

## **4.1. Tracing the origins of an urban youth vernacular: founder effects, frequency and culture in the emergence of Multicultural London English**

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### **Abstract**

This chapter traces the chronology of youth language in London from the arrival of the first post-Second World War migrants from Jamaica in 1948 to the early 2000s, by which time what is now known as Multicultural London English (MLE) had become a well-established, recognised variety. Referring to earlier work by Beaken (1971), Hurford (1967), Sebba (1993) and Hewitt (1982, 1986), we argue that MLE was preceded by two previous youth languages: London Jamaican and a ‘multiracial vernacular’. Both of these were contingent on users (ethnicity) and on context (expressing solidarity), and neither was a ‘vernacular’ in Labov’s (1972) sense. MLE emerged, we argue, in the early 1980s, when London’s inner city had become highly multilingual. Children were acquiring English in communities where the older London variety no longer dominated. The resulting variety, MLE, became for many speakers their vernacular. We also argue that the early Jamaicans formed a ‘founding’ population for youth culture, and that this status is reflected in the present day through MLE’s slang. Other linguistic features of MLE, however, only resemble Caribbean Creole to the extent that they are also shared by other input varieties to the mix.

### **4.1.1. The London multiethnolect as a new dialect**

The last forty years have seen a vibrant line of research focused on new, urban language varieties in Northwest Europe: from Scandinavia to Berlin, via Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium, high-migration areas of cities are the sites of new varieties of the majority

languages, developing alongside, and occasionally supplanting, existing urban dialects (Kotsinas 1988; Quist 2008; Cheshire et al. 2011; Nortier & Svendsen eds. 2015; Wiese forthcoming). Most of these new varieties have become *enregistered* (Agha 2007), in the sense that social, often negative, meaning is attached to them (Kircher & Fox 2019). The external conditions for this emergence have involved the arrival of relatively large numbers of people, in many cases from former colonies in the Global South, a fact which largely determines which languages will form the input to the new varieties. In these multilingual neighbourhoods, the new residents' children are not simply assimilated linguistically to the majority speech community; instead, young people are socialised and acquire language in an environment that is both multilingual and multicultural, which in turn has the potential to lead to contact-induced language change. We have argued (Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox & Torgersen 2011) that the mechanism for change is via a *feature pool* of available linguistic forms (Mufwene 2001:4-6), from which selections are made.

The above outlines the mechanism behind the linguistic developments leading to what are often referred to as *multiethnolects* (e.g., Quist 2008; Wiese forthcoming), such as Multicultural London English (MLE) (Cheshire et al. 2011). The formation of these varieties has some of the characteristics of koineisation, or new-dialect formation (Trudgill 1986, 2004; Kerswill & Trudgill 2005; Kerswill 2013a), in that a significant element of dialect contact is present, involving not only mutually intelligible dialects, but also, critically and decisively, second-language or learner varieties of the majority language – the key factor distinguishing multiethnolect formation from koineisation (even though second-language and learner varieties may be present in the latter). In particular, we see that language contact leading to language shift is a crucial component because the (mainly adult) L2 speakers of the majority language use features from their first or prior language(s) through the process of interference or *imposition* (Van Coetsem 1988). In this chapter, we pursue the idea that

demography is an important part of understanding the products of contact, in a manner consistent with Trudgill's (2004) deterministic model of new-dialect formation.

An important issue, however, is whether or not multiethnolects can be considered as vernaculars, in the sense both of a dialect characteristic of a community and as the psychologically entrenched main variety spoken alongside other less-entrenched varieties, such as the standard (Labov 1972; Sharma 2018). The alternative is to consider multiethnolects as a stylistic resource for speakers (Quist 2008), with no strong implication of entrenchment. However, taking 'vernacular' and 'style' as exclusive categories is never a tenable position, all the more so for multiethnolects, which are more variable in their linguistic features than might be expected for regional varieties in general. Extreme variability means that delimiting MLE linguistically is problematic. However, taking MLE as a salient, *enregistered* (Agha 2007) part of individual repertoires de-emphasises the vernacular/style argument and allows us to see MLE as an entity containing a set of features, with some features 'in' and others 'out'. This may seem essentialistic, but it is intended to tap into people's beliefs and ideologies. Currently there is relatively limited empirical research dealing with the perception of MLE: Cardoso, Levon, Watt & Ye (forthcoming) show that a valid approach is to search for an association between an 'accent density' index and subjective reactions to different degrees of 'broadness' of MLE. Further to this, an important result of Kircher & Fox's (2019) online study of attitudes to MLE is the high degree to which respondents were able to make a direct link from the label 'Multicultural London English' to an entity which they recognised but had perhaps not given a name to (p. 6).

A further issue is to establish how a multiethnolect is distributed across a speaker's lifespan: is it acquired as part of initial language learning, or as a second dialect in childhood or adolescence? Does it become the speaker's dominant variety? When do people stop using it, if indeed they do? The speaker's age on acquisition will affect the types of features

acquired (Kerswill 1996). There seems to be agreement that most (but not all) multiethnolects are acquired as second dialects and thus not vernaculars in any strict sense. They invariably build on the phonological, grammatical and lexical structure of the first dialect, which remains the basis of the variety (Wiese 2009:803, footnote 30). In many cases, multiethnolects as second dialects are youth languages, actively deployed to mark a heightened identity, often of an oppositional and exclusionary nature; nevertheless, they may endure into adulthood (Kießling and Mous 2006; Rampton 2011; 2015). For many speakers MLE is an unmarked choice, acquired in fairly early childhood (by the age of 4-5), thus potentially constituting a vernacular for these speakers (Cheshire et al. 2011:164-165).

