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The Changing Language of Urban Youth: A Pilot Study

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Introduction

This chapter reports primarily on a pilot study[1] carried out in late 2013 into the speech of a group of young people (YP) aged 14–16 in Manchester, UK. The study took place in two learning centres within Manchester's Secondary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)—a facility which caters for YP who have been excluded from mainstream school for discipline-related issues.[2] The pilot study had three main aims: to forge the relationships that would be needed in order to carry out a larger study, to test appropriate methods of data collection, and to identify some of the linguistic features and social factors that might warrant further investigation and analysis. This chapter reports primarily on the third of these aims.

The initial purpose of the project as a whole was to begin to explore the possibility of the emergence of an identifiable Multicultural Manchester English variety along the lines of what is known as Multicultural London English (MLE) (Cheshire et al. 2011) and to see how this might be used

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in the construction and negotiation of identities. One central idea was to see whether there was any value in looking for some kind of over-arching variety or repertoire, a possible Multicultural Urban British English (MUBE), with each city then having its own local version or sub-variety. In this approach, it is conceivable that within MUBE there exists an identifiable MLE, Manchester Multicultural English (MME), Multicultural Birmingham English (MBE) and so on. Clearly, in order to ascertain this, a lot more data is needed than can be provided by a pilot study, but I mention it here simply to give background as to the motivation behind the project. As a result, the research described here should be seen simply as a descriptive account of the speech of a selection of YP in a particular context, with some tentative suggestions as to the reasons behind the observed variation. Comparisons will be made to the London findings, but I fully acknowledge the differences in scope between the two projects at this stage. When reference is made to a possible MUBE variety, it is done so with the understanding that this concept remains, at present, un-theorised and underspecified. However, we have to start somewhere. This description should therefore be seen as taking some initial steps towards describing particular features in the speech of YP in Manchester which appear to differ from those found in a traditional Manchester accent. Time will tell if these features can indeed be seen as a constituting part of an identifiable MUBE variety.

Research on Youth Language

The initial influence and inspiration for the project was the work done on MLE by Paul Kerswill, Jenny Cheshire, Sue Fox and Eivind Torgersen (e.g. Cheshire et al. 2011), in which they describe how traditional East End London speech is changing, largely as a result of the various and numerous influences from the languages and cultures that make up the modern multicultural city. They conceptualise MLE as 'a repertoire of features' in which speakers select linguistic items from a 'feature pool' (Mufwene 2001: 4–6; Cheshire et al. 2011: 176) consisting of elements from the various input languages. The selection of features in any individual's (or group's) repertoire is determined by factors such as frequency

and salience, the latter being affected by cultural influences. Friendship networks of the speakers were also found to be important, especially in terms of their ethnic diversity. MLE, along with similar emerging varieties of language around northern Europe [e.g. Germany (Wiese 2009), Denmark (Quist 2008) and Norway (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008)] is seen as an example of a multiethnolect, a variety/repertoire of language borne out of interaction within a multi-lingual/cultural/ethnic context, yet which remains itself ethnically neutral and available to be used by anyone (Cheshire et al. 2011: 2). Notable features of MLE include (Cheshire et al. 2011; Torgersen et al. 2011; Torgersen and Szakay 2012; Szakay and Torgersen 2015):

- Shorter trajectories for FACE, GOAT, MOUTH, PRICE
- FACE is a mid-high front vowel
- GOAT is a mid-high back vowel
- MOUTH and PRICE are lower than traditional London speech
- GOOSE is very front
- New quotative *this is* + *speaker*
- Simplification of article allomorphy ([ə] and [ðə] rather than [ən] and [ði] before word-initial vowels)
- Use of the pragmatic marker *you get me*
- Syllable-timed rhythm
- Breathy voice
- Low pitch

A selection of these features is presented in the description of the linguistic data later in the chapter.

Research on Manchester English

Manchester has traditionally been under-researched in terms of accent, although this is starting to change. The most recent edition of 'English Accents and Dialects' (Hughes et al. 2012) provides a description of Manchester English, and Baranowski and Turton (2015) describe some particular consonantal features in detail in addition to a more general

overview of the sound system as a whole. There has also been recent focus on specific areas of accent and dialect in Manchester, such as the *happy* and *letter* vowels (Turton and Ramsammy 2012), ING (Schleef et al. 2015), and non-native Manchester speech (Drummond 2011, 2012, 2013; Howley 2016). Some of these sources will serve as reference points throughout the linguistic description below.

The Context

Data collection took place in two PRU learning centres in inner-city Manchester. Although the YP in the PRU follow a restricted version of the same curriculum as pupils in mainstream schools, the contexts are very different. PRU learning centres such as the two described here are often ex-youth club buildings which are not necessarily designed for classroom-based learning. The centres are small, each catering for school years 10 and 11 (aged 14–16) only and comprising no more than eight students from each year group at a time. Each centre has two centre coordinators, one permanent youth worker and peripatetic subject teaching staff. In a normal class session, there will be anywhere between one and seven YP, a subject teacher and one other adult (either the youth worker or one of the coordinators). In between classes, YP are generally free to play pool, table tennis, football (facilities and behaviour permitting), watch TV, listen to music or smoke outside.

The pilot study involved a data collection period of just over two months (September–November 2013), during which time I attended each centre once or twice a week. The study was ethnographically informed rather than ethnographic on the basis that while I did spend a great deal of my time observing, participating in and generally becoming part of the context, the vast majority of the data come from sitting down with the YP, usually in pairs or small groups, and recording our conversations. I therefore feel that my observations serve to inform this recorded data, but they do not in themselves constitute data for analysis. There are a few examples of self- or peer-recorded conversations which are also available for analysis, but these also tend to follow a more (informal) interview-type structure. This approach contrasts with the larger project,

which is very much ethnographic, relying far more on recordings of spontaneous interaction in a variety of contexts, in addition to very detailed field-notes of observational data.

