversed. The use of nonstandard *was* among the outer London adolescents is considerably higher than among the inner London adolescents, 58% compared with 42.4%, again a statistically significant difference (chi square = 23.9932, $p < 0.0001$). The figures demonstrate that the outer London adolescents are closer in their use of nonstandard *was* to the inner London elderly speakers than to the outer London elderly speakers. The reason for this may be twofold. First, the sociohistorical changes again go some way to providing an explanation. Many families were transferred from East London during the postwar slum clearance program to newly built estates in the outer

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 1. *Use of* WAS *in standard* WERE *contexts of positive polarity*

Subject	Inner London Adolescents		Inner London Elderly		Outer London Adolescents		Outer London Elderly	
	No. of Tokens	% *was*	No. of Tokens	% *was*	No. of Tokens	% *was*	No. of Tokens	% *was*
First person *We*	102/197	51.8	38/82	46.3	117/150	78	13/20	39.4
Second person *You*	56/91	61.5	26/28	92.9	38/46	82.6	0/7	0
Third person *They*	57/194	29.4	40/94	42.6	61/135	45.2	5/47	10.6
NP	46/133	34.6	34/64	53.1	22/79	27.8	2/24	8.3
Total	261/615	42.4	138/268	51.5	238/410	58	20/98	19.2

London borough, and this exodus has continued to such an extent that many families living there have their ancestral roots in the East End. The sheer volume of movement would seem to make it inconceivable that the London forms have not exerted an influence on the local variety. Second, leveling to *was* in positive polarity contexts has been noted as a phenomenon affecting British varieties more generally, including the Fens (Britain, 2002). Interestingly, the Fenland area of eastern England parallels the outer London site in that it, too, was a region affected by the post-1945 overspill and New Town developments, and evidence suggests that leveling to *was* in the Fens has been brought about by diffusion from the south (Britain, 2002:33). The use of nonstandard *was* by the young people in our outer London site, then, conforms to what would be predicted from the general pattern of dialect contact in southern England, which in turn mirrors what has been reported in England generally (Anderwald, 2001).

In contrast to the outer London adolescents, the inner London adolescents appear to be reversing this trend. There is a significantly different distribution of *was/were* in positive contexts between both the inner London adolescents and the inner London elderly speakers (chi square $= 6.1771$, $p < 0.025$) as well as between the adolescents of inner London and the adolescents of outer London (chi square $= 23.9932$, $p < 0.0001$), indicating that the inner London adolescents are neither following patterns of previous generations from the same area nor following patterns of their peers in the southeast. We return to the possible reasons for this when we consider the social factors.

Linguistic constraints

Grammatical subject. We saw earlier that the research findings to date reveal inconsistencies in the relative effects of the grammatical subject. Figure 2 (based on the figures in Table 1) demonstrates that we do not find a consistent pattern in our data sets, even between adjoining locations.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

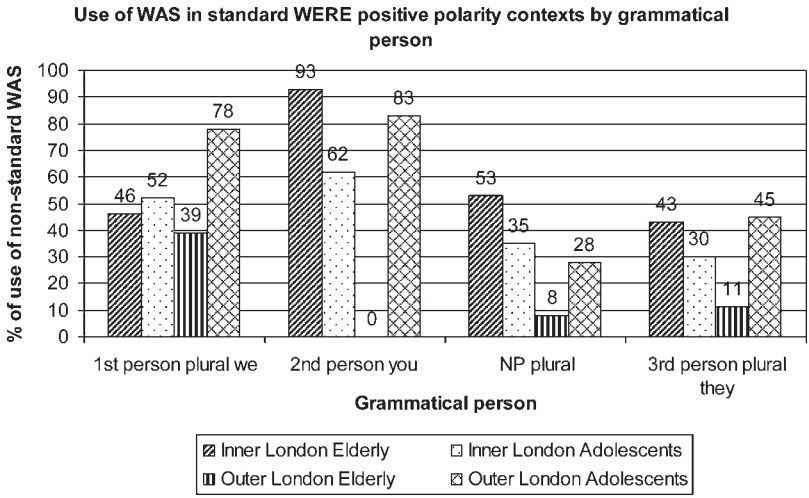


FIGURE 2. Distribution of nonstandard *was* in standard *were* positive polarity contexts by grammatical person.

In inner London, the pattern of use for nonstandard *was* with NP plural subjects and third person plural subjects among both the elderly and adolescent speakers conforms to what has been termed the Northern Subject Rule, with nonstandard *was* more frequent with NP plural subjects than with third person plural pronouns. For the outer London speakers, the pattern of use with these subjects is reversed, conforming instead to the so-called Southern Subject Rule. It is possible that regional differences account for the split, with the outer London speakers maintaining the patterns of the rest of south Essex. However, it should be noted that the differences between the uses of nonstandard *was* with third person plural pronouns and plural NPs by the two age groups are low in both inner and outer London, and what difference there is, is not statistically significant.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this part of the analysis relates to the use of nonstandard *was* with second person subjects. Figure 2 demonstrates that the highest users are the inner London elderly speakers, with, at 93%, almost categorical rates of nonstandard *was*, compared with the outer London elderly speakers who do not use nonstandard *was* at all in this context. Among the adolescents, however, it is the outer London speakers who are the higher users of *you was* at 83%. Inner London adolescents use *you was* with a rate of only 61%. The reasons why the outer London adolescents may have increased their overall use of nonstandard *was* relative to the elderly speakers in this area were already discussed. These figures, together with their high frequencies of nonstandard *was* in first person plural contexts (78%—the highest rate of all four groups of speakers), confirms that the outer London adolescents are patterning with speakers of other British varieties where high rates of leveling to *was* in positive contexts have been reported (see, for example, Britain, 2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Nevertheless, all groups of speakers except the elderly outer Londoners use more nonstandard *was* with second person subjects, as reported by most other studies that have sufficient tokens for second person subjects to be included separately in the analyses. Furthermore, for all groups, first person plural pronouns also occasion nonstandard *was*. For the outer London elderly speakers, this is the context where the highest number of forms occur. *They* occasions comparatively low rates of leveling for all groups of speakers; furthermore, *they* occurs more frequently than *we* in the speech of the outer London elderly speakers (47 tokens of *they*, compared with 20 tokens of *we*), apparently confirming the view that more frequent forms are more resistant to leveling (Kortmann & Haser, in press). Yet the relative frequencies of *we* and *they* for the other groups do not confirm the relevance of frequency, because they are either reversed (for both adolescent groups)—in other words with *we* occurring more frequently than *they*—or broadly similar (for the inner London elderly). Thus in our data, the grammatical subject does not have a consistent effect of *was/were* variation.

Postverbal constructions. *Was/were* variation in existential clauses has been analyzed very often, reflecting, we assume, the relatively high rates of existential clauses in spontaneous speech. The frequency with which *was* occurs with a plural postverbal subject in these clauses has been explained as reflecting the influence of word order or, more generally, processing effects, as we noted earlier, such that a subject that is uttered after the verb or that is separated from the verb does not trigger agreement. One of the problems of analyzing the more general effect of subject-verb order is that most other relevant constructions do not occur with any great frequency in spontaneous speech. Nonetheless, interrogatives arise sufficiently frequently among the inner London adolescent speakers to enable us to report on the use of nonstandard *was* in these contexts. Figure 3 displays the use of nonstandard *was* according to whether the subject occurs in preverbal position (in declarative clauses) or in postverbal position in *yes/no* interrogatives such as (6) or *wh*-interrogatives such as (7).[8]

(6) ***Was*** you with her? Chris C/D/S 19:30
(7) What ***was*** you saying? Zack A/Z 2 43:45[9]

Figure 3 reveals that subject-verb order is indeed a strong constraint on the use of nonstandard *was*. In interrogatives where the subject is postverbal, nonstandard *was* is used 79% of the time. It is not only existential constructions, then, where the thematic subject is in postverbal position, that affect the use of nonstandard *was*. The pattern of occurrence may well be based on the underlying mechanism that operates for all postverbal subjects; that is, the requirement of a look-ahead mechanism (Chambers, 2006) means that there is less likelihood of subject-verb agreement when the subject is produced after the verb.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

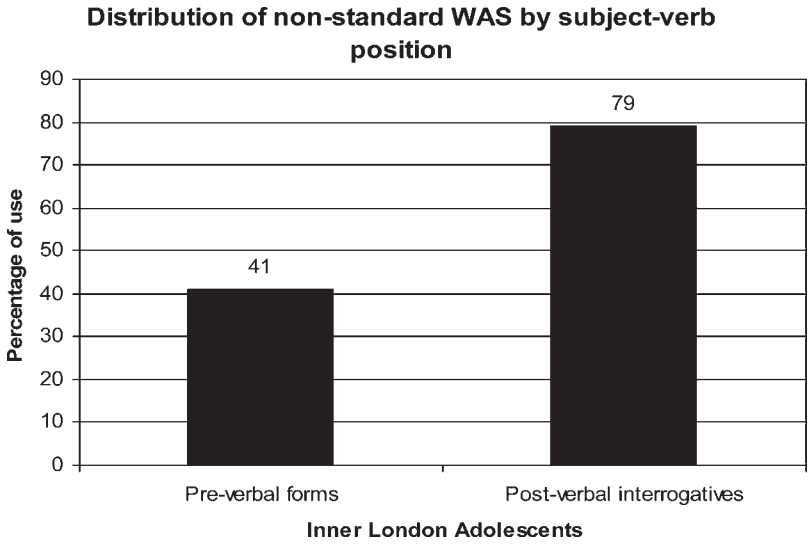


FIGURE 3. Distribution of nonstandard *was* by subject-verb position.