Finally, the question arises as to the recency of the individual features which constitute the feature pool. Answering this question is the core concern of this chapter. First, we consider the features that can be said to constitute MLE. In doing so, we evaluate the possible relevance of both Mufwene's (1996) notion of a *founder effect* and Trudgill's (2004) *determinism model* for the formation of this multiethnolect.

#### **4.1.2. Features of MLE**

Drawing boundaries between MLE and non-MLE masks the complexity of speakers' observable usage as well as their conceptualisations of their own language use – that is, what they themselves believe they are speaking; the concept of enregisterment is useful here, as we have seen. Nevertheless, we will discuss some of the main features of MLE, comment on their use, and explore the possible origins of the features.

Speakers of a multiethnolect may use features which differentiate it from other relevant varieties on every linguistic level, and MLE is no exception (Cheshire et al. 2011; Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill & Torgersen 2013; Kerswill, Torgersen & Fox 2008; Torgersen & Szakay 2012). Individual features may form part of coherent subsystems – especially

phonology, morphology or syntax – as suggested by Wiese and Rehbein (2016). As already noted, many speakers start acquiring the features of the variety at a young age, particularly the phonological features, and may use a sizeable set of features in early adolescence (to say a ‘full’ set would be misleading) (Kerswill et al. 2013). Our research shows that MLE features are spread via multicultural friendship groups, with the male non-Anglo speakers (descendants of immigrants mainly from the Global South) as the highest users overall. The high-frequency users have been identified as linguistic innovators, and these individuals can have both Anglo and non-Anglo ethnic backgrounds, which demonstrates that MLE is, to some extent, ethnically neutral (Cheshire et al. 2008). The vowel features include near-monophthongal qualities for some diphthongs, notably FACE and GOAT (Kerswill et al. 2008) and an extremely fronted GOOSE vowel (Cheshire et al. 2008). In turn, this has an effect on speech rhythm: the monophthongs (inherently?) have a shorter duration than diphthongal variants used in other varieties, giving rise to a more syllable-timed speech rhythm (Torgersen & Szakay 2012). Both FLEECE and GOOSE lack the characteristic diphthongisation of Cockney with central onsets (Wells 1982:308; and below). Consonantal features include h-reinstatement (i.e., there is little h-dropping in MLE) and k-backing, the backing of /k/ to [q] in stressed position before non-high back vowels (Fox & Torgersen 2018). Morphosyntactic features include loss of indefinite and definite article allomorphy (Gabrielatos et al. 2010; Cheshire et al. 2011), both levelling and innovation for past tense BE in negative polarity contexts (Cheshire & Fox 2009), use of relative pronoun *who* as a topic marker (Cheshire et al. 2013), use of the pronoun *man* (Cheshire 2013), the rise of the quotative THIS IS + SPEAKER (Fox 2012), and innovation in the use of pragmatic markers, in particular *you get me* (Torgersen et al. 2011). Use of *you get me* shows age effects, with teenagers being more frequent users than younger speakers and male non-Anglo speakers the highest users overall (Torgersen et al. 2018). A similar age effect is present for the fronting of GOOSE (which

shows incrementation; Labov 2007:346), with teenagers having the most fronted qualities (Cheshire et al. 2011). Incrementation is also found for the widespread quotative BE LIKE, though it is absent for the innovative quotative THIS IS + SPEAKER (Cheshire et al. 2011:180). This pattern shows that global English features in MLE, such as GOOSE-fronting and BE LIKE, follow general trends, while local, innovative features in general do not.

We will argue that understanding the demographic history of post-World War II London is an initial key to arbitrating between possible geographical and linguistic origins for the features of MLE. Table 4.1.1 provides a summary of potential origins for the key MLE features discussed in this chapter, based on the proportion of immigrants from the respective regions, as well as from London and the South-East of England.

#### **INSERT TABLE 4.1.1 ABOUT HERE**

#### **4.1.3. Beginnings, repertoires and boundaries**

There are few published accounts of young people's speech in London in the post-World War II era. The earliest appears to be Hurford (1967), who studied the phonology of members of an East End family in Bethnal Green in London's East End born between 1885 and 1953. The dialect he describes is largely a continuation of the four elderly Bethnal Green women studied by Sivertsen (1960). Beaken (1971) studied a sample of 4-9 year-olds from Bow, also in the East End. While their vowels were similar to those of Hurford's participants, Beaken offers for the first time a comment on ethnicity and language:

Large-scale immigration into the area [Tower Hamlets in London's traditional East End] had not taken place, either of native English speakers from other parts of London, or of English-speaking but not native-born immigrants. Fordway School had a small

minority of children of Asian origin who were not native English speakers. There were also some West Indian children, but those were mainly from families which had been in the area for some time: some of these “West Indians” were in fact English, having been born in the district. *The speech of the older ones was to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from that of the white children. In other words, a slight influx of immigrants into the area had not significantly affected the linguistic homogeneity of the community.* (Beaken 1971:14, quoted in Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill & Torgersen 2008:1-2; our emphasis)

