

# **On the non-convergence of phonology, grammar and discourse**

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## **1. Introduction**

The phenomenon of dialect convergence presents us with an opportunity to examine an issue that is not yet well understood in variation studies: the extent to which linguistic variation in different components of language patterns in similar ways. There have been more studies of phonetic and phonological variation than of any other kind, with the result that we now know a great deal about how sound changes typically spread through a speech community. Studies of morphosyntactic variation have been gently increasing in number, but sociolinguistic analyses of variation in discourse and, especially, in syntax remain relatively scarce. We still do not know, therefore, whether generalisations concerning the spread of sound change apply equally well to other types of language change, nor whether stable linguistic variation in phonology, grammar and discourse features has a similar sociolinguistic distribution within a community.

The study of dialect convergence might shed light on these questions because the expectation here is, precisely, that there should be considerable commonality in the direction of change and, perhaps, in the rate of change also. If regionally or socially marked phonological features are being levelled within a community, it would be surprising if other regionally or socially marked features were not being levelled as well, and if the same speakers or the same social groups were not driving all types of change. In this chapter we use data from our recent project on levelling in urban dialects in England to explore the question of whether there is isomorphism between patterns of variation and change in phonology, grammar and discourse. As the title suggests, our conclusion will be that the fundamental differences between, on the one hand, phonology – and, perhaps, morphosyntax – and, on the other hand, grammar and discourse, result in few parallels other than superficial ones between variation and change in these components of language. We begin, however, with a critical appraisal of what previous writers have seen as the main issues and unresolved problems concerning sociolinguistic variation in grammar and discourse.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. *The extent of variation in different components of language*

A fundamental question is whether there is less variation at higher levels of linguistic structure than in the phonetics and phonology. Hinskens (1998: 160) states that the proportion of variable phenomena increases the closer one approaches to the ‘periphery’ of the grammar, so that there is less phonological variation than phonetic variation, less morphological variation than phonological variation, and still less variation in syntax. Hudson (1996:45) suggests one reason why this might be so, albeit as “a very tentative hypothesis”: speakers may use phonological variation to signal the social groups to which they feel they belong, but actively try to suppress variation in syntax because it is the mark of cohesion in society. Romaine (1980), however, observes that the expansion and elaboration that is part of the standardization process would be expected to lead to more syntactic variation within a speech community rather than less.

The link between language variation and language change suggests a further reason why there may be more phonetic variation than syntactic variation. Changes in pronunciation can arise spontaneously from the inherent phonetic variability of speech, but endogenous changes at higher levels of structure are rare or non-existent (Kroch 2001). In fact, it has long been assumed that higher level change is dependent on change at lower levels: for example, phonetic changes can cause phonological weakening at the ends of words, with an accompanying loss of morphological case distinctions. This in turn may lead to grammatical reanalysis and a rigid word order to compensate for an increase in ambiguity arising from the loss of case marking. As Kroch says, this presumably accounts for many differences between present-day standard Dutch and standard German, and between Classical Latin and its Romance daughter languages. Labov (2001: 12) goes as far as to argue that change in the surface phonetics may be the driving force behind the majority of structural linguistic changes. If higher level changes stem from phonetic changes, then, there may well be more phonetic changes in progress at any point in time than grammatical changes.

The question of whether there is more variation in some components of the language than others would seem to be an empirical one: indeed, Hinskens also states that because there have been relatively few quantitative studies of dialect features in the realm of syntax (1998:159) we do not in fact know to what extent the different emphases reflect the actual proportion of variation in and across the dialects in these components of language. There is a similar lack of research into variation in discourse features: Macaulay (2002a: 298) stresses that the study of discourse variation is still at an elementary stage. In our opinion, however, the problem is not only that we lack quantitative sociolinguistic studies of syntax and discourse; we will argue later that variation in syntax and discourse features poses methodological and conceptual problems that prevent us from drawing realistic comparisons with phonological variation.

