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DIALECT LEVELLING: CONTINUITY VS. CHANGE IN MILTON KEYNES, READING AND HULL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the accents of three towns, Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull, chosen in order to illustrate and attempt to explain the phenomenon of dialect levelling in England. Data for the chapter was recorded as part of two ESRC-funded projects conducted at the University of Reading, *A new dialect in a new city: children's and adults' speech in Milton Keynes* (henceforth referred to as the 'Milton Keynes Project'; 1990-94, ESRC ref. R000232376) and *The role of adolescents in dialect levelling* (the 'Dialect Levelling Project'; 1995–98, ESRC ref. R000236180). Details of each corpus is given below.

The Milton Keynes project
C. 100 hour corpus. 48 working-class children were recorded (age groups of 4, 8 and 12 years by 2 sexes, giving 8 speakers per cell). All the children were native-born or had arrived within the first two years of life. Additionally, one caregiver was recorded for each child (all except one were female; of the 47 females, 45 were the child's mother. Five caregivers were born in the Milton Keynes area). Recordings of the children were made in structured sessions in pairs with the fieldworker, consisting of a semi-structured interview, a word list reading, and a range of tasks tailored to the age group and designed to elicit specific words, including a quiz, a map task, a picture story retelling, a 'spot the difference' game, and the identification of objects in a bag. Recordings of adults were conducted as informal interviews, mainly in their homes.

The Dialect Levelling project
C. 90 hour corpus. 96 adolescents aged 14-15 in three towns, Hull, Reading and Milton Keynes (1 age group, 3 towns, 2 sexes, 2 classes ('Working Class' and 'Middle Class'), giving 8 speakers per cell). Additionally, four elderly working-class persons aged 70 or over (two male, two female) were recorded in each town. All subjects were native-born or had arrived within the first four years of

life. SED materials (Orton et al.1962-71) were used for comparison. Recordings of the adolescents consisted of (1) individual interviews with the fieldworker, including a word list reading, (2) a discussion in pairs with the fieldworker, and (3) a group discussion with 4-6 adolescents in a single-sex group, guided by the fieldworker.

2.0 VOWELS

In this section, we have set out the information for each town separately. The descriptions reveal the similarities between the accents of the southern towns of Milton Keynes and Reading, as well as the converging direction of change. These similarities will be discussed in the main part of this chapter. The account of Hull reveals that it has a typical northern accent, with, for example, no contrast between STRUT and FOOT and the vowel of TRAP in BATH. On the other hand, it has two very distinct variants of the PRICE vowel, a monophthong before voiced consonants and a diphthong elsewhere; this pattern is restricted in England to Humberside and parts of East Yorkshire as well as an area in the Fens. Yet Hull shares with the southern towns changes in a number of consonants, involving the spread of the glottal stop between vowels, the use of [f] for [Q] in words such as *thing*, and the use of [v] for [D] as in *brother*.

Note: The main variants listed are those of young, working-class people, especially adolescents. Where there is significant age, gender or class variation, this is pointed out.

Milton Keynes

KIT [ê] While [ê] is the most commonly heard variant, a lowered variant [ê-6] is also frequent, particularly among females. Older speakers may have a raised variant [i-6].

DRESS [E§] Raised variants, e.g. [e6^{e}], may be heard before velars.

TRAP [a] A raised variant [a§] may be heard. Noticeably lengthened variants are heard before some voiced consonants.

LOT, CLOTH [Å§]

STRUT [U] More central variants [U9] and [å] may be heard. Some elderly speakers use [ˊ].

FOOT [ʃ] More conservative, less centralised variants such as [Ü9] may be heard, as can fronted [ø2] and [Y]

BATH, CALM, START [A:] A fronted variant [A9:] is frequent, particularly among middle-class young people. Elderly working-class people tend to use [a2:] in BATH and CALM; some may use a rhotic [A:ᴿ] in START with very slight retroflexion.

NURSE [‰:] Some elderly people use [‰:ᴿ].

FLEECE [êi]

FACE [Eê] A more open variant [æê] or [åê] is also found. Middle class people are likely to use [e6ê].

THOUGHT, NORTH, FORCE [o6:] A diphthongised [oÜ2] is not uncommon. Rhotic pronunciations of NORTH, FORCE are still possible in the elderly.

GOAT [‰Y] Older speakers have a more raised offset and a less fronted offset, e.g. [ˊ6Ü9]. Girls and young women tend to have greater fronting and/or unrounding of the offset, giving [‰ê]. Middle class speakers participate in the same fronting process, but their vowel onset remains higher, e.g. [ˊY].

GOAL [UÜ] The onset may be higher and/or rounded, giving e.g. [O§Ü], especially among middle-class speakers.

GOOSE [Á9:] More fronted variants, such as [Y:] or even (in palatal environments such as in *huge*) [y:], may be heard, particularly in young female speech. Elderly speakers use [Á:]. For some speakers, a slight central on-glide can also be heard, e.g. [ˊÁ9:].

PRICE [Aê] Many, particularly middle-class, speakers use a fronted [A9ê]. The rising/fronting offset may be very slight in fast speech, giving rise to a (near-) monophthong [A]. Elderly speakers tend to have a raised-centralised onset, giving [U9ê].

CHOICE [O§ê] Middle class variant is [Oê].

MOUTH [aÜ] A fast speech variant [a] is commonly used. A few younger speakers (particularly those with London origins) use a monophthong [E:]. Speakers aged 30-50 may use [æÜ], elderly speakers [Eê]. SED records [EÜ‹].