We quote Beaken at length because it shows, first, that by the mid-1960s the traditional East End had not yet become the highly multi-ethnic area it would become by the 1980s and, second, that the few non-White British residents had assimilated linguistically with the majority. This observation that the minority ethnic population, specifically the Jamaicans, were not distinguishable from the White British speakers is important, since this did not remain the case, with the emergence of new styles. This increase in the diversity of local varieties of English, to some extent along ethnic lines but still with many shared linguistic features, is part of the development of what we now recognise as MLE. At the same time, it is important to track the rapid demographic development of London’s inner city in order to draw conclusions about the linguistic inputs to the area and to interpret changes both in language structure and in speaker repertoires.

The presence of an ethnically neutral, but distinct *youth* variety in London, differing from the local London dialect, was first noted in the academic literature in the 1980s, with Hewitt’s study of black youth language (1986; 1990):

...in the many urban areas where black and white were born and grew up together, attending the same schools and occupying the same recreational spaces, one linguistic consequence is that both Cockney and Creole have come to have an impact on the speech of black and white alike. Indeed *there has developed in many inner city areas a form of 'community English', or multiracial vernacular which, while containing Creole forms and idioms, is not regarded as charged with any symbolic meanings relating to race and ethnicity and is in no way related to boundary maintaining practices* [our emphasis]. Rather it is, if anything, a site within which ethnicity is deconstructed, dismantled and reassembled into a new ethnically mixed 'community English'. The degree of Creole influence on the specific local vernacular is often higher in the case of young black speakers but the situation is highly fluid and open to much local variation. There is, therefore, a two-way movement ... in which a de-ethnicized, racially mixed local language is creatively being established alongside a strategic, contextually variable use of Creole ... often employed as [a] marker of race in the context of daily anti-racist struggle. (Hewitt 1990:191-2)

Hewitt notes the rise not of one, but two language varieties. Chronologically the first is 'London Jamaican' (Sebba 1993, 2008; Patrick 2008), which is a variant of Jamaican Creole mixed with British English, characterised by Hewitt as "a strategic, contextually variable use of Creole ... a marker of race", while the second variety is the ethnically-neutral "multiracial vernacular".

The story of London Jamaican is important for the history of MLE. It was acquired as a second dialect by many African Caribbean adolescents as part of a new 'resistance identity' (Castells 1997). This is highlighted by the criminologist John Pitts who, referring to the time when he was a youth worker in South London in 1968-71, states:

I realised I was witnessing the birth of a resistance identity ... when I started working with black kids, in youth work, they all talked like Ian Wright [retired London-born footballer with Jamaican parentage who speaks with a London (Cockney) accent – PK/ENT] and within a few short years they all sounded like Bob Marley [Jamaican reggae artist – PK/ENT]. (Pitts 2012)

Pitts' comments appear to date the beginnings of London Jamaican fairly precisely to the late 1960s/early 1970s, a claim that is at least partly corroborated by Hewitt (1982:217), citing a report by the Community Relations Committee (1976), though it doesn't provide a *terminus ante quem*:

It is often pointed out to us that sometimes during their early teens at secondary school many West Indian pupils who up till then have used the language of the neighbourhood, begin to use creole dialect ... Its use is a deliberate social and psychological protest, and an assertion of identity.

This observation refers to the acquisition of London Jamaican by West Indian children as they enter secondary school – a case of second-dialect acquisition. In their survey of school children's language use in London, Rosen and Burgess (1980) discuss what they call 'London/Jamaican'; this also places the development back to the 1970s at the very latest. They conclude (1980:67): "We can go no further ... than to conjecture that ... London/Jamaican in all its variety is a relatively independent entity attracting some pupils of Caribbean origin rather than others" – a claim that, although Rosen and Burgess did not collect speech data, suggests that the variety has some social reality and even stability, at least for these commentators.

‘Identity’ seems central to the emergence of London Jamaican, perhaps linked to London-based Caribbean and other popular music at the time (Sebba 1993: 8-9). Its influence on the later, now dominant, grime genre is frequently discussed (Varghese 2017; Beaumont-Thomas 2018), as is grime’s pervasive use of MLE with its mainly Jamaican-based lexis and slang (Drummond 2016; Varghese 2017) – a point we return to.

The second new language variety, Hewitt’s ‘multiracial vernacular’, clearly postdates London Jamaican – probably by between five and ten years. From his description, the multiracial vernacular is at its base London English with a few ‘forms and idioms’ from Creole. Above all, it ‘is not regarded as charged with any symbolic meanings relating to race and ethnicity’ but is a “new ethnically mixed ‘community English’”. Neither he nor Sebba (1993:59-60) provide any specific linguistic information about this variety. Rampton (2011) likewise does not characterise multiracial vernaculars linguistically, rather he emphasises their function in a specific interaction and sees them as having “emerged, [being] sustained and [being] felt to be distinctive in ethnically mixed urban neighbourhoods shaped by immigration and class stratification”, while their speakers also use crossing (i.e. the strategic use of features and words from the language of a group other than one’s own) as a conversational strategy (Rampton 2011:291).