Social constraints

Gender. Figure 4 shows differentiation between male and female patterns of use of nonstandard *was*. For all except the inner London adolescents, female speakers use nonstandard *was* more frequently than male speakers. However, the gender differences were significant only for the inner London adolescents. Although for this group, the males' use has increased in comparison to their elderly counterparts, the girls' use has decreased and they seem to be moving toward the use of standard *were.* What possible explanation could there be for this pattern of use? Because the populations of the two areas are very different, with the inner London area highly multicultural in nature and the outer London site predominantly white, we turn to ethnicity as a potential social constraint among the inner London adolescents.

Ethnicity. The self-classifications given by the speakers allowed us to divide them into the six ethnic groups described earlier. Even though these classifications may not be entirely satisfactory, this system allows us to see whether a particular group is leading in, and by implication possibly influencing, the use of nonstandard *was.*

Figure 5 shows the frequency of use of nonstandard *was* in positive polarity contexts, for different grammatical subjects, by the different ethnic groups. For the different subject contexts, there is remarkable consistency across the ethnic groups, with the Black Caribbean speakers always the highest users of nonstandard *was* and the Bangladeshi speakers generally the lowest users. However, we saw in Figure 4 that the male speakers in inner London are higher users of nonstandard *was* than the females, so what happens when we cross-tabulate ethnicity with gender?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

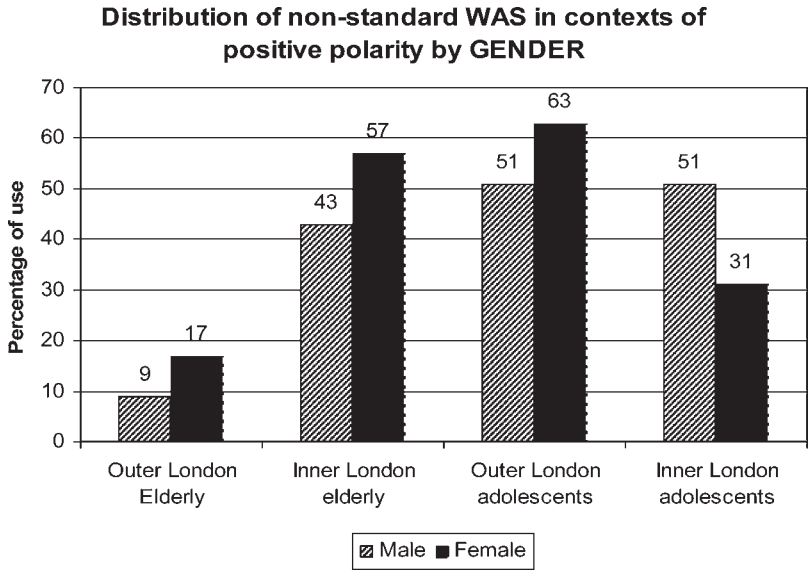


FIGURE 4. Distribution of nonstandard *was* in standard contexts of positive polarity by gender.

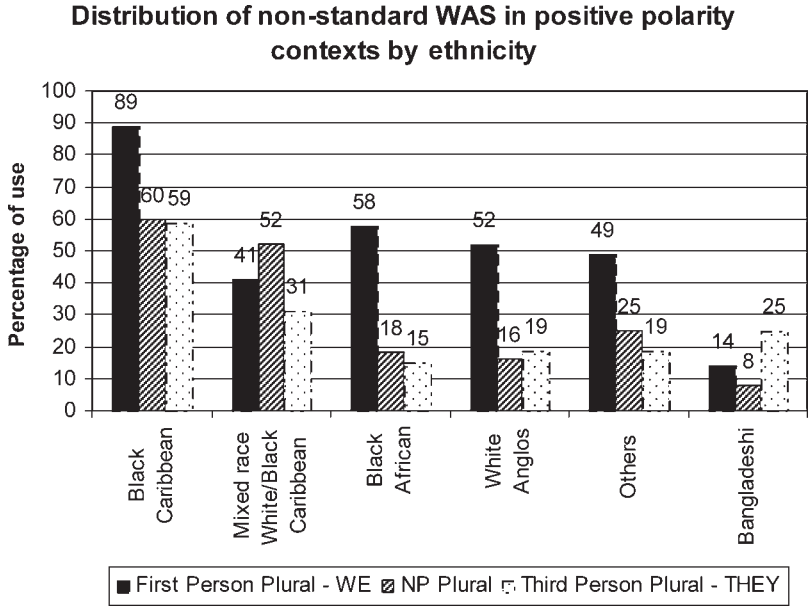


FIGURE 5. Distribution of nonstandard *was* in positive polarity contexts by ethnicity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 6 demonstrates that although the Black Caribbean speakers are the highest users of all the male and female speakers, there are clear gender differences within some of the minority ethnic groups. The highest users of nonstandard *was* in positive contexts are the Black Caribbean boys and the boys of White/Black Caribbean mixed race, and the girls in this latter group are actually the lowest users. This is the expected sociolinguistic gender pattern for nonstandard grammatical forms (Fasold, 1990:92; Labov, 1990:210), and we assume that it reflects the high frequency of leveled *was* forms in these groups, indicating a relatively stable state of variation, albeit possibly a temporary one (Cheshire, 2002:426). The other groups have lower overall frequencies of *was* leveling, so perhaps the gender pattern has not emerged in their usage. We will see later that the fact that the Black Caribbean males are leading in the use of nonstandard *was* is part of a general trend among these speakers toward leveled *was* in both positive and negative contexts, so their total rates of leveled *was* are very high. If these speakers are leading a change toward use of the *was/wasn't* pattern in inner London, we could expect the sociolinguistic gender pattern to emerge alongside increased frequencies of both *was* and *wasn't* for all speakers in later generations of Londoners.

Why, though, are the Bangladeshi speakers the lowest users of nonstandard *was*? A possible explanation is that the Bangladeshis have been a somewhat insular group, with the main wave of immigrants arriving in East London in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, at a time when most of the indigenous white working class families had moved out to the suburbs of London or to purpose-built new towns. Pockets of the East End of London very quickly became densely populated with Bangladeshi families who had very little contact with the white community. The women and children were rarely seen in public (see Fox, 2007, for more details). The children went to schools that also came to be dominated by Bangladeshi children: some of the secondary schools in East London today have a 99% Bangladeshi student population. These children spoke Sylheti or another community language at home and acquired their English mainly from school rather than from English-speaking peers, so they would have been more influenced by standard English norms associated with the school, unlike immigrants from most of the other minority ethnic groups. In their secondary schools, the mainly Bangladeshi peer groups would have consisted of speakers who had acquired English in a similar way. Although the Bangladeshi adolescents in our sample have become less insular as they got older, and now have ethnically mixed friendship networks, their English seems to reflect their earlier acquisition and socialization.

How do the White Anglo speakers fit into this pattern of use? Growing up in a highly multicultural area, they have been exposed to the speech of many different ethnic groups both through their schools and through their ethnically mixed friendship groups. This appears to have led to a situation where their overall rate of nonstandard *was* is significantly different both from that of the elderly speakers from the same area and from their peers in outer London.