NEAR [e6:] Older speakers have [e´]

SQUARE [E:] Older speakers have [E§´]

CURE [jo6:]

commA [Å9] Middle class and older speakers use [‰].

horsEs [ê]

happY [i-6]

Reading

KIT [ê] While [ê] is the most commonly heard variant, a lowered variant [ê-6] is also frequent, particularly among females. Elderly speakers have a lowered centralised variant [ê-6] or [e-6].

DRESS [E§] Raised variants, e.g. [e6^{e}], may be heard before velars.

TRAP [a] Retracted variants, e.g. [a2], are common.. Noticeably lengthened variants are heard before some voiced consonants.

LOT, CLOTH [Å§] Elderly people may use [A].

STRUT [U] Some young working-class people use a central [‰], as do many elderly speakers. Otherwise [å] or [U9] are common.

FOOT [∏] More conservative, less centralised variants such as [Ü9] may be heard, as can fronted [ø2] and [Y]

BATH, CALM, START [A9:] Some working-class adolescents use [a2:]; this fronting is less marked among the elderly, who use [A9 9:] or [A9:]. In START, a rhotic pronunciation [A:®] is the norm among working-class people over the age of about 50.

NURSE [‰:] The rhotic pronunciation [‰:®] is the norm among the working-class over-50's, but may be heard sporadically in the speech of people of all age groups.

FLEECE [i:] - [ê i]

FACE [Eê] A more open variant [æê] is also found. Middle class people are likely to use [e6ê].

THOUGHT, NORTH, FORCE [o6:] A diphthongised [oÜ2] is not uncommon. Rhotic pronunciations of NORTH and FORCE are usual among working-class people over 50.

GOAT [´Y]. The onset may be raised or fronted, giving e.g. [´§ 9Y]. Elderly speakers have less fronted offsets, giving e.g. [´Ü9]. Middle class speakers have similar variants, and participate in the same fronting process.

GOAL [UÜ] The onset may be higher and/or rounded, giving e.g. [O§Ü], especially among middle-class speakers.

GOOSE [Á9:] More fronted variants, such as [Y:] or even (in palatal environments such as in *huge*) [y:], may be heard, particularly in young female speech. Fronting does not appear to be class related. Elderly speakers use [Á:]. For some speakers, a slight central on-glide can also be heard, e.g. [´Á9:].

PRICE [Aê] - [U§ 9ê]. The onset is variably rounded. The rising/fronting offset may be very slight in fast speech, giving rise to a (near-) monophthong [A]. Elderly speakers favour [U§ 9ê].

CHOICE [O§ê] Middle class variant is [Oê].

MOUTH [aÜ] A fast speech variant [a] is commonly used. Older working-class speakers use [Eê], which is still used by some working-class children. Speakers may switch between [Eê] and [aÜ] according to context, with no intermediate variant.

NEAR [e6:] Older speakers have [e´].

SQUARE [E:] Older speakers have [E§´].

CURE [jo6:]

commA [å]. Middle class and older speakers use [‰]. Working class people over 50 use [symbol for r-coloured schwa] in items such as *letter*.

horsEs [ê]

happY [i-6]

Hull

KIT [ê]

DRESS [E-§] Non-centralised variants are also found.

TRAP [a2] Fully front [a] is also found.

LOT, CLOTH [Å“] Fully unrounded [A] is also found.

STRUT [Ü6] More central variants, e.g. [´], are found among middle class speakers.

FOOT [Ü6]

BATH [a2]

NURSE [E2:] Merger with SQUARE is common.

FLEECE [êi-6] Elderly speakers may have [e6i].

FACE [E-§:] In the words *eight* and *eighty,* [Eê] is used. Older speakers also use this vowel in *weight*; thus, *wait* and *weight* form a minimal pair. The distinction is not used by middle-class speakers, who may use a diphthong for both.

PALM, START [a2:] Middle-class speakers may use [A9:].

THOUGHT, NORTH, FORCE [O6:] Middle-class speakers use [O§:].

GOAT, GOAL [O§ 9:] ~ [´:] The central variant is associated with female, particularly middle-class speech, though other females use it, too. A diphthong [∏Ü] or [´Ü] may be used by middle-class speakers generally. There is usually no distinct allophone for this vowel before /l/.

GOOSE [Üu] Middle-class speakers may use [∏Á].

PRICE [a§i-6] ~ [a2:] In working-class speech, [a§i-6] is used before voiceless consonants, [a2:] elsewhere. This distinction is not found in middle-class speech, which uses the diphthong throughout. The monophthong has the potential for merger with the PALM/START vowel.

CHOICE [Oê]

MOUTH [åÜ] The offset is strongly labialised.

NEAR [e…E2]

SQUARE [E6:]

CURE [jÜE2]

3.0 CONSONANTS

There is considerable evidence of convergence in the consonant systems of British accents. Studies such as the *Phonological Variation and Change* project (see XXX, this volume) and from our own that t-glottalling and the fronting of /Q/ and /D/ to [f] and [v] are widespread and show increasingly similar phonological and sociolinguistic patterning throughout the country. Here, we will underline this convergence by discussing all three towns together.

/Q, D/ [Q, D] for older speakers, [f, v] increasingly for younger speakers ([v] is not used initially in function words, such as *that*). (See discussion below.)

/r/ [®] In all three towns, labiodental [Ë] may sporadically be heard. Linking and intrusive /r/ are usual in Reading and MK, but are not generally used in Hull after /O:/, as in *law and order*.

Glottal replacement of /t/. Glottal replacement of non-initial /t/ is the norm among young working-class people in all three towns, with males using the feature a little more (see Table 8, below). Among middle-class young people, girls use the feature more in Reading and Hull, while in Milton

Keynes it is the boys who have the higher frequency (Table 8). Preconsonantal environments, as in *let me*, favour the process the most. However, the least favourable environment differs: in Reading and Milton Keynes, it is word-internal intervocalic /t/ (as in *butter*), while in Hull it is the word-final pre-pause position; in this case, the /t/ is audibly released and is not glottally reinforced. Older speakers in Hull use less glottal replacement of /t/ than younger people, suggesting a recent introduction of the feature. In Reading and MK, the glottal stop may replace medial /p/ in some items, such as *stupid* and *paper*.