## 2.2. *Social variation*

A further fundamental question is whether sociolinguistic patterns of variation are the same at different levels of structure. In urban English-speaking communities many morphosyntactic and syntactic variables exhibit a sharp pattern of variation, where middle-class speakers show near-total avoidance of the nonstandard variants. In these communities phonological variation typically patterns differently: stratification is not sharp but gradient, with all speakers using all variants but with frequencies that vary in proportion to their position on the social class hierarchy.

It is often assumed that these patterns of gradient phonological variation and sharp grammatical variation hold for all communities (see, for example, Chambers 2002: 350). French, however, shows the reverse pattern: here it is typically phonological variables that are the categorical distinguishers of social class, with gradient stratification exhibited by grammatical variants such as the absence of *ne* in negative clauses (e.g. *je (ne) veux rien*, 'I don't want anything'), or some core interrogative structures (Armstrong 1997). Kerswill's (1994) research into the Norwegian spoken by rural migrants to Bergen reveals a further complication. Here, the sociolinguistic patterns for phonological and grammatical variation resemble those attested in the English-speaking world, but the relevant social factors determining sharp stratification include not only social class but also the rural-urban dimension,

resulting from the in-migration of people whose rural dialects differ greatly from the urban dialect. For example, in the morpholexis variants could be ascribed unequivocally to either the rural or the urban dialect (for example, the infinitive suffix *-e* is urban whereas *-a* is rural) and there was a clustering of individuals with either relatively high or relatively low usage of urban or rural forms (Kerswill 1994: 109). Phonological and prosodic features, on the other hand, showed gradient stratification. Patterns of sharp and gradient stratification, then, need to be seen in relation to the social and cultural contexts in which they are found. Interestingly, Kerswill also found that rural speakers acquired features of the urban dialect most readily in the morpholexis, less readily in segmental phonology and least readily in the prosody. We do not yet know, then, the extent to which sociolinguistic patterns of sharp or gradient variation differ for phonology, grammar or, indeed, discourse in different languages and dialects, nor how these patterns might relate to processes of convergence and divergence.

### *2.3. Frequency of occurrence*

One well-known reason why the study of syntactic variation has lagged so far behind that of phonological variation is that syntactic features recur less frequently in spontaneous speech than phonological features (see Cornips and Corrigan, this volume). Phonological variables show up with high frequencies in sociolinguistic interviews, and can be easily elicited in reading passages and word lists. Syntactic variables, on the other hand, may occur only in special semantic or pragmatic circumstances, and rarely or unpredictably in interview settings (Rickford et al 1995: 106). This is not an insurmountable problem: researchers have supplemented interview data with material drawn from observation (see, for example, Kallen 1991), from media monitoring and searches of electronic corpora (for example, Rickford et al op.cit.), or from literature. Elicited introspective judgements are sometimes used, usually mixed with data from other sources (see Sells et al 1996). However, a data set gathered by such eclectic methods will not normally give equal representation to the different sections of the community; and there may be a random mixing of public and private contexts, and spoken, written or electronic channels. There are advantages to using a heterogeneous data base (see Berrendonner 1993, Cheshire 1995); but an important disadvantage is that we cannot use it to compare the social mechanism of

language change in different components of language: for this a more systematically structured data set is needed, so that changes can be accurately charted as they spread from one section of the community to another.

The implications of the relative infrequency of syntactic variants are not confined to methodology: there are important theoretical issues too. A central tenet of functionalism is that language use shapes grammatical structure, so that forms that frequently co-occur are more likely to be shaped into constituents (see Kemmer and Barlow 2000, Bybee in press). Frequency plays a role in determining processes of grammaticalisation (Hopper and Traugott 1993: 103) and is important in syntactic change generally: Lightfoot (1996, 1999), for example, proposes that syntactic change depends on a slow drift in the frequencies with which speakers use various sentence types, so that eventually children are exposed to data that lead them to acquire a different grammar from previous generations. Elements that occur less than 30 per cent of the time, he argues, can be ignored in acquisition. Our current understanding of processes of syntactic change, then, suggests that for a number of reasons the relative infrequency of syntactic forms makes them less subject to change than phonetic forms.