Some limited indications of the linguistic features of the multiracial vernacular may, however, be deduced from Patrick (2008), who briefly mentions that elements of British Creole are used between whites and blacks, but it is “socially limited and grammatically restricted” (Patrick 2008:255). However, when dealing with the vowel system he lists a full range of realisations covering traditional Cockney, Jamaican Creole, and Jamaican English as well as intermediate forms. Patrick mentions a feature that is very much part of today’s MLE (and mentioned in Section 4.1.2 above): the lack of the characteristic London

diphthongisation of vowels of the FLEECE and GOOSE classes, which have undergone so-called Diphthong Shift (Kerswill et al. 2008). Table 4.1.2 shows this feature.

#### **INSERT TABLE 4.1.2 ABOUT HERE**

Patrick's speculation about this pattern is telling, suggesting by implication a link between London Jamaican and MLE: "One wonders whether BrC [British Creole], like AAVE (Labov 2001), might provide a locus for non-participation in predominant vowel shifts" (2008:260). These monophthongal variants are very much present not only in MLE (Table 4.1.1) but also in the speech of teenage African Caribbean Londoners recorded by Sebba in the early 1980s; these speakers do not otherwise use MLE features or sound Cockney (cf. Kerswill & Sebba 2011). The overall picture, however, is that few of the phonetic and grammatical features of MLE (Section 4.1.2, above) were present in the multiracial vernacular. It is London English-based and non-ethnic, but it is not a vernacular in the sense we have defined it here, since it is a second dialect and, to judge from the commentaries, also secondary in the speakers' repertoires. We now consider whether, and in what sense, the multiracial vernacular is a precursor to MLE.

MLE came to the attention of the research community in two sociolinguistic studies of multiethnic inner-city districts in East London between 2004 and 2010.<sup>1</sup> The first public mention of the variety is as 'Jafaican', in the *Evening Standard* in April 2006 (Kerswill 2014); MLE was coined by the research group in the same year. Given the commentaries above, its beginnings must postdate the start of Hewitt's multiracial vernacular; the early 1980s is an informed suggestion. Because MLE is so different from London English, particularly in its phonology, and because for some speakers it is a vernacular, it is no longer realistic to claim that it is simply a continuation of the multiracial vernacular, "characterised

by both lexis and, perhaps more markedly today, pronunciation” (Cheshire et al. 2008:2) because this account does not capture the transition to vernacular status for many speakers. What MLE does share with the multiracial vernacular is the availability of Jamaican and African American slang (Kerswill 2013b; Green 2014), with some slang being involved in acts of crossing. There is clearly continuity, but the changes seem to have been quite great in both linguistic form and sociolinguistic status.

The stability of form that MLE takes today for many speakers is true particularly of the phonological component: segmental phonology, timing and prosody are likely to be relatively stable at the individual level. In formal contexts, speakers can produce standard speech maintaining the phonology, while avoiding the morphosyntactic and discourse features. In this respect, MLE is a regional accent indexing a set of social characteristics, in the same way as other regional accents in Britain.

#### **4.1.4. MLE as a contact dialect**

So far, we have not considered in detail the process by which the features of MLE came into being. Multiethnolects such as MLE are the product of language contact, and in that respect their histories resemble those of creoles: people find themselves in the position of having to acquire new linguistic features in order to integrate linguistically with others. In the creolisation case, there is at first no existing target, but rather limited exposure to a language that will become the lexifier. In the multiethnolect case, speakers are exposed to an ambient or majority language for which there are adequate models and some availability, though learning may be constrained by the fact that, initially, the learning is largely performed by adults and without explicit instruction. The first stage of multiethnolect formation, then, is composed of adult language learning and childhood acquisition of the majority language as an L1 or L2. This does not differ from other cases where adults and children migrate. What

differs is that MLE speakers do not necessarily integrate into the majority linguistic community because access is restricted, with concomitantly greater contact taking place with other language learners. The first generation of children growing up do not have access to a ready-made community of older adolescent and adult native speakers, either in their own families or in their neighbourhoods and schools. But the formation of MLE is not a once-and-for-all thing. Because immigration rates remain high, the process is presumably being repeated locally. Hence, the durability of the above-mentioned MLE features as a norm remains to be seen; there are already indications of recent sociolinguistic and linguistic change, as well as marked differences between locations and communities (Gates 2018; Ilbury 2019).

Creolisation and dialect formation (including koineisation and, as we shall see by extension, multiethnolect formation) are argued to be points on a continuum and therefore not entirely distinct (Winford 2017:196; Siegel 1997:139; Mufwene 2008). In both cases, the *frequency* of linguistic elements in a situation of language and dialect mixing is seen as crucial (Mufwene 2008:48; Trudgill 2004). At the same time, Mufwene (1996) has argued for a *founder effect*, by which an originating speaker group has an apparently disproportionate effect on the later dialect in relation to their number, due to the fact that they establish a pattern which is then acquired by new arrivals. (See Kerswill 2018:19 on its role in the formation of new dialects in Britain.)