Final /k/ in Hull may be preaspirated, giving [klÅhk^{h}] for *clock*.

/l/ In Reading and MK, syllable-final /l/ is strongly labiovelarised and variably vocalised; in Hull, /l/ is lightly velarised in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions.

4.0 SUPRASEGMENTALS

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give an exhaustive description of intonation in the three accents. Instead, we give an example of the characteristic intonation of declarative sentences in a narrative style.

Reading and Milton Keynes

Both Reading and Milton Keynes have patterns that are close to what is described for RP, and appear very similar to each other. The basic pattern is for a mid or rising head followed by high falling nuclear tone.

Example:

I sees them on a Tuesday and a Thursday night and most of the time I'm with my boyfriend (Reading)

Their mum goes with like their uncle or something and then everyone ends up dead in the end (Milton Keynes)

Hull

The basic pattern involves a low head followed by a low-to-mid or low-to-high rise starting on the nuclear syllable. If the nuclear syllable is utterance-final, the rise takes place on that syllable. If

there are unstressed syllables following the nucleus, the nucleus is low and the first unstressed syllable is mid or high, any subsequent syllables remaining high.

Example:

There's a little park over there and they leave broken bottles in the park where little kids go

5.0 DIALECT LEVELLING: CONTINUITY VS. CHANGE IN THREE URBAN ENGLISH ACCENTS

The above descriptions strongly suggest that the accents of Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull are converging in both inventory and realisations. Yet, there are still marked differences between them, especially, of course, when we compare Hull with the southern towns. What we are witnessing is the phenomenon of *dialect levelling*, a process whereby differences between regional varieties are reduced, features which make varieties distinctive disappear, and new features develop and are adopted by speakers over a wide geographical area (see also Cheshire, Edwards & Whittle 1993).

Explanations for dialect levelling have been sought in the changing demographic patterns of the last 40 years, which have seen an increase in geographical mobility: the populations of inner cities have declined as inhabitants move out to the suburbs and dormitory towns, while the populations of smaller towns, such as Cambridge, Norwich, Ipswich, Reading and Oxford, have increased (Giddens 1997). In addition, post-Second World War efforts to rehouse those displaced by the war or living in sub-standard accommodation in inner cities led to the creation of 35 'new towns' across the country (Schaffer 1972). Evidence of an increase in social mobility is less clearly quantifiable but individual studies have shown a recent decrease in downward mobility, accompanied by an increase in the number of young men from blue collar backgrounds taking up white collar work (Marshall et al. 1988). Both vertical social mobility and lateral (geographical) mobility are likely to lead to the breakdown of the close-knit social networks associated with traditional working class communities and thought to be influential in maintaining local linguistic norms (Milroy & Milroy 1992).

The projects discussed here were designed to explore the links between such geographical and social factors and dialect levelling. The first (the 'Milton Keynes' project) was a study of the emergence of a new dialect in the new town of Milton Keynes (Kerswill 1994a, 1996a, Kerswill & Williams 1997a). In the second (the 'Dialect Levelling' project), three towns, similar in size but differing in their geographical location, demographic characteristics and social composition, were chosen as research sites. The choice of town was informed by the claim that highly mobile populations give rise to diffuse social network structures which in turn promote rapid dialect

change (cf. Trudgill 1992, 1996) and that the kind of stable communities we find in old-established urban populations promote the enforcement of local conventions and norms, including linguistic norms (L. Milroy 1980). Milton Keynes, designated in 1967 and built on a green-field site adjacent to the M1 motorway, lies within an 80 kilometre radius of several important cities, including London, Oxford, Coventry, Leicester and Cambridge. It is Britain's latest and fastest growing new town with a population that has increased from 40,000 in 1967 (MKDC 1990) to 176,000 by the time of the 1991 Census. 75% of the in-migrants to the town moved from other areas in the south-east, including London. In Milton Keynes, we have a socially fluid population made up of newcomers with aspirations to improve both their housing conditions and their employment prospects. Moreover, having arrived in the town, many residents continue to move within Milton Keynes itself (Williams & Kerswill 1997). Such instability hinders the formation of strong local ties and the kind of close-knit stable social networks which reinforce linguistic norms and inhibit language change. In complete contrast, Hull is a city of limited social and geographical mobility. Out-migration exceeds in-migration and a combination of related factors including high unemployment, poverty and poor educational achievement in the local schools means that both geographical and social mobility are severely curtailed. In addition, its geographical position 400 kilometres north of London on the extreme eastern seaboard, cut off from the south by the River Humber and remote from other large conurbations, means that, unlike towns such as Norwich, York or Reading, it has few commuters. In Hull, then, we expected to find speakers with strong local ties and the kind of networks that reinforce local norms. Reading shares characteristics with both Hull and Milton Keynes. It is an old established town with a stable, local population, but its location in the prosperous M4 corridor, 60 kilometres west of London, has attracted international companies and new industries and, as a consequence, considerable numbers of in-migrants from a wide range of socio-economic groups.