The relative infrequency of syntactic forms also makes them less available for social assessment which, in turn, makes them less likely to become associated with a specific social group. If we assume, with Bell (1984), that stylistic variation derives from and echoes social variation, we must conclude that syntactic forms are less likely to function as sociolinguistic markers, in Labov's (1972) sense. Again, this suggests that syntactic forms are less susceptible to change. Markers are variables to which speakers pay more or less conscious attention (Labov 1972): in other words, they can be assumed to be salient (Trudgill 1986, Kerswill and Williams 2002). Salient markers are likely to be involved in processes of dialect convergence and divergence (Trudgill 1986, Auer, Barden and Grosskopf 1998:163). Thus if syntactic forms do not function as markers, they may be less salient, and may not play a role in the processes of speech accommodation that underlie long-term dialect convergence and divergence (though there may, of course, be internal, structural reasons that cause dialects to 'drift' and thereby converge).

There appear to be links, then, between frequency, salience and processes of convergence and divergence. It has to be said, however, that the relationship between frequency and salience is not yet well understood. Kerswill and Williams (2002) found that some features that were used infrequently by adolescents in our dialect levelling project were nevertheless salient for them. Hoffman (2002) maintains that low frequency complex prepositions can be both cognitively salient and involved in change – in this case, in grammaticalisation. Again, then, we see that the impact of the relative infrequency of syntactic forms on their susceptibility to language change is not yet clear.

#### 2.4. Syntactic variation

There are many problems in using the linguistic variable to analyse syntax, most notably that of establishing the semantic equivalence of forms that could be considered to be variants. The issues were much discussed during the 1970s and 1980s (see, for example, Lavandera 1978, Cheshire 1987, Levinson 1988, Weiner and Labov 1983, Romaine 1980), and debate has continued since then (see, for example, with reference to French, Blanche-Benveniste 1997, Coveney 1997, Gadet 1997; and for general discussions Coveney 2002, Milroy and Gordon 2002). Cornips and Corrigan (this volume) also discuss several of the issues. Here we will focus on just one issue pointed out by Levinson (1988:166) with reference to English *ain't*. Levinson asked whether speakers who use *ain't* more frequently than speakers from other social groups do so because for them *ain't* is a marker of group identity, or because *ain't* is a more emphatic form of negation than *isn't*, *aren't* and the other alternants. If it is because it conveys emphasis, does this reflect an important aspect of the habitual patterns of social interaction of the social group to which the heavy *ain't* users belong? They might, for example, utter emphatic denials more frequently than other social groups in the community because they more often receive accusations. Thus in order to understand how and why speakers use variation, and the effect that their usage has on language change, it may not be enough to simply analyse the simple alternation of forms: we must also perform qualitative analyses to see how speakers use the forms in social interaction.

The use of passive versus active clauses within a community provides a further illustration of this point. Macaulay's (1991:98) analysis in Ayrshire found no significant differences between middle class speakers and working class speakers in their overall use of passive clauses. Importantly, however, there were social class differences in the use of *get*-passives (for example, *she got run over*), which occurred far more frequently in the interviews with speakers from the lower class. Weiner and Labov (1983:43) claimed that a shift to the *get*-passive is one of the most active grammatical changes taking place in present-day English. This means that the social class differences are an important finding, since they suggests a route for the diffusion of this construction through the community. However, Macaulay further reports that the *get*-passive occurred almost exclusively with animate subjects, and that these, in turn, occurred more frequently in the lower-class interviews. *Get*-passives are eventive, aspectually, and this probably contributes to the animacy effect in that events are usually controlled by an actor, and animates are more likely to be able to control such an event. Carter and McCarthy (1999)'s corpus-based analysis adds a further dimension that must be taken into account: the *get*-passive highlights the stance of speakers towards the grammatical subject and the event encoded in the verb phrase. Their stance is usually a judgement that the circumstances are adverse, problematic or otherwise noteworthy. Thus the shift to the *get*-passive would seem to be led by a group-specific discourse preference for using animate subjects, and for expressing the speaker's stance towards these subjects and the event that is mentioned. This is a telling illustration of the way that syntactic variation and syntactic change are intimately and inextricably part of the social construction of discourse. In order to fully understand the ongoing syntactic change, we need to know whether this social distribution reflects a distinctive habitual pattern of social interaction of the lower class group of speakers. As Carter and McCarthy point out (op.cit: 55), judgements about adversity, noteworthiness and the like are socioculturally founded and are emergent in the interaction rather than inherent in the semantics of verb choice or selection of voice or aspect. The type of stance expressed by the speaker can be determined only by examining tokens of the *get*-passive in their discourse context: a qualitative and interpretative dimension to the analysis, then, is essential.