Table 2 shows the results of a multivariate analysis using Goldvarb X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte, & Smith, 2005) of the constraints discussed on the use of leveled *was*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

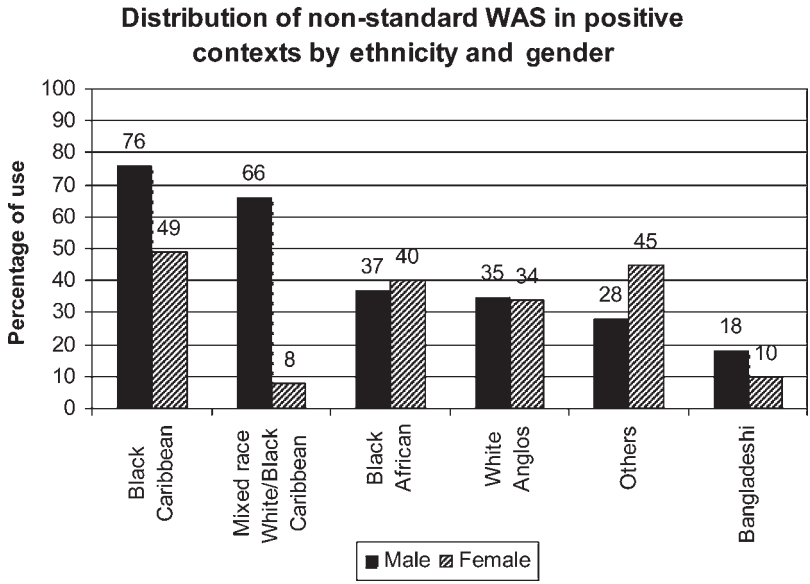


FIGURE 6. Distribution of nonstandard *was* in positive polarity contexts by ethnicity and gender.

by the adolescents. Table 2 simply confirms the patterns of variation described and demonstrates that ethnicity is far and away the strongest factor influencing nonstandard *was*, with a range of 63. Recall that we take ethnicity as a broad indicator of language background, rather than necessarily being a salient social variable in its own right. Gender is significant in inner London but not in outer London (though the female adolescents in outer London use nonstandard *was* more often than the male adolescents do).

Negative contexts

Was/were variation in negative contexts is an equally complex phenomenon in London. There is a mixed pattern: first, the expected pattern of leveling to *weren't*, resulting in the *was/weren't* system typical of much of Britain today, and second, the leveled *was/wasn't* system not, so far, thought to be characteristic of urban areas in the southeast. We discuss each of these systems separately.

Weren't *in standard* wasn't *contexts*

Table 3 shows the overall frequencies of *weren't* in standard *wasn't* contexts for different grammatical subjects.

The figures reveal low overall rates for the elderly speakers: 17% (inner London) and 14% (outer London). Closer inspection of the data revealed that nonstandard *weren't* occurs only in tags for these speakers,[10] a finding replicated in many

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 2. *Multivariate analysis of nonstandard* was *in standard* were *contexts of positive polarity—a comparison of inner London and outer London adolescents*

	Inner London Adolescents			Outer London Adolescents		
	0.41					
Input	FW	%	*N*	FW	%	*N*
Ethnicity						
Black Caribbeans	**.78**	67	118			
Mixed race White/Black Caribbeans	**.51**	45	141			
Black Africans	**.47**	38	55	Not applicable		
Other (minority Ethnic group)	**.43**	37	123			
White Anglos	**.43**	35	136			
Bangladeshis	**.15**	12	42			
Range	63					
Subject-verb inversion						
Postverbal subjects	**.78**	79	24			
Preverbal subjects	**.49**	41	591	Not applicable		
Range	29					
Grammatical person						
You	**.70**	62	91	**.76**	83	46
We	**.64**	52	197	**.71**	78	150
NP plural	**.40**	35	133	**.21**	28	79
They	**.34**	29	194	**.36**	45	135
Range	36			40		
Gender						
Male	**.57**	51	352	[.44]	51	158
Female	**.40**	31	263	[.54]	63	252
Range	17					

Figures shown in **bold** type were selected as statistically significant by the program; factor weights (FW) above 0.5 favor nonstandard *was* whereas factor weights below 0.5 disfavor nonstandard *was*.

other British dialects (Anderwald, 2002:178). When tags are removed from the analysis, there is no evidence of leveling to *weren't* in this age group.

As in many other varieties of British English, leveling to *weren't* among the adolescents appears to have increased dramatically, with rates of 41% (inner London) and 69% (outer London). Although both areas seem to be following the general trend of leveling to *weren't*, once more we find a marked difference between the inner and outer London sites, with the outer London speakers allying themselves more with the general dialect pattern found in the southeast and East Anglia (see, for example, Britain, 2002; Levey, 2007). As in the Fens, leveling to *weren't* in outer London is higher than leveling to *was*, but in inner London, the rates are almost identical. In both locations, we find that tags are an important context for leveling to *weren't*, as in other studies. We report on *was/were* variation in negative tags later. For now, we simply note that their removal from the data presented in Table 3 does not alter the pattern of *weren't* usage between the inner and outer London adolescents: for the inner London young people, the rates are then 38%, and for the outer London adolescents, the rates

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 3. *Use of nonstandard* WEREN'T *in standard* WASN'T *contexts of negative polarity*

	Inner London Adolescents		Inner London Elderly		Outer London Adolescents		Outer London Elderly	
Subject	No. of Tokens	*% weren't*	No. of Tokens	*% weren't*	No. of Tokens	*% weren't*	No. of Tokens	*% weren't*
First person singular *I*	29/72	40	1/12	8	21/39	54	0/13	—
Third person singular *He/She*	18/45	40	4/16	25	18/29	62	4/12	33
Third person Singular pronoun *It*	34/75	45	7/28	25	75/91	82	3/19	16
NP singular	6/20	30	0/10	—	7/15	47	0/4	—
Demonstrative Pronoun *That*	2/8	25	0/3	—	4/6	67	0/3	—
Total	89/220	41	12/69	17	125/180	69	7/51	14

are 61%. The grammatical subject had no significant effect on the use of *weren't* rather than *wasn't* (other than in tags, as we will show).

Social constraints on the use of levelled weren't

Figure 7 shows the effect of gender on the use of nonstandard *weren't.*

Among the outer London speakers, gender exhibits a significant effect, with females strongly favoring the use of nonstandard *weren't* (85%, FW: .77). We saw that female speakers in outer London also led in the use of leveled *was* (albeit with a frequency difference that was not statistically significant). This suggests that females are leading in the spread of the *was/weren't* system in this area of London. Among the inner London adolescents, females slightly favor the use of nonstandard *weren't*, with distribution rates at 35% for males and 42% for females, though again the effect is not statistically significant. Once again, however, ethnicity exhibits a significant effect in inner London. Figure 8 shows the effect of ethnicity on the use of nonstandard *weren't.*

Although the Black Caribbean and mixed race White/Black Caribbean speakers had the highest frequencies of levelled *was*, this time it is the White Anglos who highly favor the use of leveled *weren't* (62%, FW: .73) and the Black Caribbeans (17%, FW: .25), Black Africans (27%, FW: .38), and mixed race White/Black Caribbeans (26%, FW: .36) strongly disfavor the use of *weren't*. The distribution rate for the White Anglos in inner London, at 62%, puts them on an equal footing with their outer London peers. The Bangladeshi group, who had the lowest rates of leveled *was*, do not use nonstandard *weren't* at all. This would seem to support the argument that perhaps they have been more exposed to prescriptive norms through their early acquisition of English. Yet this is not the whole picture, as we will see when we consider the use of *was* in negative contexts.

Before that, let us consider the use of nonstandard *weren't* in tags.

Tags

Previous research suggests that tags have an important role in increasing the tendency toward *weren't* leveling generally (Anderwald, 2002:178; Tagliamonte, 1998:179). We have already seen that this was the only context where the elderly speakers in our sample used nonstandard *weren't*, a pattern also found in Birmingham (Khan, 2006). Among the adolescents, the overall frequency differs between the two sites, with nonstandard *weren't* in negative tags representing 11% ($n = 10$ of 89) of all instances of nonstandard *weren't* in inner London but nearly three times as many—30% ($n = 38$ of 125)—in outer London.