Dialect levelling has been shown to occur in mobile populations where there is a high level of dialect contact. In such areas individuals regularly find themselves in face to face interaction with speakers of other varieties, and in their efforts to accommodate to their interlocutors tend to avoid features that are unusual or markedly regional, or which might lead to comprehension difficulties (Trudgill 1986:25). Such individual acts of accommodation replicated throughout a population can lead to permanent language change as marked variants gradually disappear while the forms with the 'widest geographical (and social) usage' are retained (Trudgill 1986:98). However, while first-generation migrants will adapt in minor ways to their new linguistic environment, they are nevertheless already adults who have passed the 'critical stage' of language acquisition (Lenneberg 1967; Kerswill 1996b) and are not likely to be able to make major grammatical and phonological changes to their speech. Studies have reported the acquisition of 'easy features' and small changes in vowel quality as well as lexical and morpholexical borrowing in adult migrants (Yaeger-Dror 1994; Kerswill 1994), but it is their children, the second-generation migrants, who are central to the linguistic focusing that precedes the formation of a homogeneous variety. These children, who at

the pre-school stage normally acquire their parents' variety, will go on to encounter a range of dialects as they start school and begin to expand their social contacts. During adolescence, a period when the need for autonomy from parents is accompanied by increasing loyalty to the peer group, strong pressure is exerted by peers to conform to youth norms, including linguistic ones. It is in this age group, then, that focusing can be expected to occur and features of the new levelled variety begin to emerge.

Milton Keynes: discontinuity and rapid change

The processes of focusing and levelling can be illustrated with data from the Milton Keynes project. While the data collection employed a cross-sectional or 'apparent time' model, it was nevertheless possible to construct a chronological record of ongoing phonological change in an area that has seen massive demographic upheaval. The main body of data comprised recordings of 48 children mainly born to migrant parents (8 boys and 8 girls from each of three age groups, 4, 8 and 12 years), as already pointed out. They formed a socially homogeneous working-class sample, living in adjacent housing estates and attending three neighbouring schools. Recordings were also made of a caregiver for each child, the mother in almost all cases. Samples of the pre-new town dialects of the small towns now incorporated into the new conurbation were collected in the form of interviews with elderly men and women born in the early years of the century and resident in the area ever since. In addition, transcriptions of speakers born in the 1870s and 1880s were available in the form of SED data collected in the 1950s in the village of Stewkley, now on the outskirts of Milton Keynes (Orton, Dieth & Wakelyn 1968). Thus, we have evidence from speakers whose birth dates span 100 years.

Changes in one vowel sound, in particular, illustrate the transition from distinct regional feature to levelled form. This is /aÜ/, the vowel in MOUTH (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Percentage use of variants of /aÜ/ (MOUTH), Milton Keynes, interview style

	[EÜ9]	[Eê]	[E:]	[a:˝]	[æÜ]	[aÜ]
Children (n=48)	-	-	10.5	8.7	13.9	65.9
Caregivers (n=48)	-	-	11.7	17.2	38.6	31.5
Elderly (n=4)	63.2	25.6	9.8	-	1.2	0
(SED informants)	(✓)					

Taking the elderly speakers' realisations as representative of an earlier stage (corroborated by the SED symbol used in words containing /aÜ/, as shown), we can see that the accent has changed radically with respect to this vowel: there is almost no overlap between the caregivers and children on the one hand and the elderly speakers on the other. But, in Milton Keynes, we cannot assume that this is a 'normal' community-based change, in which younger people either adopt forms from other varieties or produce innovations of their own. The rapid change that has taken place in Milton Keynes is due to the lack of social continuity between the young speakers and the old: most of our child subjects had grandparents living elsewhere – a discontinuity that we believe is reflected in the distribution of variants for this vowel. In place of continuity, we have an incoming group of adult first-generation migrants bringing with them a spectrum of variants, ranging from the London monophthong [E:] to the Scots [Á], with [æÜ], the variant used by many south-eastern speakers, being the most common. While all the parental variants occurred in the children's data, especially in that of the four year olds, it was clear that the older children were rejecting the more marked variants of their parents' accents – including [æÜ], which presumably spread from London – and were settling on the RP-like, non-regional variant [aÜ]. In sum, the establishment of the new town has led to a rapid shift consisting of three distinct stages: first, before the advent of the new town there was a period of stability during which [EÜ9] predominated; second, we find a shorter period during which [æÜ], the form used by the migrants of the 1970s, was favoured; finally, this variant gave way to the non-regionally marked [aÜ] of the new generation of native-born young people – a form which, as our research in Reading shows, is increasingly characteristic of a wide area in the south-east. Later in the article, we return to the issue of geographical dialect levelling in this region.

Changes in the GOAT diphthong, however, present a somewhat different picture. While there is a similar break between the pre- and post-new town forms, we find that the discontinuity is overlaid by the spread of an innovation at the expense of all older variants. At the time of the SED research, GOAT was represented by two phonemes given phonetically as [UÜ] and [Ü´], the former used in words such as *throat* and *dough* and the latter in a lexical set including *road* and *coat*. In the audio recordings of the elderly Milton Keynes residents, the former has replaced the latter, and the result is centralised to [‰Ü] or [‰Ü9]. None of these older variants were at all common in the recordings of our parent cohort, however, the majority of whom, being from London and the south-east, favoured [åÜ] (Wells 1982:308 quotes this as the main 'Cockney' variant). As might be expected, [åÜ] was also the most common variant in the recordings of the four year olds, who clearly modelled their speech on that of their caregivers. However, as Table 2 demonstrates, the older children appeared to be moving away from the central-to-back diphthong of their parents and to be producing a new variant with a central onset but a high front offset, typically [åY] or [‰Y] and sometimes unrounded to [åê] or [‰ê]. Thus, the older children appear to be settling, not on a majority form already present in the mix, but on a new variant which differentiates them from their

caregivers (see Table 2). As with MOUTH, this vowel is in fact participating in a change affecting the whole south-east region – a point we return to below.