*Get*-passives are not a unique phenomenon: many syntactic changes appear to have their roots in discourse strategies. Faarlund (1985) explains several changes in terms of ‘pragmatic syntax’, whereby speakers appear to have found a new form more useful for pragmatic purposes, and this has led to syntactic restructuring. Discourse factors can also play a role in the process of grammaticalisation (see, for example, Epstein (1994, 1995), who takes account of communicative intent, speaker attitude, grounding and thematic continuity in his analysis of the grammaticalisation of the Latin demonstrative *ille* to French *le*). Thus an essential difference between syntactic variation and phonological variation is that there is a direct link between the syntactic constructions that speakers choose and their construction of discourse in social interaction. Milroy and Gordon (2003: 197) point out that work on higher level variation is often concerned largely with language internal constraints on variation rather than on the relationship between language variation and the social world. Clearly, however, it is important to explore the social distribution of syntactic alternants if we are to understand processes of syntactic change; and it is necessary, therefore, as we have said, to look beyond a quantitative analysis of alternating forms to see how speakers use the forms in social interaction.

### 2.5. *Variation in discourse features*

As with the study of syntactic variation, analyses of sociolinguistic variation in discourse are scarce. We should not conclude, however, that discourse features are never involved in sociolinguistic variation. Variation with social class has sometimes been noted: for example, in Macaulay’s Ayrshire study (1991), working class speakers used more discourse markers overall than middle class speakers. Dines’ (1980) Australian research found that working class women used set marking tags such as *and that* more than three times as often as middle class women. Woods (1991) reports that discourse features analysed in the Ottawa survey showed a greater amount of socially stratified variation than phonological variables: the middle class speakers used a larger number of ‘opinion openers’ such as *I think, presumably, in my opinion*, whereas the working class speakers used more markers soliciting or anticipating agreement between speaker and addressee, such as *you know, eh* or *don’t you think*. In New Zealand, Stubbe and Holmes (1995), similarly, found *you know* and *eh* to be more frequent in working class speech, and *I think* in middle class speech. In addition,



*you know* occurred more frequently in the informal speech styles of both classes, and *I think* was more frequent in the more formal speech styles. Gender differences in the use of discourse markers have also been reported (for example, by Erman 1993, Stubbe and Holmes 1995 and Holmes 1995a; see further below). Nevertheless, Macaulay (2002a) reviews what is currently known about sociolinguistic variation in the use of discourse variation, and concludes “it would take a braver person than I am to assert with confidence that we have much solid information on gender, age or social class differences” (op.cit.: 298).