It should be pointed out, however, that in both this study and the follow-up study, it was vital for us as researchers to be accepted into the community. In many ways, this was a daunting task, given that we do not 'fit' into any existing categories of people usually found in the centres. 'University researcher' is not a role the YP are likely to have come across before nor is it one that carries much meaning for them. At one of the centres, one of my biggest problems was convincing the YP (especially boys) that I was not 'Fed' (police). In fact, one of the YP remained unconvinced throughout my whole time at the centre and only changed his mind when I happened to bump into him weeks later when I was walking from a university building; he looked me up and down, tutted and said 'I could have sworn you was Fed' before walking away, shaking his head. For most of the YP, I drifted somewhere between teacher, classroom assistant, youth worker and visitor, often depending on the individual and on the particular context. In reality, I was doing all I could to be friendly and approachable to the YP, and unobtrusive and helpful to the staff, while all the time trying to avoid all situations in which I might be called upon to act as an adult with any kind of authority.

During the pilot study, I collected recordings of varying lengths and of varying quality from 14 YP. Much of the variation stemmed from the fact that as a genuine pilot study, I was experimenting with different methods of data collection, so not everything was successful. The data presented here focus on four individuals: Damian, Ryan, Luke and Leah, two from each centre. These four have been deliberately chosen for this chapter purely due to the fact that between them, they offer a fair reflection of the variation within YP's language in this context. I am not claiming them to be a representative sample by any means, but neither is there anything to suggest they are unrepresentative of their peers. As will become clear in the following description, Luke and Leah tend to use features which align with a traditional variety of Manchester English, while Damian and Ryan exhibit some features which I would argue might represent an emerging MUBE variety of Manchester English due to their apparent similarity to MLE. I could have chosen several other individuals to illustrate the same

point, but these four offered the clearest examples coupled with the best-quality audio recordings. Although the two pairs actually attended centres in different areas of the city (Damian and Ryan in centre A, Leah and Luke in centre B), this geographical fact is not thought to play a particular role in the language of the YP. It is the case that there is regional linguistic variation within Manchester, but this is tempered here both by the fact that YP do not always go to the learning centre that is nearest to where they live and also that they will have attended different mainstream schools, often moving location in the process. The conversational speech described in this chapter all comes from pair/group chats with me; however, the YP presented here were not recorded in the same conversations, that is, each was actually recorded with a different friend/group whose speech is not being discussed.

As a result of the approach taken, and the contextually limited nature of the data (albeit consistent with many studies into language variation), what is presented here can only offer a snapshot of each individual's spoken language. All I can say for sure is that what is presented here is a replicable and accurate analysis of the speech that was used in an informal conversation with me and one or more of each individual's peers. It might well be that this can be generalised to some extent across other linguistic interactions that these speakers engage in, or maybe even across other speakers. However, it is only right at this point to at least recognise the inherent flimsiness in this kind of generalising, despite it being an established part of much existing research into language variation.

A Description of the Language

The following description focuses on features that are deemed to be of interest or relevance in relation to either a typical Manchester variety or a possible emerging 'multicultural' variety along the lines of the aforementioned MUBE. Recordings were made on a Zoom H2 recorder placed unobtrusively on a surface near the participant. Recordings were stored as .wav files using a 44.1 kHz sampling rate with 16-bit precision, saved onto an SanDisk (SD) memory card and then transferred onto a PC. Conversations were not planned or staged; they were the result of asking a YP if they could spare a few minutes for a chat as and when the

opportunity arose. The content of the conversations generally revolved around life at the PRU, outside interests and language.

Vowels

Acoustic analysis of the vowels was carried out using *Praat* (Boersma and Weenink 2015). Tokens were identified and segmented manually, and a script was used to take F1 and F2 measurements at 20%, 50% and 80% of the vowel duration. These measurements were checked visually during the process. All raw Hz measurements were then normalised using the modified Watt and Fabricius method (Fabricius et al. 2009) and plotted onto charts. The 20% and 80% measurements were used for all vowels including monophthongs, in line with recent thinking in this area, suggesting that studying the trajectories of all vowels provides a more detailed picture of what is happening (see Watson and Harrington 1999 for a discussion of this point). Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 show the complete normalised measurements for all four speakers and should be referred to throughout the following description. Measurements are based on 749 tokens overall, an average of 187 per speaker and just over 12 per vowel.

FOOT/STRUT

STRUT in all four speakers is entirely consistent with existing traditional accounts of Manchester English (e.g. Hughes et al. 2012; Drummond 2013; Baranowski and Turton 2015), in that the STRUT vowel is produced in the same area as FOOT,[3] with no apparent distinction between the two. This is an example then of a traditionally (supra)local feature potentially existing unchanged alongside possibly incoming MUBE features as there is no observable difference between the two pairs of speakers. However, perhaps this is unremarkable given the fact that there is nothing within what we know of multicultural varieties of English which would be working in opposition to a raised and backed STRUT. For example, if a particularly salient feature of MLE or a possible MUBE happened to be an especially lowered and/or fronted STRUT, it would be interesting to see how this was realised in a northern variety. But without such opposition, it remains unproblematic.