We saw earlier that the female adolescents in this study lead in the overall use of *weren't*. If we consider tags separately, we once again find differences between the inner London and the outer London adolescents. In inner London, the *weren't* tags are divided evenly between males and females (though the number of tokens is low-just 10 total). In outer London, however, their use is highly favored by females—of the 38 instances of nonstandard *weren't* tags, 74% ($n = 28$) are

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

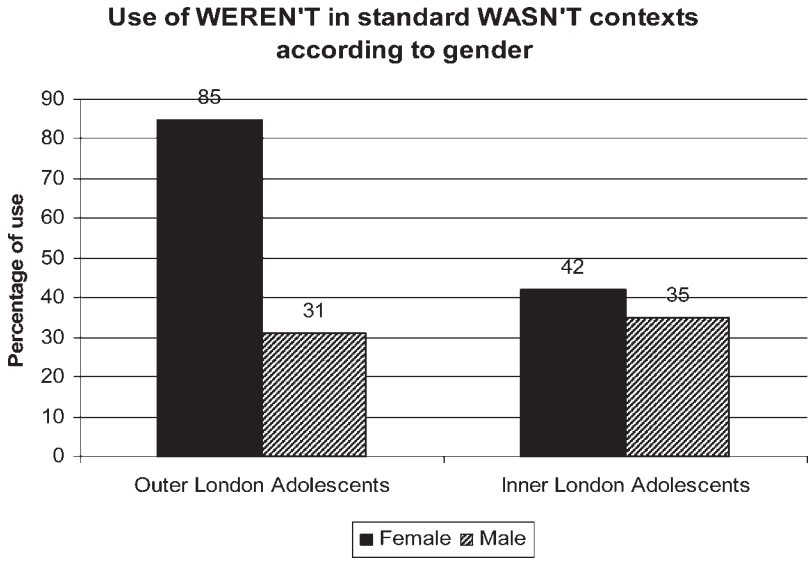


FIGURE 7. Distribution of *weren't* in standard *wasn't* contexts by gender.

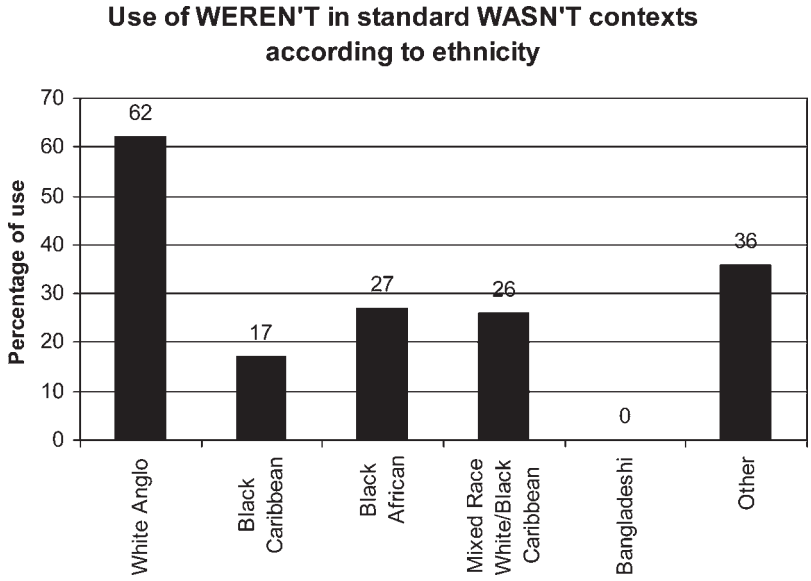


FIGURE 8. Distribution of *weren't* in standard *wasn't* contexts by ethnicity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

used by females. The results are presented in Figures 9 and 10, which display graphically the differences between the two sites.

The most striking result displayed in Figure 9 is that nonstandard *weren't* is categorical in negative tag contexts in the outer London site, with a strong female lead toward nonstandard *weren't* in other negative contexts. In inner London (Figure 10), the trend is not so strong, although leveling to nonstandard *weren't* is well underway in tags, with the males using it categorically in this context (though the number of *weren't* tags is low in inner London).

Interestingly, with just two exceptions, all the tags with nonstandard *weren't* occur with *it* as the subject, as in (8). The exceptions were from inner London, where two tags occurred with third person pronoun *he*, as in (9).

(8) it was June or July weren't it? Danielle C/D 20:15
(9) he was gonna post it back to him weren't he? Mark T/M 2 18:35

Furthermore, in outer London *weren't it* does not always show agreement with the subject and verb in the previous clause, as examples (10), (11), and (12) illustrate.

(10) and it's about ten questions as well weren't it? Amber J/S/A 28:40
(11) that's a lot of good weren't it? Kelly K/H 41:20
(12) oh yeah cos I stopped bunning weren't it? Kieran K/D 14:30

We do not find examples of this type in inner London where, in any case, tags with past BE are less frequent. Schilling-Estes and Wolfram (1994:292, 299–300) argued that *weren't* has been reanalyzed as a unit that cannot be separated into the component parts from which it derives—the negative clitic and the *were* form of finite BE. Our analysis suggests that in outer London, the frequent collocation of *weren't* and *it* in tags is carrying the process one step further in this context, resulting in an invariant *weren't it* form that functions as a single unanalyzable unit rather than as a decomposable form showing agreement with the verb and subject of the preceding clause.

Wasn't *in standard* weren't *contexts*

In the outer London data, we find just two tokens of nonstandard *wasn't* from the elderly speakers and one token, in a negative tag, from an adolescent speaker. Tokens in the outer London are too few in number to comment on.

In inner London, standard *weren't* contexts arise infrequently among our elderly speakers, but of the 20 tokens extracted from the data, 6 (30%) display nonstandard *wasn't*, as in examples (13) and (14):

(13) no they wasn't about. Edie 42:15
(14) I mean you wasn't to eat sweets. Joan J/J 45:55

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

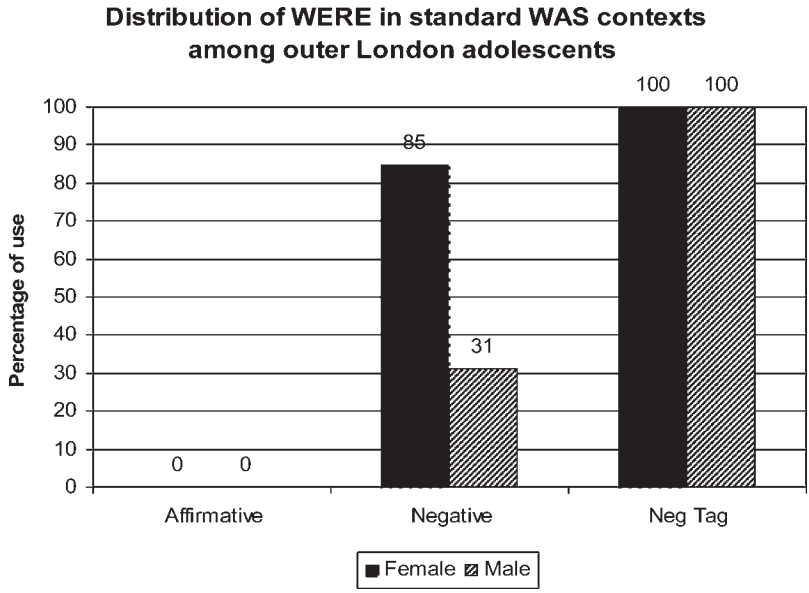


FIGURE 9. Distribution of *were* in standard *was* contexts among outer London adolescents.

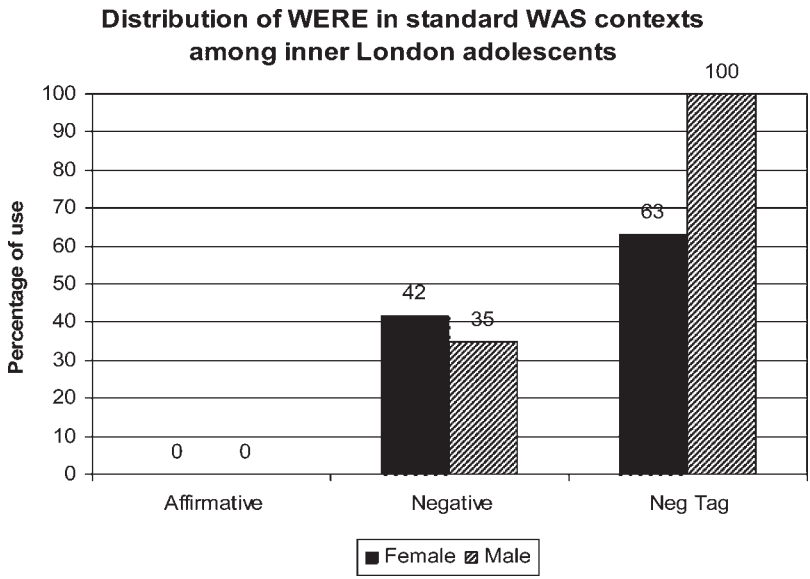


FIGURE 10. Distribution of standard *were* in standard *was* contexts among inner London adolescents.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

With the tide moving toward leveling to *weren't* in negative contexts, we might expect to find less use of nonstandard *wasn't* among the adolescents, but in fact we find that there is 46% ($n = 18$ of 39) leveling to *wasn't* in standard *weren't* contexts. What is more, just as for *was* in affirmative contexts, nonstandard *wasn't* in negative contexts is favored by males, with a distribution rate of 57% compared with the rate for females of 33%. A further parallel with the analysis of leveling to *was* in affirmative contexts is that our Goldvarb analysis revealed that although the numbers of tokens are low when broken down by speaker ethnicity, ethnicity nevertheless again has a statistically significant effect on the probability of nonstandard *wasn't*. Figure 11 displays the percentage use of nonstandard *wasn't* by ethnic group.