In our view the analysis of discourse features, like the analysis of syntactic variation, requires a more complex analysis than a simple counting of the number of tokens. Again, we need to consider how speakers use discourse features in interaction. For example, Erman (1993) found that *I mean*, *you see* and *you know* were used more frequently by women than men in a sample of speakers from the London-Lund corpus; more importantly, however, there was a gender difference in the functions of these expressions. Women tended to use them between complete propositions, to connect arguments; men, on the other hand, tended to use them as attention-getting devices or to signal repair work. Holmes (1995a) finds a gender difference in the discourse function of both *you know* and *I mean*, with male speakers using them more often to signal referential meaning and female speakers to signal affective meaning. As with syntactic variation, then, important differences in the way that different social groups use discourse features in interaction may be obscured if we simply count numbers of tokens. This is not the case with phonological variation, where the form-meaning relationship is at its most arbitrary, nor, on the whole, with morphosyntactic variation (for an elaboration of this point see Kerswill in press).

## 2.6. *The social mechanism of change at higher levels of language*

Finally, we turn to the question of the social mechanism of change at higher levels of linguistic structure. For phonological variation and change it is now possible to generalise from the large number of studies that have been conducted, in order to propose some general principles. Thus Labov (1990:205), reviewing more than thirty years of research on phonetic and phonological variation, concludes that the clearest and most consistent sociolinguistic patterns concern the linguistic differentiation of

women and men. Where there is stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women do. Gender has an equally important role in the process of sound change: indeed, the linguistic behaviour of female speakers is sometimes taken as a diagnostic of change in progress (for discussion see Cheshire 2002).

There are no such general principles for morphosyntactic changes, and we know still less about the social embedding of changes at higher levels of structure. The few reports that do exist give a contradictory picture. We argued above that the relative infrequency of syntactic variants makes them unlikely to occur with sufficient frequency to become habitually associated with the speech of either women or men. This in turn means that there is no reason to suppose that syntactic features will follow similar patterns of change to phonetic and phonological variables. Some studies do suggest a similar social patterning: for example, Rickford et al's (1995) analysis of topic-restricting *as far as* constructions found women appearing to lead in the loss of the verbal coda. The authors comment, however, that further study is needed of the intersection of gender with social class, which was not included in their study. Ferrara and Bell's (1995) analysis of the grammaticalisation of *like* found sex differentiation at the start of the grammaticalisation process, with a subsequent levelling out of this differentiation as the change proceeds – the reverse, in other words, of the patterns found in sound change. Tagliamonte and Hudson's (1999) analysis of *BE like* leads them to conclude that discourse features may pattern differently from phonological features. As with Rickford et al's study, however, these studies of *BE like* do not take account of the possible interaction with social class. At present, then, like so many issues concerning variation in syntax and discourse, the question is unresolved.

### **3. The Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull project**

We now turn to the results of the research project on dialect levelling and change that we directed with Ann Williams between 1995 and 1999, in order to explore some of the unresolved issues mentioned above. The project, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (project number R000236180), analysed the speech of 96

adolescents aged 14-15, in three English towns.<sup>1</sup> The towns contrast on a number of dimensions relevant to the phenomenon of dialect levelling and change. Two of the towns, Milton Keynes and Reading, are in southeast England, approximately the same distance north and west of London. They differ in that Milton Keynes is Britain's fastest-growing new town, whereas Reading is an older, prosperous, established town. Milton Keynes was founded in 1967 in a district containing some small towns and villages and since then its population has more than quadrupled from 44,000 to 176,000 in 1991 and 207,000 in 2001. Reading has considerable in-migration, though less than Milton Keynes, but unlike Milton Keynes it also has a stable local population. In contrast, the third town, Hull, is in the northeast, some 200 miles from London. In Hull industries are declining and there is more out-migration than in-migration: unemployment levels are high and the levels of educational achievement in the local schools are low.