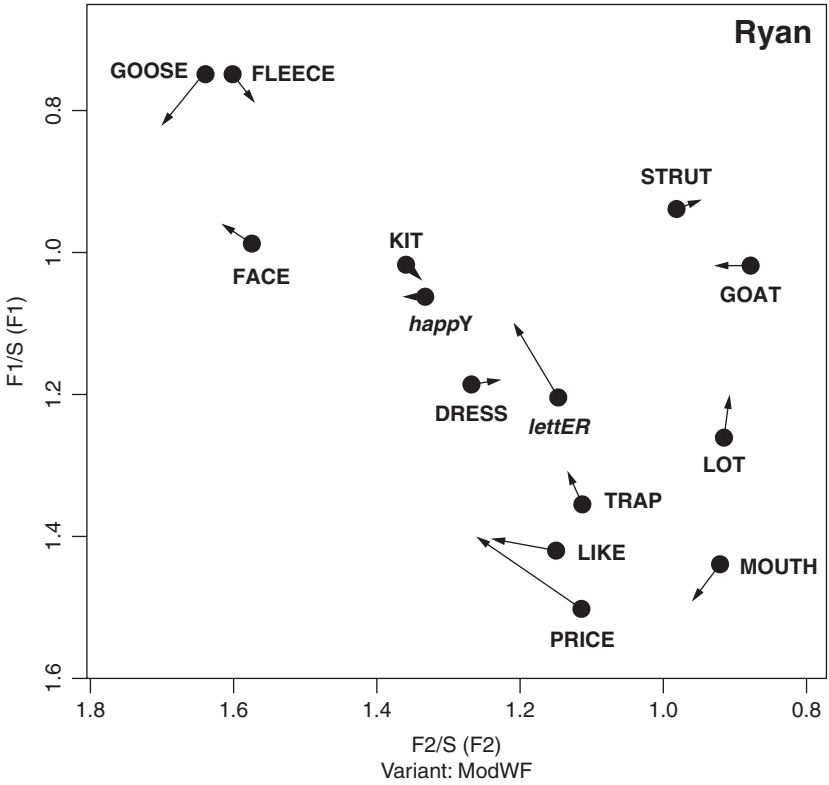

Fig. 4.1 Vowel chart showing the mean normalised (Watt and Fabricius modified method) F1 and F2 measurements for Ryan

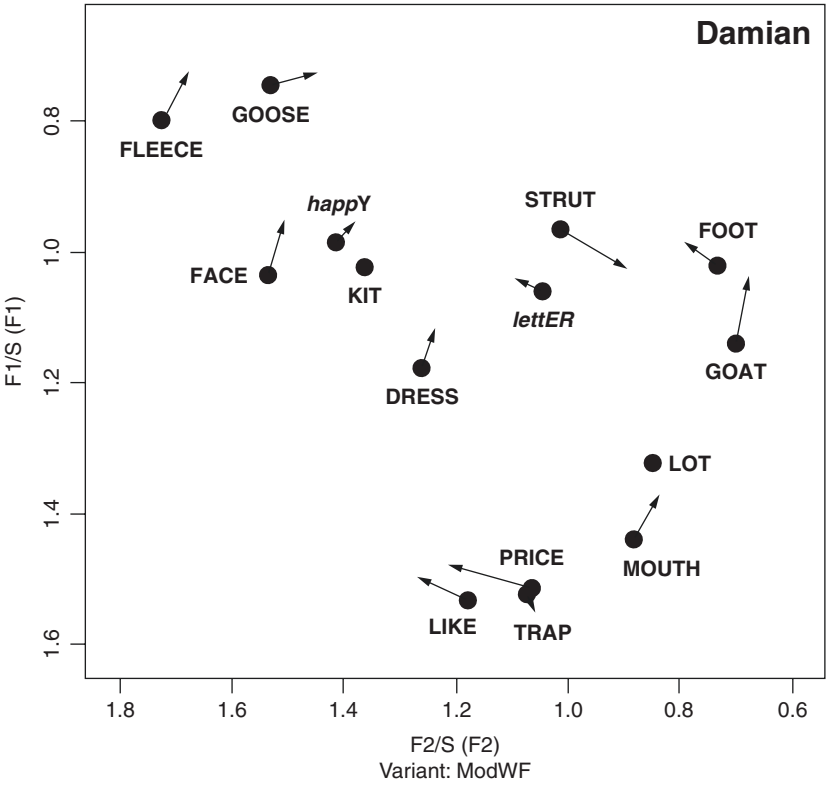

Fig. 4.2 Vowel chart showing the mean normalised (Watt and Fabricius modified method) F1 and F2 measurements for Damian

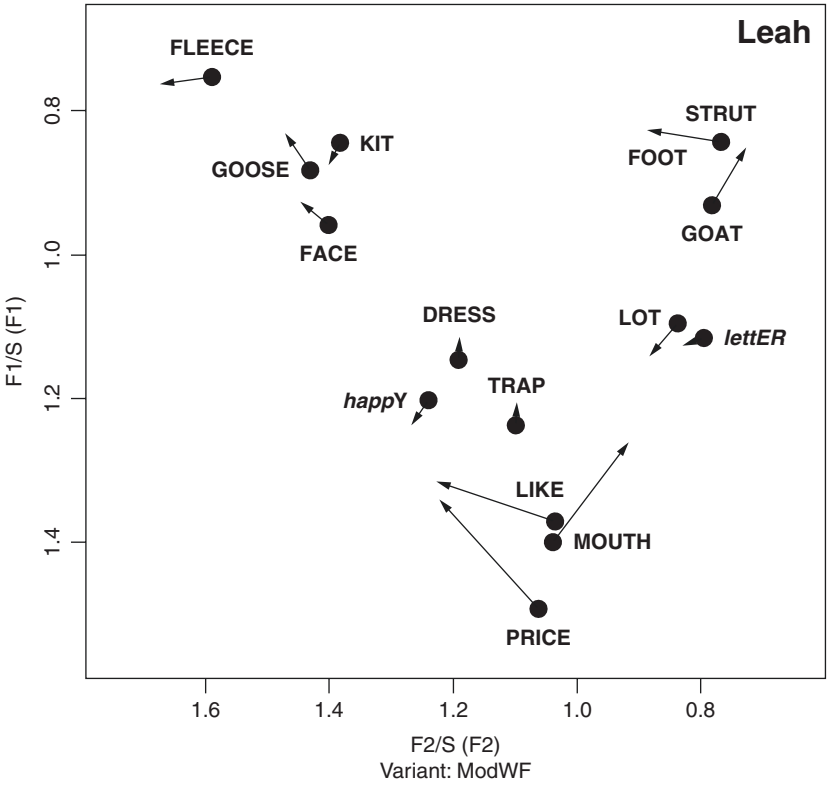

Fig. 4.3 Vowel chart showing the mean normalised (Watt and Fabricius modified method) F1 and F2 measurements for Leah