Black Caribbeans are shown to favor the use of nonstandard *wasn't* (83%, $n = 5$ of 6, FW: .86) as well as those from the other minority ethnic groups (89%, $n = 8$ of 9, FW: .91). Those likely to strongly disfavor the use of nonstandard *wasn't* are the White Anglos (10%, $n = 1$ of 10, FW: .12) and the Bangladeshis (13%, $n = 1$ of 8, FW: .15).

To summarize the analysis of past BE in negative contexts, we can say that in outer London there is a strong trend toward *weren't* leveling, to the extent that *weren't it* may even be grammaticalizing as an invariant negative tag. Our data suggest that in this location leveling to *weren't* is led by females, and that females may also be spearheading the leveling to *was*. Note that this is an unusual gender pattern for a morphosyntactic form that one might expect to be subject to social stigmatization. We saw earlier, however, that *weren't* may be relatively nonsalient perceptually. Furthermore, in our outer London data, we coded as *weren't* a small number of pronunciations as [wɒnt]. This suggests that nonstandard *weren't* may derive at least in part from a phonetic development and subsequent reanalysis of *wasn't* (see, again, Britain, 2002), and this in turn may have made *weren't* less susceptible to social stigmatization. In inner London, though, there is a mixed pattern, with some divergence between different ethnic groups. In general, the Bangladeshis tend to conform to standard uses of past BE. The White Anglos, as a group, show patterns of use that parallel their outer London peers in that they favor *weren't* leveling and, therefore, the mixed *was/weren't* system, but recall that their overall frequencies of *weren't* leveling are lower than for the outer London adolescents, reflecting their exposure to the two patterns of leveling in negative contexts. The Black Caribbeans, as well as others from some minority ethnic groups, favor the use of leveling to *was*, not only in affirmative contexts but also in negative contexts. Two of the White Anglo boys also have the *was/wasn't* pattern (which accounts to some extent for the overall lower rates of *weren't* leveling among the White Anglos in inner London relative to adolescents in outer London).

Existential constructions

Finally, we turn to our analysis of past BE in existential clauses.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

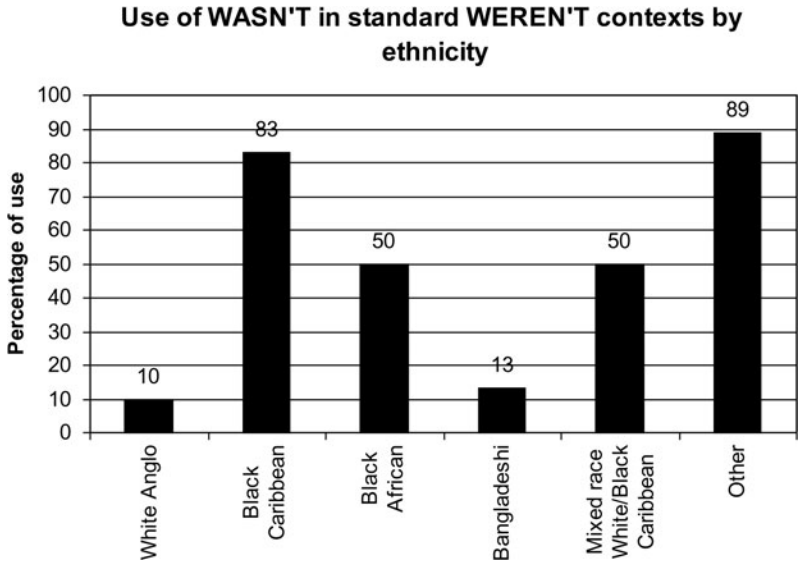


FIGURE 11. Distribution of *wasn't* in standard *weren't* contexts by ethnicity.

Singular subjects

As with nonexistential clauses, there is no use of *were* in positive contexts, so that the following sentence is ungrammatical in London English:

(15) * There were a dog in the garden.

Negative constructions with existential *there* occur infrequently. When they do occur, only *wasn't* is used with singular subjects by the elderly speakers in both locations, as well as by the adolescent speakers of inner London. The outer London adolescents, on the other hand, display leveling to *weren't* in negative existential contexts ($n = 7$ of 9), with *weren't there* used categorically in negative tags ($n = 4$). Again, this is in keeping with the generally more advanced pattern of leveling to *weren't* in the speech of the outer London adolescents.

Plural subjects

As with almost every other study of contemporary English (e.g., Britain, 2002; Eisikovits, 1991; Tagliamonte, 1998), our study highlights the fact that the use of nonstandard *was* in plural subject existential constructions is much higher than in other plural subject contexts. Even among the outer London elderly speakers, who have a general tendency toward the use of prescriptively standard forms, the rate of nonagreement in this context is higher than elsewhere, with an overall distribution rate of 25% compared with 19% in nonexistential contexts (see Table 1).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

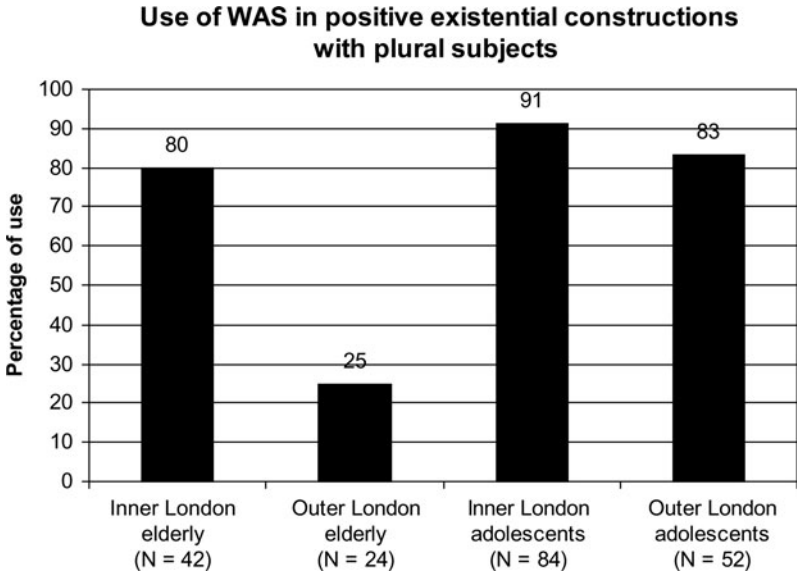


FIGURE 12. Distribution of *was* in positive existential constructions with plural subjects.

Figure 12 shows that the inner London elderly speakers, who use nonstandard *was* approximately 50% of the time in other contexts, have a high rate (80%) of nonstandard *was* usage in existential contexts. These high rates are unexceptional, given the long history of nonagreement in English existentials reported in the literature. The adolescents, though, have still higher rates of nonstandard *was* in plural subject existentials. Perhaps this partly reflects the general trend toward *was* leveling in positive contexts. Still, in inner London, nonstandard *was* in existential contexts is being adopted by speakers from all ethnic groups, unlike nonstandard *was* in other contexts. This is not surprising because the grammar of existentials is different from that of other clauses. It confirms, in our view, that a processing mechanism underlies *was* usage in existentials. As argued earlier, there is evidence to suggest that all speakers tend to resort to the default form *was* in contexts where they produce the subject after the verb.

Negative contexts with plural subject existentials occurred too infrequently for a detailed analysis. No examples were found in the speech of the outer London elderly speakers, and only two negative tokens were extracted from the inner London elderly speakers (both *there wasn't*). Three tokens were found in the speech of the inner London adolescents, of which two were nonstandard *wasn't* and one standard *weren't.* There were seven tokens extracted from the outer London adolescents, where there was a marginally higher use of *weren't* ($n = 4$ of 7). Perhaps this is in keeping with their higher tendency toward *weren't* leveling in negative contexts generally. Low numbers of tokens prevent us from investigating this aspect of *was/were* variation further.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

DISCUSSION

Standardization, dialect contact, and language contact

We now return to the questions of the relative effects of standardization, dialect contact, and language contact on *was/were* variation in London. We begin by considering the relative effects of standardization and leveling in our data. Because London is reputed to be a source of innovations, it was possible that we would find high rates of the leveled *was/weren't* split that previous studies throughout Britain have reported. On the other hand, as the largest urban conurbation in the U.K., it could be expected that the influence of standard English would result in high rates of standard past BE forms.