TABLE 2 Percentage use of variants of /ˊÜ/ (GOAT) in Milton Keynes

	[åê]	[åY]	[åÜ], [åÜ9] (also [o:])
4 year olds	13.5	30.2	55.7
8 year olds	12.9	53.6	33.3
12 year olds	3.0	68.6	28.2
Caregivers	3.5	37.3	60.0

Note: Children's data is taken from the elicitation tasks; that of caregivers is taken from the interviews. The caregivers' scores include the [o:] used by five mothers from outside the south-east of England.

Demography, network type and change in three towns

The results described above illustrate a number of principles that might be derived from studies of areas of intensive dialect contact (see also Chambers 1992): there is normally no historical continuity with the locality; marked regional forms are disfavoured; majority rather than minority forms win out; and, from initial diffusion, focusing takes place over one or two generations. The Milton Keynes data, however, could only partially illustrate two further principles (Kerswill & Williams 1997a). The first is that the structure of the new speech community is seen in adolescents, not in pre-adolescent children. As the oldest children in the Milton Keynes project were just 12, it was not possible to make strong predictions about adolescent behaviour. We could only assume that the tendencies they exhibited as young teenagers would be confirmed in later adolescence. The follow-up Dialect Levelling project focused on adolescents, an age group who are approaching maturity in their *knowledge* of adult linguistic norms, including style shifting, and yet who experience strong peer group pressure to differentiate themselves from the older generation and adhere to the norms of their age group. It was asssumed, then, that evidence of linguistic innovation, including levelling tendencies, would be apparent in teenage populations. The sample for the Dialect Levelling project comprised 96 adolescents (eight boys and eight girls from each of two social groups, middle and working class, in each town). All were aged 14/15 and in year 10 of co-educational comprehensive schools with the exception of one group who were at a private school. In each town, eight elderly working-class speakers were also recorded.

The second principle that could not be fully explored in the Milton Keynes project concerned the relationship between network characteristics and language change. Milton Keynes offered

limited scope for the study of *differences* between social network types. By its very nature, a new town population is composed of mobile individuals who, in adapting to life in a new environment, contract numerous weak and uniplex ties. Elements that are necessary for the formation of strong local networks, such as links with close kin living in the neighbourhood, a common work-place with friends and neighbours, and shared out-of-work activities with workmates (Milroy 1980), are rare. Thus, while the Milton Keynes data enabled us to demonstrate that loose and diffuse network structures promote rapid language change (see Milroy & Milroy 1992; Kerswill & Williams 1997a), there was no opportunity to explore the opposite claim that close-knit networks inhibit language change. By extending the project to include Hull and Reading it was possible to compare towns whose contrasting demographic characteristics give rise to a range of network types.

The city of Hull provides a complete contrast with Milton Keynes. Its remote location on the east coast limits geographical mobility, and upward social mobility is restricted by one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. In the district where the research was conducted, 44% of the heads of household were 'not in the labour market' compared with a national average of 16%. (OFSTED 1993). The teenagers who took part in the project had all grown up in close proximity to each other on the extensive council estate situated on the periphery of the city. In many cases, as Table 3 indicates, parents and even grandparents had spent most of their lives on the same estate. Thus, the teenagers' and their parents' networks were dense and multiplex and anchored very firmly in North Hull. The Milton Keynes families, in contrast, had migrated from many parts of the country and most of the childrena had been elsewhere, moving to the new town in the first few years of their lives. Reading shares characteristics with both towns. It has stable, long established local communities as well as a mobile population of commuters and workers in the new high technology industries. Unlike Hull, however, it has full employment and the potential, at least, for social mobility.

In the Dialect Levelling project, we have supplemented the ethnographic information obtained in the interviews by using subjects' birthplaces together with the birthplaces of their parents as a simple analogue of social network density. This gives us a measure of the *localness* of the network, which can be expected to correlate with network density. Furthermore, instead of looking at individual speakers, we obtain a picture of the localness of the networks in each sampling district as a whole. Table 3 shows this information for the working-class subjects in each town. As can readily be seen, Milton Keynes is clearly differentiated from Hull and Reading, both of which have a large majority of families with strong local ties.

TABLE 3 Birthplace of working-class adolescents and their parents in Hull, Milton Keynes and Reading (Dialect Levelling project)

	HULL			**MILTON KEYNES**			**READING**		
	BORN	Mother's b'place	Father's b'place	BORN	Mother's b'place	Father's b'place	BORN	Mother's b'place	Father's b'place
GIRLS									
1	Hull*	Withersea		Scotland [i]	Scotland	Scotland	Reading	Reading	Reading
2	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Milton K	Halifax	London	Reading	Reading	Reading
3	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Luton	Hampshire	Watford	Reading	Guyana	Guyana
4	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	London	London	London	Germany	Reading	Reading
5	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Milton K	Bletchley	Bletchley	Reading	India	Reading
6	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Lancashire	Lancashire	Liverpool	Reading	Cambridge	Reading
7	Hull*	Hull	Hull	Blackpool	London		Reading	Reading	Reading
8	Hull	Hull	Spain	Bletchley	Stevenage	Ireland	Reading	Reading	Reading
BOYS									
1	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Milton K	Bletchley	Bletchley	Reading	Reading	Reading
2	Hull	Hull	Hull	London	Essex	London	Reading	Reading	Reading
3	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Milton K	London	London	Reading	Reading	Reading
4	Hull	Hull	Hull	Milton K	Suffolk	Ireland	Reading	Reading	Reading
5	Chester	Hull*	Lincs	Newbury	Berkshire	Tadley	Reading	Reading	Reading
6	Hull*	Hull*	Hull*	Ireland	Halifax	Ireland	Reading	Reading	Reading
7	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	Milton K	London	London	Reading	Reading	London
8	Hull*	Hull*	Hull	Milton K	London	Jamaica	Reading	Reading	Ireland

* born on the estate

[i] children born outside Milton Keynes but migrated within the first four years of life.