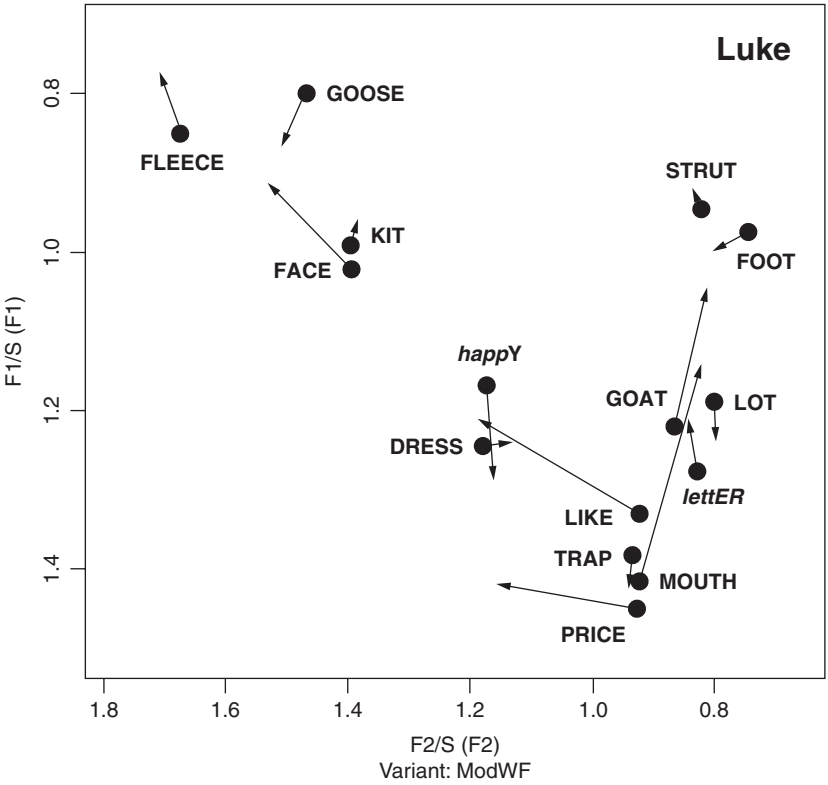

Fig. 4.4 Vowel chart showing the mean normalised (Watt and Fabricius modified method) F1 and F2 measurements for Luke

GOOSE

All four speakers have a very high and fronted GOOSE vowel, consistent with MLE (Cheshire et al. 2011: 158) but also with changes more generally in most varieties of English, including existing accounts of Manchester (e.g. Hughes et al. 2012; Baranowski and Turton 2015), especially with regard to younger speakers. The extent of some of the fronting, particularly in Ryan's speech, where it actually appears to be slightly more front than FLEECE, is indicative of the extreme fronting reported in MLE, but apart from this, there does not appear to be a significant difference

between the two pairs of speakers as Luke and Leah both have vowels as fronted as Damian.

happy

The *happy* vowel is of interest as it represents a particularly Manchester feature, often being realised as a relatively open [ɛ] or [ɛ̈], especially in phrase-final position (Turton and Ramsammy 2012; Howley 2016). In fact, along with *letter* (see below), this lowered and centralised *happy* is often the source of stereotypical imitations of a Manchester accent (Howley 2016: 139). What is especially interesting here is the difference between the two pairs of speakers, with Luke and Leah showing considerably more open realisations of the vowel than Damian and Ryan. In fact, both Luke and Leah's *happy* vowels share the vowel space for DRESS, with Leah's even appearing to be more open. The apparent length and direction of Luke's *happy* trajectory is potentially interesting, possibly showing strong movement towards that more open variant even during the vowel; however, small token numbers mean this observation should be treated with caution. Despite the numbers, the position of the vowel is consistent with auditory analysis of other recordings of Luke and Leah. In contrast to this open variant, both Damian's and Ryan's *happy* vowels are realised in the same area as KIT, still suggesting a lack of *happy*-tensing (where *happy* would be closer to [i]), consistent with some other northern varieties (Beal 2008) but not typically 'Manchester'. There is nothing in a possible MUBE that would prohibit a more open realisation, but it is interesting that neither Damian nor Ryan tend to use the local variant.

letter

Similar to *happy*, but to a greater extent, the *letter* vowel represents a typically Manchester feature, often realised as a relatively open and backed [ʌ] rather than the more typical [ə] (Turton and Ramsammy 2012). Stereotypically, the variant is even more open in addition to being

rounded (Howley 2016: 116), and the possibility of [ɒ] is mentioned in Hughes et al. (2012: 117), although Turton and Ramsammy suggest this is an exaggerated realisation. Baranowski and Turton (2015: 286) observe that the primary movement is backing along the F2 plane rather than lowering. Variability is constrained syntactically and morphologically, with a suffix such as plural 's' inhibiting movement and phrase finality encouraging it (Howley 2016: 114). Here, it is clear that both Luke's and Leah's realisations of *lett*ER are considerably more backed than Ryan's and Damian's, who both show a centralised schwa variant. As with *happ*Y above, this is arguably an example of possible MUBE-oriented speakers apparently rejecting the more localised variant, even though there is no obvious incoming variant to instigate this change.