In each of the three towns we recorded 32 adolescents aged between 14 and 15. Sixteen were from a school in a broadly defined 'working class' area and sixteen were from a school in a contrasting and equally broadly defined 'middle class' area. There were equal numbers of boys and girls in each school. Thus the 96 adolescent speakers differ by region, gender and, albeit very broadly, social class. Each speaker was recorded in three settings: in one-to-one 'ethnographic' interviews, mainly with Ann Williams but occasionally with Paul Kerswill; in more spontaneous interactions in pairs with the fieldworker; and in group discussions of between four to six speakers, guided by the fieldworker. Four working class elderly speakers (aged 70-80) were also recorded in each town, for comparison<sup>1</sup>. The main focus of the project was on the role of adolescents in dialect levelling. We focused specifically on phonological levelling and diffusion, expecting that morphosyntactic, syntactic and discourse variants would be unlikely to occur in sufficient quantity for detailed analyses of these types of variables to be carried out. In the event, however, there were enough tokens for us to draw some preliminary conclusions about variation in these components of language, as we will see, and to consider what our analyses can contribute to the questions discussed in the previous section.

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<sup>1</sup> Fuller details of the project are given in Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams (1999) and Williams and Kerswill (1999).

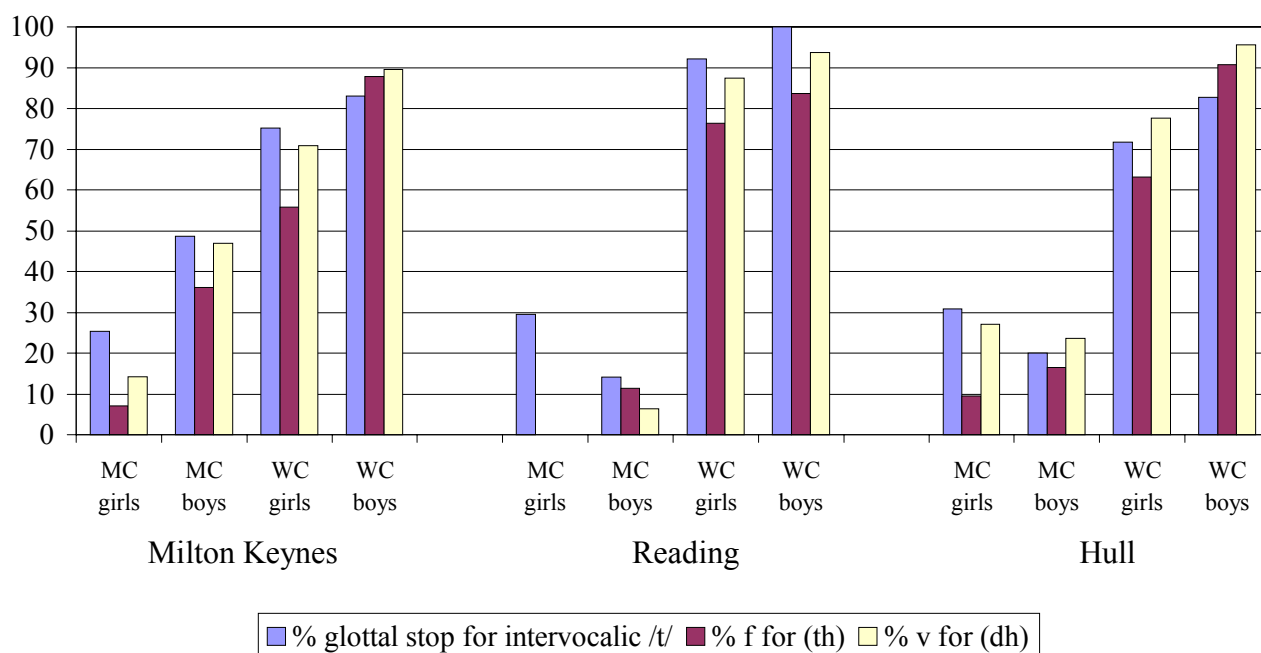
### 3.1. Phonological variation and change in the three towns

We begin by summarising some of the main findings of the analysis of phonological variation and change.<sup>2</sup> This will serve as a baseline with which to compare variation and change at other levels of structure.