To understand the formation of MLE, we need, then, to look both at the frequency of features and the effect of a founding population, if it can be identified; in other words, we are placing a premium on a demographic argumentation (Trudgill 2004). We have already suggested a special role for African Caribbean varieties – creoles and Englishes – for the post-World War II development of youth language in London. We must also assume that it is migration in the earlier part of the post-war period that is relevant, up to around 1980. At the

same time, we must scrutinise the proportion of London’s population that the foreign-born residents constitute at any one time. We now examine what demographic evidence can be adduced.

#### *4.1.4.1. Caribbean migration*

Today’s inner-city London is linguistically very diverse; however, it was much less so in the fifteen years after the end of the Second World War. Migration to London (Inwood 1998:412; Fox 2015:18–28) has for centuries been a major factor in the city’s cultural and economic development, though it is not clear what, if any, linguistic effects there might have been until the post-World War II period (Kerswill & Torgersen 2016:86). The beginning of post-World War II immigration is usually said to date from the arrival in London of the *Empire Windrush* in 1948 with 492 “mostly young skilled or semi-skilled workmen from Jamaica” (Inwood 1998:855). This number is minuscule, though it complements around 15,000 people of West Indian birth already present in Britain by 1951, of whom 4,200 were in London (Inwood 1998:856). Immigration from the Caribbean slowly increased in the next two decades, as shown in Table 4.1.3.

### **INSERT TABLE 4.1.3 ABOUT HERE**

Inwood (1998: 856) states, “[b]y early 1961, when the census was taken, there were 172,379 people of West Indian birth in the UK, and 98,811 in Greater London. Of the London West Indians, about 55 per cent were Jamaicans [...]”. Given that the population of London in 1961 was 8 million (Demographia), this indicates that the Caribbean-born population constituted 1.2% of the total – a small proportion.

After a sharp peak in 1960-1961, immigration to the UK from the Caribbean tailed off (see Figure 4.1.1 and Tables 4.1.3, 4.1.4 and 4.1.5), though African Caribbeans continued to be the biggest non-UK-born group until 1981 (Dorling & Thomas 2016:97). The fall in the number of Caribbeans is mirrored by a drop in the number of people who identify ethnically as Caribbean after 1981 (Tables 4.1.4 and 4.1.5). This drop is the consequence of demographic changes which are likely to have had linguistic consequences: Owen (1995:7) states that “[t]he decline in the estimated Caribbean and Cypriot populations is a reflection of the UK-born children of migrants from these ethnic groups leaving the parental home to form their own households”. Owen also mentions that there was an increasing number of people of mixed parentage and of people who did not wish to be classified as West Indian (1995:7). This can be taken as an indication of the broadening of West Indian networks to encompass other ethnicities, particularly the majority White British one, and would have been a conduit for the spread of Caribbean linguistic features among the rest of the population at the time.

#### **INSERT FIGURE 4.1.1 ABOUT HERE**

##### *4.1.4.2. South Asian immigration: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*

The post-1961 period continued to see increasing, and much more diverse, immigration. Figure 4.1.1 shows the great increase in immigration from India in the 1960s and 70s, which reduced before picking up rapidly again in the 1990s and 2000s (Owen 1995; Dorling & Thomas 2016:89), after our period of interest. The vast majority of this large-scale wave of immigration from the Indian subcontinent was from India itself, with a high proportion settling in London. Tables 4.1.4 to 4.1.6 show the major countries of birth of London residents in the 1971, 1981 and 1991 censuses, with Table 4.1.6 additionally showing the

number of people in Great Britain from the corresponding ethnic groups in 1991 (the correspondence with country of birth is necessarily approximate).

**INSERT TABLE 4.1.4 ABOUT HERE**

**INSERT TABLE 4.1.5 ABOUT HERE**

**INSERT TABLE 4.1.6 ABOUT HERE**

The tables show relatively large-scale immigration from the South Asian countries, particularly India and Bangladesh. Immigration from this region had overtaken that from the Caribbean by 1981, though the Caribbeans remained a large group.

#### *4.1.4.3. African migration*

Immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa, principally former British colonies such as Kenya and Nigeria, became significant later than that from South Asia (cf. Tables 1.4.4 to 1.4.6). The numbers of Londoners born in Africa equalled their Indian-born counterparts in 1981, exceeding them by a comfortable margin by 1991. At the same time, the Caribbean became a less significant source of migrants, while people with a Caribbean background remained roughly on a par numerically with the other two major groups. In 1991, already ten years after our time period, there were still only slightly over half as many Londoners of Black African ancestry as there were African Caribbeans (Table 4.1.6, last two columns). By 2001, the two groups were numerically equal, while only by 2011 did the Africans outnumber the Caribbeans, by a large margin: 573,931 versus 344,597 (London Datastore, Table 31).

#### *4.1.4.4. Conclusion – migration*

After 1948, immigration increased only slowly at first, in numbers that were proportionally small. The question arises as to when incoming varieties began to change the phonology and grammar of inner-city London speech. One possibility is that they never did and that varieties like MLE are always secondary dialects, remaining distinct from the inherited local varieties, and instead the product of migrants living in communities out of touch with locally-descended populations. Most ethnic/linguistic groups in London have not, however, been isolated, with the result that the MLE repertoire is today more or less shared. In Section 4.1.5, we consider the possibility of early post-World War II contact and change more analytically.