We have seen that in the outer London site, both leveling to *was* and leveling to *weren't* are indeed well underway. As in the Fens (Britain, 2002), the changes can be attributed to dialect leveling, which is caused in our outer London location by population movement from inner London areas. In inner London, however, both *was* leveling and *weren't* leveling were less in evidence; in fact, here the adolescents use nonstandard *was* less frequently than the elderly speakers. Furthermore, in negative polarity contexts, we found a mixed pattern of leveling both to *weren't* in standard *was* contexts, and to *wasn't* in standard *were* contexts. Inner London does not appear to be the source of the *was/weren't* pattern that is so widespread in other urban centers in the U.K.

We argue that this cannot be attributed to the pressure of standard English. For some adolescent groups, most notably the Bangladeshi speakers, there does seem to be a trend toward the use of standard English past BE forms, as Chambers (2004) predicted for urban speakers who are in contact with prescriptive norms. Other ethnic groups, though, particularly male Black Caribbean speakers, show a strong trend in the opposite direction to leveled *was* in both positive and negative polarity contexts. The usage of the White Anglo "heritage London" speakers seems to be affected by both trends. We attribute these differences, in large part, to the linguistic heritage and language histories of the different ethnic groups. Even though all the adolescents spoke English fluently and have English as their dominant language, some acquired it as a second language when they started school. As we argued earlier, the Bangladeshis would have tended to use their school English within their predominantly Bangladeshi peer groups, and this has resulted in their lower use of nonstandard past BE forms in late adolescence. On the other hand, other adolescents with immigrant backgrounds in our sample, who also speak a language other than English at home, were socialized within more ethnically mixed friendship groups. For example, the speakers in our sample with parents from Colombia, Portugal, and North Africa had friends from different ethnic backgrounds whom they had known from an early age; the English they acquired when they began schooling, then, would have been influenced by the English of these friends as well as the English associated with the school. Nevertheless, they may have been more inclined to use both *was* and *wasn't* because of their early experience of acquiring English as a second language:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

leveled *was* is the default form in interlanguage varieties. In fact, all groups other than the White Anglos have more leveling to *wasn't* than leveling to *weren't*, as well as varying degrees of leveled *was* (even the Bangladeshis, who have no tokens of leveled *weren't*, have 13% leveled *wasn't*).

There is a different possible explanation for the preference of the Black Caribbean adolescents for the *was/wasn't* pattern, which perhaps also applies to the mixed race Caribbean/Anglo adolescents. The linguistic heritage of these speakers may include traces of an ancestral English-based Creole input that would have had *was* in mesolectal varieties and *were* only in the more acrolectal varieties. It is noteworthy that a pattern of overall *was* leveling is reported for other varieties that may have had some Creole ancestral input, such as African American Vernacular English (Labov et al., 1968; Weldon, 1994:361) and Samaná English in the Dominican Republic (Tagliamonte & Smith, 1999).

Thus although the overall frequencies of nonstandard past BE forms are lower in inner London than in outer London, it would be simplistic to attribute this merely to an overall influence of standard English norms. In any case, there is no reason to suppose that inner city adolescents would necessarily be influenced by standard English speakers. There is ample evidence in the research literature to show that the most important influence comes from the peer group, and that speakers who are more integrated into peer group friendship networks are more likely to use nonstandard morphosyntactic forms (see, for example, Cheshire, 1982). It is relevant, therefore, to note that all the adolescents in the inner London sample have multiethnic friendship networks, even if, like the Bangladeshis, their earlier friendship groups were more homogeneous (see Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill, & Torgersen, 2008). The patterns we find in inner London relate to the complex mix of variants that are used in the multiethnic friendship groups, which in turn reflect the different language backgrounds and linguistic inheritances of the adolescents. Our division into the different ethnic groups has given some preliminary insight into these factors. It is noteworthy, for example, that the overall figure for *was* leveling in positive contexts for the Black Caribbean speakers (67%; see Table 2) is higher than for the outer London adolescents (58%; see Table 1).

We assume that the contradictory findings of previous studies of the early stages of dialect contact can be explained in a similar way. The fact that nonstandard *was* declined in early New Zealand English but increased in early Tristan da Cunha English must be due to patterns of interaction between different groups of early English-speaking settlers and perhaps, in the case of New Zealand, the indigenous inhabitants. In London, just as in New Zealand or Tristan da Cunha, ecological and sociohistorical factors are all implicated, so that even within a single location, such as our inner London research site, these factors produce different patterns of variation.

Internal constraints on variation

Our analysis does not provide strong support for previous claims that there is a consistent constraint hierarchy for the effect of the grammatical subject. We

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

expected to find consistency between at least the elderly inner London speakers and the adolescent speakers in outer London, given their shared sociodemographic origins, but the only clearly shared constraint was the strong effect of second person subjects. The so-called Northern Subject Rule applied to *was/were* variation for the inner London elderly speakers, and the Southern Subject Rule to *was/were* variation for the outer London adolescents. Nor do our findings provide support for the idea that changes in the overall frequencies of *was* leveling result in changes in the effect of plural NPs, as suggested by Britain (2002) and Nevalainen (2006). The highest frequencies of *was* leveling were found among the outer London adolescents and the inner London elderly speakers, both of whom have rates above 50% (as in Table 1), yet these have opposite patterns of variation with third person plural subjects. The two groups whose frequency of *was* leveling is below 50% (the inner London adolescents and the outer London elderly speakers) show similarly reverse patterns of variation. In all cases, though, the variation was not statistically significant. Perhaps more data would have allowed significant patterns of variation with grammatical subject to emerge, but there seems to be no linguistic basis for assuming that there might be a consistent hierarchy of grammatical subjects.

Nevertheless, the preference among all four groups of speakers for *was* with second person subjects does fit with the results of previous studies—or, at least, those studies that take this context into account. Although this is a widespread phenomenon, it is not easy to explain. For present-day varieties of northern English or varieties previously influenced by northern English, a preference for *you was* can be seen as a retention of an earlier pattern; in Middle English, *was* is reported as most frequent in second person singular contexts in the north (Forsström, 1948; Mossé, 1952; as reported by Smith & Tagliamonte, 1998:117). Perhaps, then, southern varieties were influenced by northern *you was*, alongside other northern morphosyntactic forms (Milroy, 2002:4–5). An alternative—or additional—factor may be the distinction between singular *you was* and plural *you were* that is said to have developed in the south in the late sixteenth century, as a consequence of the loss of the number distinction between *thou* and *you* (Pyles & Algeo, 1993; see also Petyt, 1985). Tagliamonte and Smith (2000:165) claimed that this southern use was restricted and that, because it correlates with specific writers, it is best seen as a stylistic device. It is likely, however, that its use by certain writers must have reflected spoken usage, and perhaps the legacy is seen in the present-day high rates of *you was*.[11]

Our analysis has shed light on the apparently universal effect of existential constructions on the use of *was*. We saw that *there was* with plural subjects is favored even by the Bangladeshi adolescents who rarely use nonstandard *was* in other contexts. The fact that *was* is favored by the inner London adolescents in other contexts with a postverbal subject confirms, in our view, that processing is an important factor, such that agreement is unlikely when speakers utter the verb before the thematic subject. In these cases, the subject does not trigger agreement. Of course, speakers *can* look ahead to the thematic subject in existential clauses when they want to, as, presumably, do speakers who tend to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conform to prescriptive norms, such as the elderly speakers in outer London. For many speakers of present-day English, whether or not they otherwise use prescriptively standard English forms, *there was* (like present tense *there's*) is often an invariant form in spontaneous speech, presumably as a result of lexicalization (Cheshire, 1999; Crawford, 2005; Walker, 2007). This would perhaps explain why the Bangladeshi adolescents used nonstandard *was* in positive existential contexts 100% of the time ($n = 5$) but not in positive nonexistential contexts. Moore (2003) reported a somewhat similar situation in the U.K. town of Bolton, where *were* leveling exists but where *was* is nonetheless favored in existential contexts.