PRICE

There is little difference between the four speakers' realisations of PRICE, and none differ from what would be expected from a typical Manchester realisation (Wells 1982). While nearby areas do have a monophthongal PRICE in traditional dialects (Beal 2008: 135), this is not the case for Manchester itself. Ryan's and Damian's appear slightly more open and with slightly shorter trajectories, but the difference is negligible. There is, however, a difference when we focus specifically on the vowel in the context of discourse marker or quotative 'like' (herein the LIKE vowel). Differences between PRICE and LIKE within an individual are to be expected, depending on the function of 'like' (e.g. Drager 2009; Schleef and Turton 2016), but what is interesting here are the differences between the pairs of speakers, both in terms of their LIKE vowels and their PRICE/LIKE contrast. Both Ryan and Damian produce a more open and more monophthongised LIKE compared to Luke and Leah, and there is little difference between the pairs' PRICE and LIKE in terms of position. Luke and Leah on the other hand have fully diphthongal LIKE which is slightly less open than their PRICE. Lowered and monophthongised PRICE is a feature of MLE (Cheshire et al. 2011: 163) and might therefore be a possible contender as a MUBE variant. Cheshire et al. do not separate *like* from other PRICE tokens, but it might be the

case that it is discourse marker and quotative *like* that is pushing that process in their data. However, lowered and monophthongal PRICE is not unusual in southern England accents more generally (e.g. Tollfree 1999), so we should be cautious with this interpretation of it necessarily representing an incoming 'multicultural' variant as other factors might be at work.

FACE

All four speakers have a FACE vowel that is mid-high and front with a short trajectory. While it might be tempting to draw parallels with similar (and quite dramatic when compared to traditional London) realisations for FACE in the MLE data, in reality, the FACE vowel around Manchester generally has these features already (Hughes et al. 2012: 117), although Baranowski and Turton (2015: 285) stress that it is diphthongal in the city itself. Ryan and Damian's realisations are perhaps slightly more front than Luke and Leah's, but the difference is very small. This is not to say that the motivation between each pairs' realisations might not be the same, but when they overlap to such an extent, it is impossible to argue one way or another with the data available here.

MOUTH

MOUTH is interesting, in that Ryan and Damian both have very monophthongised realisations compared to Luke and Leah. This is similar to how this vowel is realised in MLE, with Cheshire et al. noting a lowered variant with a shorter trajectory (Cheshire et al. 2011: 158). Unlike FACE, there is no northern/Manchester pattern to this vowel with regard to monophthongisation, so I would argue that this could be viewed as a possible incoming MUBE feature. As with PRICE, it should be noted that monophthong MOUTH is a common feature in southern English accents more generally and not specifically 'multicultural'; however, I will put forward some arguments later in the chapter that support the MUBE interpretation.

Other Linguistic Features

Quotatives

An interesting comparison with the MLE data in terms of quotative forms is the complete absence of the innovative *this is* + *speaker* expression discussed in Cheshire et al. (2011: 172) in either the pilot study or in fact the follow-up study. Cheshire et al. do comment that it might be a transient phenomenon in London (and of course the data is almost ten years old), and that it is not used to a great extent, but they also make the point that it is used often enough to have been noticed by non-linguists, with British TV comedy actors such as Catherine Tate, Alexander Armstrong and Ben Miller using it in sketches portraying youth language (Cheshire et al. 2011: 173). Whatever the mechanisms for a possible spread of MLE/MUBE features (see later discussion), this is one feature that has apparently not been transferred into, or emerged in, a Manchester urban variety (Kerswill et al. 2008 also make the point that not all innovations in inner-city London are spreading). This might be due in part to differences in the linguistic backgrounds of some of the participants and families in the London and Manchester studies, with some caregivers in the London studies 'only just beginning to acquire English themselves' (Cheshire et al. 2011: 179), and a suggestion of 'interlanguage varieties' of English among the YP. They argue that this lack of fluency offers an environment in which *this is* + *speaker* can be utilised by younger speakers as a 'high-involvement deictic form used with gestures…to act out moments within a narrative as well as to quote speech' (Cheshire et al. 2011: 180) and is then later refined by 16- to 19-year-olds to be exclusively quotative in nature. Perhaps, then, its absence in the Manchester data is due to our speakers existing in different linguistic environments, where the overwhelming L1 English-speaking family contexts (albeit with a wide range of varieties, ethnicities, etc.) do not create that initial opening for the younger speakers to develop the expression in the first place. Clearly, further and more wide-ranging research in Manchester is needed in order to ascertain whether *this is* + *speaker* remains a uniquely London feature.

In terms of other quotative possibilities, it is hard to make meaningful comparisons with the data under investigation here as not all conversations included instances where they would be used. However, partial pictures from two of the speakers show something similar to the London data, at least in terms of there being a variety of quotatives in use. Small numbers make it hard to confirm, but there is a possibility that *be like* is perhaps not as frequent as it appears to be in London, an idea that is currently being followed up in the larger study. Extract 1 gives an example of the types of quotatives used by Damian.

Extract 1

Damian: I was- I was with my boy once and like (.) these two white police officers come over to us cos (.) we were just walkin' about (.) and then they come up to us and started- started saying sayin' bare like bare racist stuff to my mate and that(.) like sayin' erm (.) **they said** 'What you up to lads?' and I sai- **I said** 'nothin' we're just walkin' about' and **he goes** (.) 'well wha- wha- what's what's your black friend been doin'?' and I sai- so **I said** 'what do you mean?' **he goes like** and then **he starts goin' on like sayin**' (.) erm 'I'm sure I've seen him about an' all that selling drugs'.

Although the sample is small, both here and elsewhere in Damian's speech, straightforward *say* and *go* are by far his most frequent quotatives. What is missing here is *be like*, which does not occur at all in this recording, although he has been heard to use it in other situations.