As might be expected, the linguistic results reflect the demographic patterning found in the three towns. Tables 4 and 5 show the results for the PRICE vowel for Reading and Milton Keynes. Table 4 suggests that there has been little change in the pronunciation of this vowel in traditional Reading English over three generations. The predominant variant is a back, diphthongal [Aê]; however, there are also raised back/centralised variants which, though occurring less in teenage speech than in the speech of the elderly, nevertheless reflect the continuity that is present in the community and the close contact many of our teenage informants had with the older generation.

This continuity is not present in Milton Keynes, where the migrant families have little connection with the old people of the area. The results shown in Table 5 chime with our findings for MOUTH and GOAT: the old dialect forms have all but disappeared, with the raised back/centralised variants preferred by the elderly speakers almost completely absent from the speech of the young people.

TABLE 4 Percentage use of variants of (aê), Reading working-class group (interview with fieldworker)

	[a2ê]	[A9ê]	[Aê]	[Oê]	[U9ê]	[Uê]
Girls (n=8)	2.8	21.2	45.1	21.1	4.3	5.1
Boys (n=8)	0.6	19.1	63.7	13.7	2.7	-
Elderly (n=4)	-	12.4	47.8	21.8	1.7	15.7

TABLE 5 Percentage use of variants of (aê), Milton Keynes working-class group (interview with fieldworker)

	[a2ê]	[A9ê]	[Aê]	[Oê]	[U9ê]	[Uê]
Girls (n=8)	25.4	44.6	29.2	0.5	-	-
Boys (n=8)	1.0	38.0	60.0	-	-	-
Elderly (n=4)	-	-	24.4	56.6	15.3	3.4

Hull: continuity and resistance to change

It is in Hull, however, that the strongest evidence of close-knit networks acting as a conservative force and resisting change can be seen. Characteristic of the old dialect of Hull and the surrounding area of Holderness is an allophonic distinction between a diphthong [aê] and a monophthong [a:] in the PRICE vowel (Trudgill 1990:69). The former precedes voiceless consonants in words such as *bright, like, pipe*, and the latter, voiced consonants as *in bride, five, and mind*. The following description was published by the English Dialect Society in 1877.

Long i as in night, tribe, &c. This has two distinct powers [aa…y] or [aa…] and [ey]. To a stranger it seems as if these were used indiscriminately, but such is far from being the case. Each follows certain well defined and fixed rules.

(1) When this long *i* is followed (α) by a flat consonant, *i.e.* by the letters *b, d, g* hard, j, (or *g* soft) *v*, *z* (or *s* with *z* sound); (β) the liquids *l*, *m* and *n* ; (γ) another vowel; it has the sound of [aa…y], which in N. and W. has a great tendency to become [aa…].

tribe [thraa…yb] or [thraa…b]
rive [raa…yv]
…

(2) When, on the other hand, long *i* is followed by a sharp consonant, *i.e.* by one of the letters *c* (or *s* with sharp sound) *f, k, p, t,* or the remaining liquid, *r*, it is pronounced [ey], *e.g.*:—

rice [reys]
tight [teyt]
…

(Ross, Stead & Holderness 1877:9)

Today, the distinction between two distinct allophones in these environments is maintained, although the quality seems to have changed in that the monophthong is near-categorical before voiced consonants, while the diphthong preceding voiceless consonants has been lowered – if we can accept Ross et al.'s transcription [ey] as representing IPA [eê]. Thus, in the Hull teenagers' speech, the two vowels are typically pronounced [a2:] and [ai-6]. Table 6 shows their distribution in both middle-class and working-class groups. Of the 16 middle-class teenagers in the sample, only one observed the distinction between voiceless and voiced contexts. The older working-class speakers observed the rule categorically, as did all the young working-class students with the exception of one boy. Thus, while the two allophones are merged in middle-class Hull speech, working-class children appear to be preserving some of the more complex patterning of the older local variety.

Further evidence of the strength of local linguistic norms in Hull can be seen in the distribution of /h/ in lexical words, as in *house, home, hand*. Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull are all located in the extensive area covering most of central England where *h*-dropping is a feature of the traditional dialects (Upton & Widdowson 1996). As might be expected, the elderly speakers in all three towns had few instances of initial /h/. In contrast, the working-class adolescents in both Reading and Milton Keynes showed a surprisingly high use of the standard form. It might be suggested that since /h/ is a very salient feature, the young people were style shifting and accommodating to the fieldworker. This was clearly not the case in Hull, however, where the adolescents matched the older speakers in their use of the non-standard variant, as shown in Table 7 and Figure 1. An explanation for the differences, however, might lie in the very salience of this feature. In such a close-knit, territorially bounded community as the Hull estate, use of the standard form is perceived as 'posh' (see Kerswill & Williams 1997b) and there is strong pressure to avoid it. We discuss further explanations for the contrasting patterns of Hull and the two southern towns in the final section.