Lexicalization may also account for the effect of tags on the use of nonstandard *weren't* in our data (and in the York corpus; see Tagliamonte, 1998). Tags are interactionally salient features, occurring at points in the discourse when speakers wish to explicitly involve their addressees, for a range of pragmatic reasons (for discussion of some of these, see Holmes, 1995). At these discourse points, the communicative demands on speakers are more pressing than the syntactic demands of marking agreement between the subject and verb in the tag and the subject and verb in the preceding clause. The range of tags used in different varieties of English show a tendency for speakers to use invariant tags for pragmatic purposes. They include, for example, *eh* in New Zealand (Meyerhoff, 1994), *isn't it* in Wales (Trudgill & Hannah, 1994:35), *is it* in Botswana (Arua, 2004:260) and many other African English varieties (Schmeid, 1991:73–74), and, more recently, *innit* for some young speakers of British English (Andersen, 2001). Stenström and Andersen (1996) identified the use of invariant tag questions in general as a prominent linguistic innovation in the speech of U.K. teenagers (see Tagliamonte, 1998:165). The use of *weren't it* by the adolescents in outer London fits with this innovative pattern. We have suggested that *weren't it* is becoming an invariant tag form and that, by extension, this may help accelerate the spread of *were* in negative polarity contexts more generally. Although we have not analyzed the pragmatic functions of the *weren't it* tags in outer London, it is possible that such an analysis would help explain the female lead in the use of *weren't* in tags (and, by analogy, in negative contexts generally).

It is not clear why adolescents in inner London use *weren't it* tags less frequently than those in outer London. One possibility may relate to their use of *innit* tags. These are frequent in adolescent speech in both the research sites, but it is noteworthy that in inner London, *innit* occurs in contexts where standard *wasn't* or nonstandard *weren't* would normally be expected, as in examples (16) and (17).

(16) last year I was opening the bowling innit? Chris C/D 10:00
(17) in the car I was drinking tequila innit? Kim K/C/G 14:15

This explanation seems plausible because it would be expected that as *innit* becomes further lexicalized it would occur in past tense contexts as well as

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

present tense contexts. Subsequent analyses of the uses of *innit* in both data sets will allow us to explore this possibility.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis has shown that *was/were* variation in London is a complex phenomenon, subject to a range of external and internal constraints that can be explained in terms of different patterns of social integration, friendship networks, and founder effects, as well as dialect contact and, indirectly, language contact. We are left with a set of further questions that now need to be researched in our data sets, such as the functions of *weren't it* and other tags in the adolescent discourse.

There are more general and more challenging questions, too, for future research on variation in multicultural and multilingual cities like London. Traditional definitions of the speech community as a group of speakers who share a set of evaluative norms governing social and stylistic variation (see Labov, 1966) are unhelpful in understanding the complex system of variation we have described in inner London. Here some groups of adolescents may even have different grammars—the patterns of *was/were* variation for the Bangladeshi and the Afro-Caribbean speakers indicate this possibility—yet there is a net effect on language change. The White Anglo adolescents, for example, have different patterns of *was/were* variation both from the elderly speakers in the same area and from their peers in outer London, which we attribute to their ethnically mixed friendship groups. Conceptualizing the variation in terms of more microlevel communities such as, perhaps, communities of practice, may help explain the inter-relationship between variation and change in a large metropolis like London. Fox (2007) represented a step in this direction. Although we cannot explore them here, factors more often considered in language contact settings are also likely to be useful. We made brief appeal, albeit indirectly, to founder effects (Mufwene, 2001, 2002), and we mentioned the potential influence of second language acquisition for adolescents in some ethnic groups. Thomason's (2001) concept of "negotiation" in communities where there are groups of language learners as well as members of the "host" community is very relevant to the inner London situation, though we have not been able to explore this in the article. Immigration and the resulting urban multilingualism and multiculturalism is typical of the past as well as the present, so analyses of present-day variation and change in a metropolis should inform our understanding of historical language changes as well as ongoing innovation and change. The challenge for future studies of language variation and change in our large multicultural urban cities is how best to incorporate linguistic diversity into a coherent account of language use that takes full account of the different language histories, language ecologies, and social dynamics of urban speakers.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, all examples are taken from the adolescent data in our corpus of London English.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2. Hazen (1998) presented evidence for the development of *wont* as an analogous form to *ain't* in Warren County, North Carolina.

3. Although *was* is the more frequent nonstandard form in present-day British English dialects, nonstandard *were* also occurs, particularly in northern dialects. In Bolton, Lancashire, for example, adolescents used nonstandard *were* at a rate of 17.2% in positive contexts and 44.4% in negative contexts (Moore, 2003:73).

4. Interestingly, Moore (2003), who reported on an area where *were* leveling is the norm, again found tags influencing the use of nonstandard *were*, though in her study the form was favored in positive as well as negative tags.

5. Distance between the subject and the verb is part of the Northern Subject Rule (Ihalainen, 1994:221–222; Wright, 1905:435). There was no significant effect for this factor in our data.

6. Stoke Newington: Growth: From 1940, *A history of the county of Middlesex: Volume 8: Islington and Stoke Newington parishes* (1985), pp. 160–163. Available at: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=4714. Accessed: 8 May 2007.

7. It should be noted, however, that Levey (2007) found some instances of nonstandard *were* in positive standard *was* contexts in his corpus of outer London preadolescents, although its use is rare (0.4%, $N = 1014$).

8. There were two instances of interrogatives with preverbal subjects as in "*if we was all together?*" These were included in the first category.

9. Our initial analysis looked for differences between *wh*-interrogatives and other postverbal interrogatives but no significant differences were found.

10. There was one exception, from an outer London elderly speaker, used as part of the fixed emphatic expression *–n't half* as in *she weren't half frightened.*

11. We were unable to investigate this possibility as there was only one instance of a plural *you* with past BE in the whole data set. This, interestingly, has a plural pronoun followed by *were*. It was from the Hackney adolescents: *I thought youse were going back to the cage.*

REFERENCES

Andersen, Gisle. (2001). *Pragmatic markers and sociolinguistic variation. A relevance-theoretic approach to the language of adolescents*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Anderwald, Lieselotte. (2001). *Was/were* variation in non-standard British English today. *English World-Wide* 22:1–22.

_____ (2002). *Negation in non-standard British English: Gaps, regularizations and asymmetrics*. London: Routledge.

Arua, Arua E. (2004). Botswana English: Some syntactic and lexical features. *English World-Wide* 25:255–272.

Baker, Philip, & Eversley, John. (2000). *Multilingual capital*. London: Battlebridge Publications.

Biber, Douglas, Johansson, Stig, Leech, Geoffrey, Conrad, Susan, & Finegan, Edward. (1991). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Harlow, UK: Longman.

Bickerton, Derek. (1975). *Dynamics of a Creole system*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Britain, David. (2002). Diffusion, levelling, simplification and reallocation in past tense BE in the English Fens. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6:16–43.

Britain, David, & Sudbury, Andrea. (2002). There's sheep and there's penguins: "Drift," "slant" and singular verb forms following existentials in New Zealand and Falkland Island English. In M. Jones & E. Esch (eds.), *Language change: The interplay of internal, external and extra-linguistic factors*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 209–242.

Brown, Roger. (1973). *A first language: The early stages*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brunner, Karl. (1970). *An outline of Middle English grammar*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Chambers, Jack K. (1995). *Sociolinguistic theory: Linguistic variation and its social significance*. Oxford: Blackwell.

_____ (2003). *Sociolinguistic theory: Linguistic variation and its social significance*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

_____ (2004). Dynamic typology and vernacular universals. In B. Kortmann (ed.), *Dialectology meets typology: Dialect grammar from a cross-linguistic perspective*. Berlin: De Gruyter. 128–145.

_____ (2006). Linguistic continuum from vernacular to standard. Paper presented at Vernacular Universals and Contact-induced Change: An International Symposium, University of Joensuu, Finland.