Leah is more of a storyteller so provides more quotative data. In this recording, she uses *say*, *go* and *be like* in the proportions illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Leah's quotatives

Quotative	%	*N*
Go (go, goes, went, gone)	57	25
Say (say, says, said)	30	13
Be like	13	6

Again, the use of *be like* appears to be less frequent than perhaps expected, given that it is a feature that has been spreading rapidly through most English-speaking communities (see Buchstaller and D'Arcy 2009 for an overview).[4] What is interesting here is that when Leah does use *be like*, it is usually to convey an element of expressive or mimetic content rather than purely linguistic content. Compare, for example, the purely linguistic content of the examples in (1) with those in (2) below.

1.	a.	…and **she went** 'What you talking about you idiot?' and **I said** 'Oh my god!'
	b.	…and **I've gone** 'It's fucking roasting out here'
2.	a.	I bet you're gonna get home, play this in front of your wife and **she'll be like** '[gasps] Oh my god!'
	b.	…but you get them proper fucking girls … proper bad yardie **they're like** '[imitates voice] yo what you on bro'
	c.	I phoned her the other day and **she was like** '[posh voice] hello'

In fact, five of the six uses of *be like* from Leah show some element of performance, be it through voice mimicry or action/gesture. This mimetic element is to be expected as mimetic re-enactment has been identified as one of three global constraints on *be like* (Buchstaller and D'Arcy 2009), but it will be interesting to see whether the strength of this constraint remains as consistent when the data set is enlarged.

Words and Phrases

At this point, it is difficult to identify particular words and phrases as being part of a possible MUBE repertoire or not. There are items that Ryan, Damian and their friends appear to be more likely to use than Leah, Luke and their friends, but more data is needed. For the purposes of this descriptive chapter, perhaps it is sufficient to detail some of the words and phrases encountered so far that are maybe not so widely known to everyone. Table 4.2 shows possible unknown words or words of interest that occurred in these conversations. Some emerged naturally, while others were in response to a question specifically about words they use that I might not know. Interestingly, when Luke was asked this question,

Table 4.2 Words and phrases of interest from the conversations

Man	Impersonal pronoun	Just a couple man innit	Ryan
Live /laɪv/	Adjective: cool, good	that's live that	Ryan
Spinning	Verb: lying	you're spinning you, G	Ryan
For time/time ago	Adverbial: for a long time / a long time ago	I haven't seen him for time. We used that time ago	Ryan
Peak	Adjective: negative, bad luck, embarrassing	[Someone trips over] yo that's peak man	Damian
Bare	Adjective: very	…started saying bare racist stuff	Damian
Hoodrat	Noun: person from the hood that thieves	People might say hoodrats yo	Damian
Bum	Adjective: good, nice	Oh it's bum that	Leah
Buttersket	Noun: derogatory name for girl (slag)	Fucking buttersket	Leah
Reef	Verb: batter (beat up)	[I'd] fucking reef em	Leah

he simply could not come up with anything other than very predictable and everyday terms such as 'mate', 'lad' or 'wanker'.

Awareness

One of the reasons these particular interactions were chosen to be studied here is that they all contain at least some discussion of the speech of the YP themselves as part of the conversation. During the chat with Leah, I asked if there were any words they use which I would not know, and Leah asked if I knew what 'breadbin' meant. I said I did not.

Extract 2

Leah: D'you know like, d'you know like you get boys that go 'what you on bredren [ˈbredrɪn]?' And they say bredren.
Rob: Yeah Yeah
Leah: Well you know to take the piss you say 'breadbin'.
Rob: Ah haa
Georgia: D'you get it?

Rob: {Yeah yeah}
Leah: {Thicko here} [referring to Georgia] didn't have a fuckin noggins what it {means.}

Georgia: {I don't} get it.
Leah: (unclear)
Georgia: I really {don't get it}
Leah: {D'you know} when boys say to each other 'yes what you on bredren?'
Georgia: Yeah
Leah: Like well you know breadbin (unclear)
Leah: In other words, in say- instea- in-
Georgia: Well why would you call someone a breadbin anyway?
Leah: Fuck off Georgia.

My understanding of this and other similar exchanges is that the girls are aware of some kind of way of speaking that they are not part of, and they distance themselves from it by mocking those who do use its features. The extent to which this way of speaking can be interpreted as an identifiable variety with particular and regular features, or as a transient style, or as simply consisting of one or two specific items such as 'bredren', remains to be seen. However, the girls do appear to have a sense of something identifiable when they go on to say that it is mainly boys who speak like this and are clear in their own minds where it comes from.

Extract 3

Leah: …ever since fucking *Anuvahood*[5] and *Kidulthood*[6] started coming out…and they started watching too much soaps.

In the conversation with Damian, I had previously mentioned media stories in which young white men were portrayed as 'sounding black' (see Kerswill 2014 for a discussion on the use of 'Jafaican' in the media, also Drummond 2016). He returns to this idea with the following:

Extract 4

Damian: Nah but obviously though the accent…they – they they're trying to say that it's just black people that use it but it's white people as well. They're trying to like stereotype. Trying to say it's just…just black people that used to do it and all that but it's not though, it's like loads of people do it.

What is interesting is Damian's apparent understanding of what 'it' is when we had not actually discussed a particular way of speaking other than vague references to media stories. This is certainly suggestive of an identifiable 'accent' of some sort, and his comment about people 'using' it implies an element of choice.

That element of choice is also apparent in Ryan's views. Ryan has a very clear awareness of the way he speaks ('It's just a teenage accent innit, it's a standard teenage accent') and does not see it as permanent:

Extract 5

Ryan: When I'm like 40 yeah, I won't be speaking like this. But I will til I'm about 30 [or summat] innit. Cos the olders still speak like this innit (.) like set olders.