TABLE 6 The PRICE vowel with following voiceless and voiced consonants: middle- class and working-class speakers in Hull (word list data)

1. With following voiceless consonant, e.g., *bright, knife, whiter, like*

	[aə̂]	[a…ə̂]	[a:]
MC boys	100	0	0
MC girls	100	0	0
WC boys	100	0	0
WC girls	100	0	0
WC elderly	100	0	0

2. With following voiced consonant, e.g. *bride, five, wider, pint*

	[aə̂]	[a…ə̂]	[a:]
MC boys	75.0	20	5.0
MC girls	92.5	7.5	0
WC boys	7.5	10.0	82.5
WC girls	0	25.7	74.2
WC elderly	0	0	100

TABLE 7 Percent use of [h] in lexical words, e.g., *house, head, behind*, working class speakers (interview data)

	GIRLS	BOYS	ELDERLY
Milton Keynes	87.5	85.3	5.6
Reading	78.5	51.0	10.4
Hull	11.8	15.0	12.5

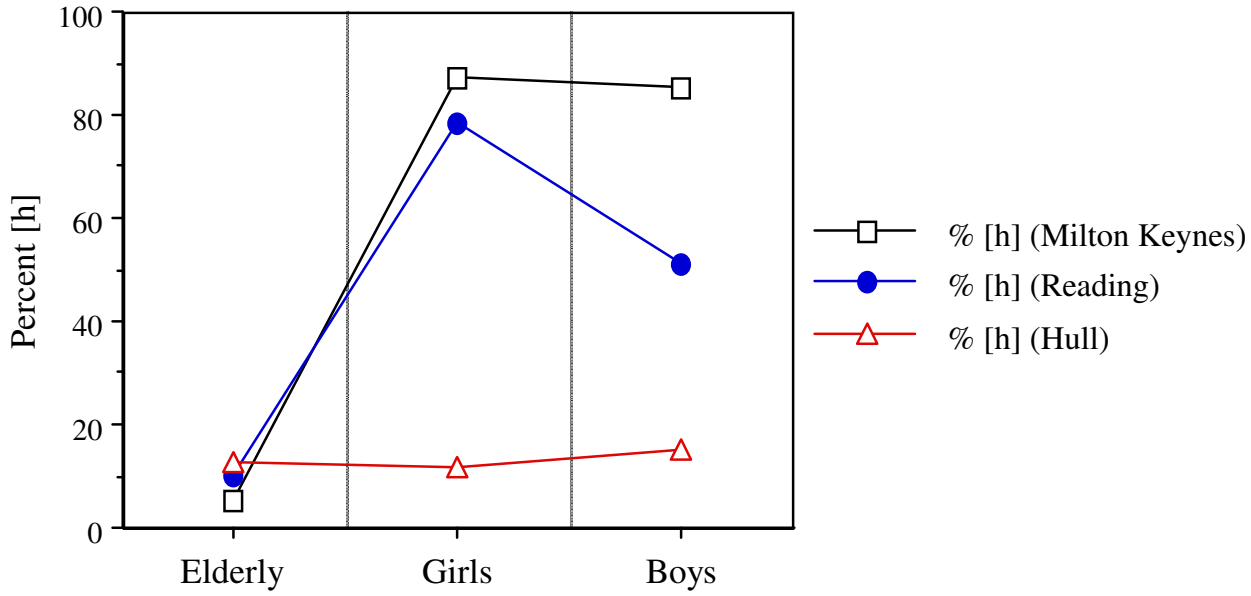

FIGURE 1 Percent use of [h], working-class speakers, interview data (data from Table 7)

To judge from the data so far presented, working class teenagers in Hull appear to be resisting any movement towards standardisation of accent features; the close-knit and territorially defined nature of their community appears to inhibit language change. However, one of the motivations for studying adolescent speech was that it was in this age group that we expected to find evidence of linguistic innovation along with levelling tendencies. Data on a group of consonantal variables indicated that the Hull teenagers can be as ready to adopt innovations as their southern counterparts.

For some years now, researchers have been documenting the progress of a series of consonantal features which originated in London, and are rapidly being adopted by young speakers across Britain. The replacement of [t] by a glottal stop [ʔ] in word medial, intervocalic position (as in *letter*) and in word final position (as in *cut it out*) is a feature of London or Cockney English which has spread so widely across both geographical and social space that it has come to be 'perceived as a stereotype of urban British speech' (Milroy, Milroy & Hartley 1994:3), present not only in the working-class varieties but also making inroads into RP (Wells 1994). The extent of glottalisation in the interview data of the Milton Keynes and Reading adolescents described here was not surprising, given (a) that these two towns are close to London and (b) that '*t*-glottalling' is a common feature in southern English English, present both in older Reading speech and in the speech of the majority of new migrants to Milton Keynes, who originate from London or the south-east of England. More surprising were the results for Hull, where *t*-glottalling does not form part of the original dialect nor of the dialect of the surrounding East Riding (see SED), though it is used to

some extent by middle-aged speakers. Young people in Hull appear to be using glottals as frequently as their southern counterparts, as shown in Table 8.

Similar patterns can be seen in the analysis of two further London features, the merger of /Q/ with /f/ (as in *thin*) and of /D/ with /v/ in word medial and word final positions (as in *brother*; see Table 8). Like *t*-glottalling, these features appear to be spreading rapidly out of London (Trudgill 1986). In Norwich, the mergers were totally absent from the speech of 11 year olds in 1968, whereas they were 'very common indeed in the speech of working class 16 year olds in 1983' (Trudgill 1986:54). It was expected that the mergers would be present in the adolescents in Milton Keynes, given that Londoners account for 35% of in-migrants to the town, and the proximity of Reading to London would account for their adoption there, although they are absent from the speech of older residents. However, the data given in Table 8 demonstrate quite clearly that the mergers are now found in working class adolescent speech in Hull, too. The mergers form part of a group of features which also includes *t*-glottalling and the use of labio-dental /r/ which seem to constitute a set of 'youth norms', adopted by young people in many areas of Great Britain (see Docherty & Foulkes 1998, Stuart-Smith 1998). Like their peers in other parts of Britain, young Hull speakers are adopting these innovative features in full measure.