Migration at first mainly involved people from one region: the Caribbean. Notably, roughly half of this group came from Jamaica. Almost all of those who came from the Caribbean spoke an English-lexifier creole and most would have been familiar with English (we consider the consequences of this fact below). Later migrations, at first from South Asia and then Sub-Saharan Africa, were more linguistically diverse – especially the latter. Mitigating this linguistic diversity is the fact that a proportion of these immigrants, being from former British colonies, had at least some knowledge of English. To these must be added the large number of speakers of other languages who came from other regions, such as North Africa, Turkey and Europe, but whose numbers were initially smaller. Nevertheless, the proportion of residents who were immigrants or the children of immigrants remained small overall in the early years, though, as we argue below, there is evidence of high concentrations at a local level. If there was an influence, we can hypothesise that the order in which the different national groups came had an impact on the outcomes in terms of youth language and, later, local vernaculars.

#### **4.1.5. London youth varieties and the *Founder Principle*: Jamaican advantage?**

##### *4.1.5.1 The demographic argument*

We are now in a position to apply an argument based on demographic change in order to account for the features of the three varieties we have discussed – London Jamaican, the multiracial vernacular, and Multicultural London English. We ask the question of whether Jamaican English and Creole were more likely to leave linguistic traces than other varieties because this group was the first to arrive in numbers in post-war London.

In examining demographic history, we are going beyond the discussion of the origins of MLE features in Cheshire et al. (2011:158-164), where the focus was on the acquisition of MLE by children and adolescents. Mufwene's (2001) *Founder Principle* provides us with a demographic model, albeit focused on creoles. According to Mufwene, the principle serves "to explain how structural features of creoles have been predetermined to a large extent (though not exclusively!) by characteristics of the vernaculars spoken by the populations that founded the colonies in which they developed" (Mufwene 2001:28-29). By analogy with population dynamics, those linguistic features in the initial mix that are relatively frequent in a new community have a selective advantage. Newly arrived incomers, especially their children, then acquire these features. In subsequent generations, for an incoming population to cause any change to the variety, the proportion of newcomers to the established population needs to be high; Kerswill (2018) estimates that the figure could be as high as fifty percent. This argumentation is problematic for the claim that the arrival of immigrants in the post-World War II period in London led to changes in local speech; as we have seen, the proportions of any one ethnic or linguistic group lay between around one and two and a half percent in the period up to 1981, with the UK-born population always in a large majority.

How could the incoming groups have caused change? The first thing to note is that they did not at first. As we have seen, reports from the early period show that the Caribbean

migrants' children acquired London dialect (Cockney) features. In his late-1960s study, Beaken (1971:134) observed young West Indians moving away from Caribbean features in their speech as they approached secondary school age, and Labov (2001:507) makes a similar observation in the 1980s that young Jamaicans were using a dialect that was not distinguishable from that of other working-class Londoners. Similarly, in the early 1980s, Sebba found that young Londoners of Jamaican origin were not reliably heard as 'black' and were largely indistinguishable from their Anglo counterparts – though, significantly, some African Caribbean speakers were nonetheless heard as 'black' (Sebba 1993:66-70). But by this decade, the movement was in the opposite direction from that which Beaken describes, with older Caribbean children using *more* Creole features than young children, usage reportedly peaking in the late teens (see discussion in Sebba 1993:38-39). This is entirely consistent with Pitts' comments, mentioned above.

Up to this point, there is no mention of any general change in London's vernacular speech caused by an influx of people speaking languages other than English, nor is there any evidence of a new, relatively stable, pan-ethnic, youthful urban contact vernacular, which is consistent with the idea of a founder effect: London English remained firmly in place; it was certainly changing, but not necessarily in a direction that might be predicted by the presence of extensive language and dialect contact. Instead, there are youth styles – London Jamaican and the multiracial vernacular – which were very much in-group varieties, used as styles or registers additional to the local vernacular.

It is only with the emergence of MLE that there is any indication that a new contact variety was becoming a central part of some young people's repertoires to the extent that, for some, it became a vernacular in Labov's sense. Thus, it had the potential to influence or even replace the local variety. The formation of MLE, as well as the expansion of its contexts of use, most likely began around the early 1980s, doubtless with local variations. Because of

this relatively late timing, we should also examine influences from the other major languages spoken in London, including Punjabi, Bengali, Chinese, Yoruba and other Asian and African languages, as well as Turkish, Greek and other European languages. London Jamaican is no longer a mainstream youth variety among Caribbean youth, though it continues to be used in social networks dominated by Caribbean-descended people (Christian Ilbury, personal communication; Ilbury 2019). For these speakers, it is likely that London Jamaican features are used on an MLE phonological and grammatical base, not London Cockney, as in earlier decades.

Even in 2001, twenty years after the period we are focusing on, the proportions of people belonging to minority ethnic groups were not in a majority in London, the ‘White British’ Census classification accounting for 57.8% of the population in that year (and down to 44.9% in 2011). The picture is very different, however, if we look at African Caribbeans in particular boroughs and parts of boroughs. In 1981, this ethnic group represented 13.6% of the population of Lambeth, where Caribbean migrants first settled, and 15.1% in Hackney. The figure for Greater London as a whole was much smaller, at 4.7% (Richmond 1987:145). Within boroughs, we can look at ward level. Figure 4.1.2 displays the ethnic composition of Hackney as a whole, albeit 20 years later (such information is not easily available for 1981). The data are from the 2001 Census, in which respondents were asked, “What is your ethnicity”, with a choice of a closed set of options including ‘other’ categories. ‘Black African’, ‘Black Caribbean’ (equivalent to ‘African Caribbean’) and ‘White Other’ were the three largest non-White British groups – each of which is linguistically diverse and each still only accounting for 10-12% of the total. In this chart, the South Asians are broken down by nationality, obscuring the fact that they form a fourth group of similar size.