I again brought up the question of whether the way YP speak might relate to ethnicity, but this time, I consciously avoided talking about white kids 'sounding black'.

However, as I was in the process of relating this to Ryan, his friend interrupted:

Extract 6

Lee: They'll just say he [Ryan] thinks he wants to be black.
Rob: Exactly. And so people – but anyone who actually works with young people will say that's not true.
Lee: But that's just how he speaks cos of his area.

Rob: Exactly
Ryan: Yeah not cos of the colour and that, like so if they hear me speaking and they're gonna say that I think I'm black, why would I think I'm black? You get me?
Lee: [laughs]
Ryan: [laughing] You get me.

It is interesting that both Lee and Ryan focus on 'wanting to be black' rather than 'sounding black', suggesting a greater degree of agency. Ryan does not appear to see the connection between ethnicity and accent, and this is certainly a common view among other boys in the study. There is often an awareness of what other people may think about their speech in relation to ethnicity, but this view is then usually dismissed as inaccurate, at least among the boys who can be seen as using features linked to a possible MUBE. The extent to which the laughing at the end of the excerpt relates to the irony of ending a statement about not being black with a pragmatic marker 'you get me' that is strongly associated with non-Anglo aspects of MLE (Torgersen et al. 2011) is debatable, but it certainly is a possible interpretation.

Social Factors

Clearly, with only four speakers, it is difficult to discuss with much authority the social factors that might be at work in shaping the language of these YP, so in order to give a fuller picture, I will refer to some observations from the current larger study in addition to the pilot study in order to identify some emerging areas of interest.

Gender

At a superficial level, there is a difference between the way boys speak and the way the girls speak in both the pilot study and the follow-up study. Quantitatively, the boys are more likely to use non-traditional Manchester features, and the girls are more likely to use the traditional Manchester variants. That is not to say that several boys (including Luke above) do

not use traditional variants; just that, of the speakers who do use possible MUBE variants, almost all are boys. There is also a potential gender difference in the use of phrases more associated with a MUBE repertoire such as *bredren, yo, bare, rass, mandem* and so on, which are used much more frequently by the boys than the girls. However, this gender difference remains superficial at present, in that it offers no kind of explanation—there is no reason why there should be such a pattern and observing it does not help us understand the variation. If we follow this route, we are in danger of falling foul of the 'correlation fallacy' (Cameron 2009), whereby we try to explain observed generalisations of language variation using the same identity categories that generated the observation in the first place.

Ethnicity

Equally superficial is a possible emerging pattern relating to the ethnicity of the speakers and the use of different features. Whatever pattern there appears to be would be problematic at best when explored a little further and, again, arguably holds no explanatory power even if it is shown to exist. From a purely quantitative perspective, it looks possible that those individuals who do not fall into a 'white British' census category (non-Anglos in the terminology of Cheshire et al.) are more likely to use non-traditional and potentially MUBE features. But it soon becomes clear again that using such macro social categories as ethnicity is not useful, as many of the differences between ethnicities are largely meaningless in the twenty-first-century urban Britain, certainly in this particular context. It is hard to see why the heritage of one grandparent, for example, should be given any sort of relevance in comparing the speech of two boys who have grown up side by side. Besides which, there are too many exceptions to any apparent ethnicity pattern to allow it much influence in our analysis, a point illustrated by the participants here, all of whom would be classified as white British Anglos, despite Ryan and Damian being two of the heaviest users of possible MUBE features.

In previous studies, ethnicity has been shown to have an effect on the use of variants from a distance, by way of friendship networks and their

ethnic diversity (Cheshire et al. 2011), with speakers with more diverse networks favouring certain non-standard features. Friendship networks did not form part of the data collection for either the pilot or the follow-up study here beyond what was observed among the participants in the actual context. And while observed networks might be of interest in some ways, it would be wrong to interpret them in the same way as friendship networks in other studies, as here it is often the case that the YP in the centres do not see each other outside of the PRU context. Their real friendship networks exist outside the centres, a world to which we did not have access. Having said that, I was provided with one potentially useful insight when I happened to ask Ryan about the ethnic mix of his friends as part of a conversation:

Extract 7

Rob: And what sort of er is it a mix in terms of backgrounds?
Ryan: Nah, same background
Rob: White, black…
Ryan: White innit.
Rob: All white?
Ryan: Yeah, all white.

At present, I would argue that ethnicity does not appear to be playing a role in the language of these particular YP, at least in the traditional sense of externally defined macro categories, and certainly in the data from the pilot study. Whether ethnicity emerges as a meaningful explanation of variation in the larger study remains to be seen, although initial signs are doubtful (see Drummond and Dray 2015 in which we suggest social practices are a better predictor than ethnicity in the use of th-stopping).

Identity

It goes without saying that identity plays a crucial role in language variation (and vice versa) generally, and there is no reason to think that the

relationship is any different here. If we apply current (third-wave) variationist thinking to this data (see Drummond and Schleef 2016 for a discussion), it would be interesting to explore the extent to which certain linguistic features are being used alongside non-linguistic semiotic practices to possibly index or reflexively construct identities. Clearly, this is not possible in any meaningful way with the pilot data, but one of the purposes of this preliminary study was to identify potentially interesting areas to pursue. Certainly, an argument could be made that the *lett*ER vowel is worth investigating in relation to whether a backed variant is being used to signal a traditional Manchester identity, and a more centralised realisation (clustered with other related features) is being used to align with a more current, multicultural youth identity. Similarly, the frequency and contextual use of some of the words and phrases in Table 4.2 might be a useful area to investigate in more depth. There is a sense that in addition to some of the words being used by some YP rather than others, there also exists an understanding that some of the words are not available to be used by everyone. This can only be addressed with the more ethnographic approach of the follow-up study.