TABLE 8 Three consonantal variables currently spreading in British English (interview data)

	MIDDLE CLASS		WORKING CLASS	
	girls	*boys*	*girls*	*boys*
MILTON KEYNES				
% [ʔ] for intervocalic /t/	25.4	48.6	75.2	83.0
% [f] for /ɸ/	7.1	36.1	55.8	87.8
% [v] for non-initial /ð/	14.3	46.9	70.8	89.5
READING				
% [ʔ] for intervocalic /t/	29.5	14.1	92.2	100
% [f] for /ɸ/	0	11.4	76.4	83.7
% [v] for non-initial /ð/	0	6.4	87.4	93.7
HULL				
% [ʔ] for intervocalic /t/	30.9	20	71.8	82.7
% [f] for /ɸ/	9.6	16.5	63.2	90.7
% [v] for non-initial /ð/	27.1	23.7	77.7	95.5

Conclusion

The patterns emerging from the data appear to point to a North-South divide, with young people in the southern towns rejecting older, regionally marked forms in favour of non-regional variants used over a wide area, while the working-class northern teenagers continue to adhere strongly to certain conservative local forms. The linguistic differences possibly reflect more general north-south divisions that have been widening over the past 20 years (Smith 1994), with the south of Britain, especially the south-east, experiencing increased economic activity and wealth while the north has undergone a corresponding decline in its prosperity. In a recent survey which ranked 280 British towns according to their prosperity (Champion & Green, 1990), Milton Keynes and Reading are in third and ninth places respectively. Although Hull, as a city, is not listed, Smith (1994) points out that 'even the worst performing towns in the south east scored higher than a substantial proportion of those in, say, Yorkshire and Humberside' (p.133). The relative prosperity of the southern towns makes social mobility an achievable goal. In Hull, however, where school leavers face one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, the 'intense pressure to reject NS dialects through routes such as the educational system' (J. Milroy & L. Milroy 1993:60) has little impact on children who remain unconvinced of the value of education as a passport to social mobility and have little incentive to modify their accents.

Closely linked to increased economic prosperity are the population movements that have taken place in Britain since the 1970s. The main trends show an overall movement from north to south, with the result that at present 58% of the population live in the south, in an area which occupies only 40% of the land area of the United Kingdom. Important for a study of the spread of accent features are the socio-economic characteristics of the migrants. According to Smith, 'migrants tend to be young, and the most mobile among the population are those in their 20s. They are generally well educated and are predominantly in professional and other non-manual jobs' (1994:232). Thus, while Milton Keynes and Reading have seen in-migration of all social classes including professional cadres, there has been little migration of any kind into Hull. These factors are reflected in the school populations. In Milton Keynes, there are two extensive secondary school campuses attended by most children living in the town, a situation which results in a good deal of mixing at educational and social levels. A very different situation is found in Hull, where the middle classes tend to live outside the city in the surrounding villages. 'Working class Hull is crammed within tight local authority boundaries with almost no middle class hinterland – those families school their children in the East Riding' (*The Observer*, 3 May 1998). Thus, there is little or no social mix in many of the schools within the city and consequently little opportunity for the children to interact regularly with a range of social groups. In addition, the remote location of the housing estates, built on the very outskirts of the city, combined with the strong tendency for families to remain on the estate for several generations, means that in their early years children have little experience of coming into contact with speakers of different varieties.

While structural factors can be advanced to account for some of the rapid dialect changes in Milton Keynes and Reading, as well as for the more conservative speech patterns of the Hull youngsters, it is difficult to see how such factors might explain the enthusiastic adoption of the non-standard southern consonantal variants [ʔ], [f] and [v] by working-class young people in northern areas, as demonstrated in Table 8. It is possible that affective factors play a part. First, it has been suggested that this set of consonantal variables can be identified as 'youth norms' (Docherty & Foulkes 1998). The tremendous increase in radio and TV stations and programmes directed at young people has led to widespread use of informal and non-standard registers in the broadcast media, most of which emanate from London and the south. Adolescents throughout Britain are regularly exposed to southern accents, which in turn are associated with young people and youth culture. Second, the changes observed in the pronunciation of this group of consonants are from standard to non-standard, and are thus acceptable to working-class speakers. Finally, variation in the consonants /t/, /Q/ and /D/ is much less salient for Hull speakers than, for example, variation in the realisation of /h/, /Ü/ as in STRUT and /æ/ as in BATH. The adoption of southern, non-standard variants of /t/, /Q/ and /D/ do not affect a northerner's sense of regional identity. As for h-dropping, its continued strong use by the Hull adolescents is, we have argued, due to the strongly local nature of the networks of this group. Thus, by adopting non-standard southern features, the young Hull speakers are able to signal their identification with the peer group and youth culture, while at the same time retaining their strong links with both their social class and their region of origin. Cohen (1972), in his work on subcultures, identifies the motivation that may lie behind the Hull adolescents' choice of linguistic forms when he suggests that young people 'negotiate a space for their own culture within the parent class culture. In this way they both create and express autonomy and difference from parents and maintain … the parental identifications which support them'.

The data presented here for Reading and Milton Keynes show similarities between the varieties used by the current generation of adolescents in the two towns, although the mechanisms by which changes take place are quite different. In Milton Keynes, massive demographic change has resulted in discontinuity of dialect transmission followed by focusing in the first native-born generation, while in Reading linguistic changes are more gradual. The resulting forms are quite similar, however, and strongly suggest a gradual move in the southern counties to adopt more standard-like or at least less localised variants. Hull, with its greater geographical isolation and relative lack of opportunities for young people, is linguistically more conservative. Yet its adolescents remain open to non-standard linguistic innovations coming from outside. A comparison of language variation in the three towns shows that levelling is present in each, but that the underlying processes differ. Structural factors, such as migration patterns, economic prosperity, geographical distance, social class and social network type, clearly play important roles, but these can be mediated by affective factors, such as, for teenagers, identification with the peer group and the locality on the one hand, and a wider youth culture on the other.

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