**INSERT FIGURE 4.1.2 ABOUT HERE**

How then can we account for what we assume to be the non-London origins of many features of MLE, as suggested by Table 4.1.1? One approach is to use Census data to investigate populations at the ward level, looking out for concentrations of particular groups. The existence of concentrations means that, at a local level, the ethnic group concerned has the chance to dominate linguistically; if, in addition, there is a significant level of contact and integration with other groups, then linguistic features may be adopted by those groups. Figure 4.1.3 shows that in 2001 there were considerable concentrations of people who were not White British in the east of the borough; it does not show the distributions of African Caribbeans or other groups.

**INSERT FIGURE 4.1.3 ABOUT HERE**

We can go a step further and identify concentrations of particular ethnic groups. Figure 4.1.4 shows the numbers of particular ethnic groups per hectare in smaller sub-areas in 2001. Figure 4.1.4 (top left panel) shows that the White British are the largest single group and that there is variation in their distribution. The other panels show three other large groups, Black Caribbeans, Black Africans and Indians. It is noticeable that there are clear concentrations of each group, with Caribbeans more to the east and centre, Africans in the centre and south, and Asians in the north. In several areas, the White British are a clear minority, while for each of the three minority groups there may well be areas where it is close to being an absolute majority.

**INSERT FIGURE 4.1.4 ABOUT HERE**

What these charts do not show is the situation in the past; however, the Census figures we have quoted suggest that similar distributions (high diversity with some ethnic/linguistic concentrations but little segregation) were present then too. Although the immigrant groups together represented, overall, a fairly small minority of London's population in the earlier post-war years, we argue that, on demographic evidence alone, conditions were right for new youth varieties to emerge, certainly as styles which were used for particular kinds of identity work. But this would initially have been restricted to places where the African Caribbeans were present in sufficient numbers: remember that it wasn't until the 1970s that distinctive new varieties emerged (London Jamaican and the specific youth style labelled the 'multiracial vernacular'). Our reasoning is as follows. Because the African Caribbeans were the first to arrive, we assume there were relatively high concentrations of young people of Caribbean origin in places where the White British also lived. This is the context in which London Jamaican emerged, arising from contact between different Caribbean (not White British) groups. Interaction between young people of Caribbean and other linguistic backgrounds facilitated 'crossing' (Rampton 1995) and, later, the appearance of the multiracial vernacular and, after further large-scale immigration, MLE. The fact that African Caribbeans were the first major immigrant group meant that their influence on youth language was significant at the outset, and new immigrant groups would have to relate their own speech to the emerging youth language norms, in many cases choosing to assimilate to them. This is how we see the workings of the *Founder Principle* in post-war London. There is, then, no need to accept the proposition voiced earlier that at least fifty percent of the population had to be speakers of other language varieties for there to be a linguistic effect on youth styles. Effects on vernacular speech came later, when the proportions of non-speakers

of the local London vernacular approached a much higher percentage. One of the results was MLE.

#### *4.1.5.2 The cultural argument*

However, one can claim a *founder effect* for non-linguistic influences too. During this time, up to and incorporating the beginnings of London hip-hop in the late 1980s, Caribbean cultural forms were a fundamental influence on British popular music and London's emerging post-war youth culture (Gidley 2007). A good proportion of the slang in today's grime music is of Caribbean origin, even though several of the most prominent artists, such as Dizzee Rascal, Stormzy and Big Shaq, are of African heritage. A little speculatively, we can say that the most salient and frequent portion of the slang in grime is largely of Jamaican origin (cf. the quantitative methods currently being applied to grime lyrics by Paga 2019). If this is true, it is likely that the popularity of grime has indirectly helped Caribbean language, especially slang, to keep up its currency.

We can assume MLE has a different genesis from its two predecessors, arising in an environment that is much more multilingual and in which African Caribbeans formed just one of a number of groups – albeit large. By the 1970s, as we have seen, the Caribbeans themselves had largely shifted to local forms of English, this switch being facilitated by the dwindling number of new immigrants. This demographic change contrasts strongly with the rapidly growing African, South Asian and other groups.

Yet MLE is sometimes thought of in the media as being a kind of Jamaican Creole and hence 'foreign' (Kerswill 2014; Kircher & Fox 2019), for a time going by the moniker 'Jafaican' in the media. What kinds of evidence is there for this (misleading) assumption? Some of the slang used by young, mainly male MLE speakers is of Jamaican origin, including *bruv* (perhaps an Anglicised version of *brada*), *blood* (both address terms), *ends*

‘local area’, as well as the plural morpheme *-dem* in *mandem* ‘people’ and *galdem* ‘girls’. *Man* used as a first-person pronoun has possible Jamaican antecedents, but usage has developed locally (Cheshire 2013; Ilbury 2019). Much of the attested slang, however, is not of Jamaican origin. According to Green (2014:70), out of 220 items he collected, 39 were “from the Caribbean, usually Jamaica ... ; 35 from US black slang ... ; 41 from US white slang; and 35 from white London slang or Cockney. In addition, 74 home-grown terms ... are used as the core vocabulary of MLE and have evolved independently ...” This result, partial though Green admits, shows that there are still some Jamaican roots but that this part of the linguistic structure is constantly in flux as might be expected in youth language. However, as we noted above, the Jamaican portion of MLE slang may be the most prominent (Kerswill 2014), which maintains the salience of (supposed or real) Jamaican language.