However, even within third-wave thinking, there is sometimes a tendency to see identity as existing externally to the context in some way, so when we talk of linguistic features indexing aspects of identities, we are referring to something 'out there' that exists in a form in which it *can* be indexed by a particular clustering of features. More useful perhaps is viewing identity as not existing 'out there' at all but rather as something that is continually enacted and re-enacted within interaction (more along the lines of what is argued in Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Taking this approach, it becomes more important to identify what identity work (if any) a particular feature is doing within a particular space at a particular time rather than remove tokens of this feature from their context and impose a consistent meaning onto its repeated use and frequency.

Social Practices

Possibly, the most useful way in which to explore the variation that exists in the language of urban youth is to look at the practices which the YP

value, participate in and identify with. This is an approach we have begun to use in relation to our analysis of th-stopping (Drummond and Dray 2015) by looking at how use of 'ting' for 'thing' patterns with those YP who are involved in the musical practices of grime/rap and/or dance hall. But this is not to suggest that using 'ting' (or any of the other features discussed above) always has that association, rather that by taking this approach we can attempt to identify within specific interactions what particular linguistic and non-linguistic features are 'doing' in terms of social meaning. So, going back to the gender and ethnicity points—yes, it might turn out to be the case that identifiable MUBE linguistic features tend to be used by boys more than girls and by YP with Jamaican, black British or black African heritage more than those with white British heritage. But this does not offer any kind of explanation as to why this tendency exists, unless we argue that the features are actively involved in the performance of masculinity, for example, which at the moment they do not appear to be. But taking a practice-based approach, we can begin to see how involvement in particular social practices and engaging in the linguistic requirements of those practices generate the use of particular variants in particular contexts, thus providing a clearer explanation of who is doing what and why.

A practice-based approach would also help to shed light on possible mechanisms for linguistic features to be shared between London and Manchester. In some ways, it makes sense that an MME (or a Manchester version of a possible MUBE) should emerge in the same way that MLE emerged in London as the social/linguistic conditions outlined in Cheshire et al. (2011) are not dissimilar in the two cities. But this does not explain why some traditionally Manchester features are apparently being rejected in an emerging Manchester variety of English, unless perhaps the new variants are spreading from London. However, if we start to look at social practices such as music as being part of the process of diffusion, things start to make a lot more sense. Following this idea might lead us to conclude that the incoming variants are not being imported from MLE; rather they are emerging in the realities surrounding certain practices in which the YP are taking part (and those practices happen to be similar, but not identical in London

and Manchester). If the features 'belong' anywhere, they belong in the practices, not in any variety of English. Of course, the reality is that there are, as always, a combination of factors working together that are bringing about the current changes in the language of urban youth in Manchester, and many of these might be beyond our understanding until we dig deeper into the data. All we can ever do is use the evidence that we gather to piece together the bigger picture while remaining open to interpretations from related, if at times conflicting, areas of sociolinguistics.

Moving Forward

At the time of writing, the overall project is at an interesting stage. With the data collection period now over for the larger study also, we are starting to make sense of what is really happening linguistically and socially in this particular context. It has not always been easy, as the follow-up project has involved a collaboration between two people from different research backgrounds (a sociophonetician and an ethnographer/discourse analyst) which see language research and even the social world in often very different ways (see Dray and Drummond forthcoming for a discussion of the ups and downs of the process). However, the pilot study described here played a vital role in moving the project forward and preparing the way for the larger study. In addition to providing insights into the kinds of language features and social factors that might emerge as being of interest in a follow-up study, it also gave some idea as to the challenges involved in collecting data of this kind in such an unpredictable environment. While the data presented here is necessarily limited, the chapter represents only a fraction of the value of carrying out this kind of preparatory work. The relationships that were formed and developed, the techniques that were tried and the insights that were gained, all contributed to the next stage of the research. But perhaps, most importantly, the pilot study highlighted the need for a more flexible approach than traditional variationist-based techniques and approaches offer, especially with regard to the social meaning of the variation. I have hinted at this in the preliminary analy-

sis above, but it is a theme that is continuing to be developed and will no doubt emerge more fully in future publications.

Notes

1. The subsequent larger study continued in the same sites and ran from 2014 to 2016. It was funded by The Leverhulme Trust—*Expressing inner-city youth identity through Multicultural Urban British English.* RPG 2015–059—and brought in Susan Dray, an ethnographer and discourse analyst. Although the main linguistic data presented here comes from the pilot study, reference will be made to the follow-up study where relevant in order to explore areas of explanatory or methodological interest.
2. The decision to focus the research on the PRU context was made for three main reasons. Firstly, from a practical perspective, it provided access to a relatively stable group of young people who, given their inner-city context, would serve as examples of current urban Manchester speech. Secondly, the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) environment is one that lends itself to the ethnographically informed approach being aimed for, in that the learning centres exist as relatively closed groups of a small number of Young People (YP) in which there is flexibility in day-to-day activities and lessons (unlike the rigid nature of most mainstream school timetables). And thirdly and most importantly, the YP in the learning centres represented a group of potentially marginalised individuals who were in real danger of slipping through the cracks with regard to further education and employment prospects, and some of the marginalisation, arguably, could be seen as stemming from the general prejudice surrounding 'youth language' (e.g. West 2011; Johns 2012; Harding 2013).
3. There were no 'clean' tokens of FOOT in the recording of Ryan.
4. Perhaps the closet comparable Northern British English data comes from Buchstaller (2014) in which she shows that in the speech of her ten 19- to 21-year-olds (albeit middle class university students in Newcastle), *be like* is the most common form, followed by unframed quotatives, followed by *say* and then *go*.
5. A 2011 British comedy film about a young man in London http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1658797/
6. A 2006 British film about a group of 15-year-olds in London http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0435680/

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