One significant finding concerns the consonant variables that were analysed. Figure 1 shows the distribution of T-glottaling and TH-fronting in the three towns. T-glottaling refers to the replacement of [t] by [ʔ] in intervocalic positions within a word, as in [beʔə] for *better*. TH-fronting refers to the variables (th) and (dh). The first has the variants /θ/ and /f/, as in *thing* (which can be pronounced [fɪn] as well as [θɪn]). The (dh) variable represents the equivalent process affecting non-initial /ð/, as in *mother* (which can be pronounced [mʌvə] or [mʌðə]). Figure 1 shows that the distribution of each of the incoming, nonstandard variants is broadly similar in all three towns: the strongest social factor is social class, with middle class (MC) teenagers using far fewer of the innovative forms than their working class (WC) peers. Gender differentiation is, on the whole, slight, and patterning across the three towns is not consistent. All three features are at least a century old in London, and are known to be spreading throughout the southeast (along with a labiodental pronunciation of /r/; see Foulkes and Docherty 2000), albeit at different rates (TH-fronting has been slower to spread than T-glottaling). In Hull, however, all three are recent. The incoming forms have been adopted very rapidly: in Hull: there is evidence that TH-fronting has only been common among children since the decade between 1980 and 1990 (Kerswill and Williams 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> Details of the phonological analysis are given in Kerswill and Williams (1999) and Williams and Kerswill (1999); see also Kerswill and Williams (2002).



NB: (th) = fronting of /θ/ to [f]  
 (dh) = fronting of non-initial /ð/ to [v]

Figure 1 Non-standard variants of three consonantal variables (interview data) (from Cheshire et al. 1999)

A further consonant variable, initial (h) in words such as *head* or *heart*, shows a different social and geographical distribution. All three towns lie in the large central belt in England where initial /h/ is dropped in traditional dialects and generally in working class speech. The elderly speakers in the three towns used initial /h/ only between 5 and 12 per cent of the time, as Figure 2 shows. However, Figure 2 also shows that working-class teenagers in the two southern towns, especially Milton Keynes, have apparently reinstated the pronunciation of initial /h/, using it up to 83 per cent of the time. In Hull, on the other hand, the young people retain the traditional zero form. Here, then, there is a clear division between the Northern town and the Southern towns.

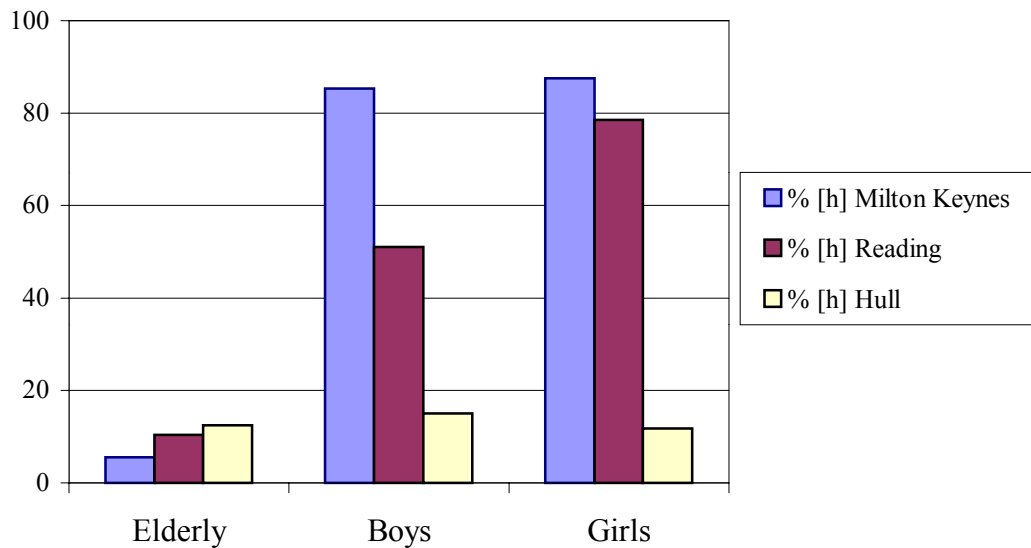


Figure 2 Percent use of [h] in lexical words, working class speakers (interview data) (from Cheshire et al. 1999)