#### **4.1.6. Conclusions**

We have presented arguments supporting the apparently disproportionate influence of Jamaican language and culture on youth language in London, culminating in MLE. We return to the linguistic evidence to see how far Jamaican influence is visible in linguistic structure. Clearly Jamaican lexis and music have long permeated London youth language and grassroots music, and this may even be increasing. However, as the summary of MLE features in Section 4.1.2 show, in the morphosyntax there are no identifiable traces of Creole, with the possible exception of the pronoun *man*. This leaves us with the phonology, and here again, the picture is unclear. First, some MLE features are not present in Jamaican Creole, such as uvular [q] for /k/ and a very fronted GOOSE vowel. Unlike Cockney, MLE is an /h/-pronouncing variety, even though Jamaican Creole, like Cockney, is mainly /h/-dropping (Devonish & Harry 2008:272–3) – as is the English of many L1 Yoruba speakers, who also form a significant minority in London (Igboanusi 2006:494). As Table 4.1.1 shows, some of

the remaining vowels share some features with Jamaican English, but equally with those of other overseas varieties of English and learner varieties. There is practically no evidence to suggest a direct influence.

This leaves us with a conundrum. The evidence we have of the Caribbean influence on London Jamaican is self-defining, but it is not clear whether any of the distinctive structural (non-lexical, non-discourse) features of MLE can be ascribed to a Creole origin. We end up resorting to argumentation: the deterministic theory of new-dialect formation (Trudgill 2004), which relies solely on demography and frequency of features, has a strong degree of validity for a number of cases such as New Zealand English. The features of MLE are not inconsistent with this theory, as Table 4.1.1 indicates, with Caribbean Creole being the most frequently mentioned origin across the features listed. For a number of reasons, the validity of the deterministic model is hard to prove – though this does not necessarily invalidate it. First, the list in Table 4.1.1 is not exhaustive. Second, and more importantly, MLE is not homogeneous in the same way as a new dialect such as New Zealand English. Third, unlike this variety, MLE is the product of prior language shift, the shift involving many different languages. Fourth, standard varieties of English might have played a stronger role for MLE than, for example, New Zealand English, via teachers and youth workers. And finally, fifth, the social context of MLE is of far greater complexity than that of New Zealand English in that it is used in multilingual and multiethnic contexts, functioning as both a marked style and, for many, as a vernacular, and is always in competition with other varieties of English.

However, among immigrants, their descendants and their White Anglo associates, the African Caribbeans, perhaps for three decades, dominated both linguistically and culturally. It may also be significant that the English-lexifier creoles that most of the original immigrants spoke were accessible to speakers of English in a way that South Asian and West African

languages could never be. The Creole speakers had themselves been educated in English and had almost all migrated from countries where English was a dominant part of the linguistic ecology. Both of these factors – linguistic similarity and shared knowledge of English – would have made contacts easier than with immigrants from other linguistic backgrounds.

As for ascribing MLE to a Caribbean origin, we have shown that there is an undoubted continuity from Creole to MLE and have argued that relatively open networks allowed for a good deal of contact. But the characteristic MLE features are found in other input varieties, so we agree with Trudgill (2004) that it is the relative frequency of individual features that count in new-dialect formation. But because of the long time-depth and because different linguistic groups immigrated at different times, many other influences could have made their presence felt along the way, either bolstering the existing Creole features or replacing them. In particular, we must still account for the time-gap between the Caribbean English and Creole speech of the 1950s and 1960s immigrants and the much later emergence of MLE. Added to this is the dynamic nature of language in a multicultural and multilingual city, meaning that other, new processes are at play, mainly related to ongoing language contact and acquisition. The conclusion must be that the story in many respects follows Trudgill's deterministic new-dialect formation model, however this is an imperfect mechanism when applied to a new urban contact dialect; Trudgill (2018) has stated that the model is most suited to the *tabula rasa* situation of new settlements. The situation is, above all, characterised by language shift and group second-language acquisition (Winford 2003:235) with various adult learner varieties forming a significant part of the input. What then is the role of the *Founder Principle*? It is clear that the African Caribbean 'founders' laid the basis for the ensuing varieties – even if, as we have seen, there is little left of the original Creole, except for a vibrant use of Jamaican slang. In a complex situation such as the

emergence of multiethnolects, it is only by adding a component of cultural and social interpretation that we can approach an understanding of the outcomes.

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<sup>i</sup> October 2004–September 2007 *Linguistic innovators: the English of adolescents in London* (Economic and Social Research Council, ref. RES 000 23 0680). Researchers: Jenny Cheshire, Sue Fox, Paul Kerswill, Eivind Torgersen.

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