Cheshire, Jenny. (1982). *Variation in an English dialect: A sociolinguistic study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

_____ (1999). Spoken standard English. In T. Bex & R. Watts (eds.), *Standard English: The widening debate*. London: Routledge. 129–148.
_____ (2002). Sex and gender in variationist research. In J. K. Chambers, P. Trudgill, & N. Schilling-Estes (eds.), *The handbook of language variation and change*. Oxford. Blackwell. 423–443.
Cheshire, Jenny, Fox, Susan, Kerswill, Paul, & Torgersen, Eivind. (2008). Ethnicity, friendship network and social practices as the motor of dialect change: Linguistic innovation in London. *Sociolinguistica* 22:1–23.
Crawford, William. J. (2005). Verb agreement and disagreement: A corpus investigation of concord variation in existential *There + Be* constructions. *Journal of English Linguistics* 33:35–61.
Eckert, Penelope. (2000). *Language as social practice*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Eisikovits, Edina. (1991). Variation in subject-verb agreement in inner Sydney English. In J. Cheshire (ed.), *English around the world: Sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 235–256.
Ellis, Alexander John. (1889). *On Early English pronunciation*. London: Truebner & Co.
Fasold, Ralph. (1990). *The sociolinguistics of language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Feagin, Crawford. (1979). *Variation and change in Appalachian English: A sociolinguistic study of the White community*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
Forsström, Gösta. (1948). *The verb "to be" in Middle English: A survey of the forms*. Lund, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup.
Foulkes, Paul, & Docherty, Gerald. (1999). *Urban voices: Variation and change in British accents*. London: Arnold.
Fox, Susan. (2007). *The demise of Cockneys? Language change among adolescents in the "traditional" East End of London*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Essex.
Harris, Roxy, Leung, Constance, & Rampton, Ben. (2002). Globalization, diaspora and language education in England. In D. Block & D. Cameron (eds.), *Globalization and language teaching*. London: Routledge. 29–42.
Hay, Jennifer, & Schreier, Daniel. (2004). Reversing the trajectory of language change: Subject-verb agreement with *be* in New Zealand English. *Language Variation and Change* 16:209–236.
Hazen, Kirk. (1996). Dialect affinity and subject-verb concord: the Appalachian Outer Banks. *SECOL Review* 20:25–53.
_____ (1998). The birth of a variant: Evidence for a tripartite negative past *be* paradigm. *Language Variation and Change* 10:221–244.
Hock, Hans Heinrich. (1986). *Principles of historical linguistics*. Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs 34. Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter.
Holmes, Janet. (1995). *Women, men and language*. Harlow, UK: Longman.
Ihalainen, Ossi. (1994). The dialects of England since 1776. In R. Burchfield (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the English language*. Vol. 5. *English in Britain and overseas: Origins and development.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 197–274.
Kerswill, Paul, & Williams, Ann. (2005). New towns and koineisation: linguistic and social correlates. *Linguistics* 43(5):1023–1048.
Kerswill, Paul, Torgersen, Eivind, & Fox, Susan. (2008). Reversing "drift" in London diphthongs. *Language Variation and Change* 20(3):451–491.
Khan, Arfaan. (2006). *A sociolinguistic study of Birmingham English: Language variation and change in a multi-ethnic British community*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Lancaster.
Kökeritz, Helge. (1932). *The phonology of the Suffolk dialect*. Uppsala, Sweden: Aktibolag.
Kortmann, Bernd, & Haser, Verena. (in press). Agreement in English dialects. In A. J. Dufter, J. Fleischer & G. Seiler (eds.), *Describing and modelling variation in grammar*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Labov, William. (1966). *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
_____ (1990). The intersection of sex and social class in the course of linguistic change. *Language Variation and Change* 2:205–254.
Labov, William, Cohen, Paul, Robins, Clarence, & Lewis, John. (1968). *A study of the non-standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican speakers in New York City*. Comparative Research Report, U. S. Regional Survey, Philadelphia.
Levey, Stephen. (2007). *The next generation: Aspects of grammatical variation in the speech of some London preadolescents*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen Mary, University of London.
Meechan, Marjory, & Foley, Michele. (1994). On resolving disagreement: Linguistic theory and variation—there's bridges. *Language Variation and Change* 6:63–85.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Meyerhoff, Miriam. (1994). Sounds pretty ethnic, *eh*? A pragmatic particle in New Zealand English. *Language in Society* 23:367–388.
Milroy, Lesley. (2002). Introduction: Mobility, contact and language change—Working with contemporary speech communities. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6:3–15.
Milroy, Lesley, & Milroy, James. (1997). Varieties and variation. In F. Coulmas (ed.), *The handbook of sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell. 47–64.
Moore, Emma. (2003). *Learning style and identity: A sociolinguistic analysis of a Bolton high school*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester.
Mossé, Fernand. (1952). *A handbook of Middle English*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
Mufwene, Salikoko S. (2001). *The ecology of language evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
_____ (2002). Competition and selection in language evolution. *Selection* 3:45–56.
Nevalainen, Terttu. (2006). Vernacular universals? The case of plural *was* in early Modern English. In T. Nevalainen, J. Klemola, & M. Laitinen (eds.), *Types of variation: diachronic, dialectal and typological*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 351–369.
Nevalainen, Terttu, & Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena. (2003). *Historical sociolinguistics: Language change in Tudor and Stuart England*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
Orton, Harold, & Tilling, Paul. (eds.) (1971). *Survey of English dialects: The basic material*. Vol. 3. *The East Midland Counties and East Anglia*. Leeds: Arnold.
Petyt, K. M. (1985). *Dialect and accent in industrial West Yorkshire*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
Pietsch, Lukas. (2005). *The grammar of variation: Verbal agreement in northern dialects of English*. Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer.
Pyles, Thomas, & Algeo, John. (1993). *The origins and development of the English language*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World.
Rupp, Laura, Britain, David, Fox, Susan, Bray, Michelle, Baker, Susan, & Spurling, Juliette. (2005). The Northern and East Anglian subject rules: Two patterns, one rule? Paper presented at UKLVC, Aberdeen.
Sankoff, David, Tagliamonte, Sali, & Smith, Eric. (2005). *Goldvarb X: A variable rule application for Macintosh and Windows*. Department of Linguistics, University of Toronto. Available at: http://individual.utoronto.ca/tagliamonte/Goldvarb/GV_index.htm. Accessed: 26 February 2007.
Schilling-Estes, Natalie, & Wolfram, Walt. (1994). Convergent explanation and alternative regularization patterns: *Were/weren't* leveling in a vernacular English variety. *Language Variation and Change* 6:273–302.
Schmeid, Josef. (1991). *English in Africa*. Harlow, UK: Longman.
Schreier, Daniel. (2002). Past BE in Tristan da Cunha: The rise and fall of categoricality in language change. *American Speech* 77(1):70–99.
Schumann, John. H. (1978). *The pidginization process: A model for second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
Smith, Jennifer, & Tagliamonte, Sali. (1998). "We *were* all thegither … I think we *was* all thegither": Was regularization in Buckie English. *World Englishes* 17:105–126.
Stenström, AnnaBrita, & Andersen, Gisle. (1996). More trends in teenage talk: A corpus-based investigation of the discourse items *cos* and *innit*. In C. E. Percy, C. F. Meyer, & I. Lancashire (eds.), *Synchronic corpus linguistics: Papers from the sixteenth international conference on English language research on computerized corpora*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 189–203.
Tagliamonte, Sali. (1998). *Was/were* variation across the generations: View from the city of York. *Language Variation and Change* 10:153–192.
_____ (2009). There *was* universals, then there *weren't*: A comparative sociolinguistic perspective on "default singulars." In M. Filppula, J. Klemola, & H. Paulasto, (eds.), *Vernacular universals and language contacts: Evidence from varieties of English and beyond*. London: Routledge. 103–132.
Tagliamonte, Sali, & Smith, Jennifer. (1999). Analogical levelling in Samaná English: The case of *was* and *were*. *Journal of English Linguistics* 27:8–26.
_____ (2000). Old *was*, new ecology: Viewing English through the sociolinguistic filter. In S. Poplack (ed.), *The English history of African American English*. Oxford: Blackwell. 141–171.
Thomason, Sarah. (2001). *Language contact: An introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. (1972). *A history of English syntax. A transformational approach to the history of English sentence structures*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
Trudgill, Peter. (2004). *New-dialect formation: The inevitability of Colonial Englishes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Trudgill, Peter, & Hannah, Jean. (1994). *International English. A guide to the varieties of Standard English*. 3rd ed. London: Arnold.
Visser, Fredericus T. (1963). *An historical syntax of the English language*. Part 1. *Syntactical units with one verb*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
Walker, James A. (2007). "There's bears back there": Plural existentials and vernacular universals in (Quebec) English. *English World-Wide* 28:147–166.
Weldon, Tracey. (1994). Negation in African American Vernacular English. *Language Variation and Change* 6:356–397.
Wolfram, Walt, & Schilling-Estes, Natalie. (2003). Parallel development and alternative restructuring: The case of weren't regularization. In D. Britain & J. Cheshire (eds.), *Social Dialectology: In honour of Peter Trudgill*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 131–154.
Wright, Joseph. (1905). *The English dialect grammar*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394509000015 Published online by Cambridge University Press