This is also true for the vowel variables that were analysed. For these variables there were independent, relatively local developments which in some cases led to convergence between the two southern towns, though not between the southern towns and Hull. Table 1 gives as an example the distribution of variants of the PRICE<sup>3</sup> vowel in the speech of the working class teenagers in Milton Keynes. In this new town the young people's families came from outside the area and do not, on the whole, have local ties. As might be expected, there is only a small overlap in the realisations of this vowel by the sixteen working class adolescents and the four elderly speakers (these elderly speakers were from Bletchley, one of the small towns that pre-existed Milton Keynes and are now incorporated within the new borough). The dominant variant for boys is a back, diphthongal [ɑɪ], a London-like realisation which is geographically widespread in southeastern urban varieties. This does occur in the speech of the elderly, but for them it is more back and centralised realisations that occur more frequently. The girls have fronter variants, and these are not used at all by the elderly speakers.

<sup>3</sup> These words are used mnemonically following Well's (1982) system.

Table 1 Percentage use of variants (aɪ) (PRICE), Milton Keynes working class speakers, interview style (from Williams and Kerswill 1999: 156)

	[aɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌɪ]	[Λɪ]
Elderly age 70-80 (2f, 2m)	0	0	24.4	56.6	15.3	3.4
Girls age 14/15 (n=8)	25.4	44.6	29.2	0.5	0	0
Boys age 14/15 (n=8)	1.0	38.0	60.0	0	0	0

Table 2 shows that in Reading, where many of the young people are in close contact with older family members from the local area, there *is* continuity in the realisation of this vowel between the elderly speakers and the working class adolescents. Continuity is not absolute – the young people use the back and centralised variants of the vowel less frequently than the older speakers – but there is overlap in the vowel realisations. As in Milton Keynes, the predominant variant for the working class boys is the general southeastern form. However, there is no clear pattern of gender differentiation.

Table 2 Percentage use of variants (aɪ) (PRICE), Reading working class speakers, interview style (from Williams and Kerswill 1999: 156)

	[aɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ɑɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ʌɪ]	[Λɪ]
Elderly age 70-80 (2f, 2m)	0	12.4	47.8	21.8	1.7	15.7
Girls age 14/15 (n=8)	2.8	21.2	45.1	21.1	4.3	5.1
Boys age 14/15 (n=8)	0.6	19.1	63.7	13.7	2.7	0

In Hull, on the other hand, there is a very different pattern. Table 3 shows a complex allophonic patterning, for working class speakers only, with an [aɪ] diphthong before voiceless consonants (as in *bright* or *pipe*), and an [a:] monophthong before voiced

consonants (as in *bride* or *five*). Again, there is no pattern of gender differentiation. It is noteworthy that the allophonic patterning occurs almost exclusively in working class speech: unusually for English phonological variables, then, the [a:] variant shows sharp stratification. There is evidence in these figures of the incipient loss of this alternation, which is now restricted to the city of Hull and the immediate environs. This loss would represent convergence with other Yorkshire varieties of English.

Table 3 The PRICE vowel with following voiceless and voiced consonants, Hull speakers (from Cheshire et al. 1999)

(a) with following voiceless consonant, e.g. *bright*

	% [aɪ] ~ [a:ʰ]	% [a:]
WC elderly (n=4)	100	0
WC girls (n=8)	100	0
WC boys (n=8)	100	0
MC girls (n=8)	100	0
MC boys (n=8)	100	0

(b) with following voiced consonant, e.g. *bride*

	% [aɪ] ~ [a:ʰ]	% [a:]
WC elderly (n=4)	0	100
WC girls (n=8)	25.7	74.2
WC boys (n=8)	17.5	82.5
MC girls (n=8)	100	0
MC boys (n=8)	95.0	5.0

Williams and Kerswill (1999:162) see these different social and geographical patterns of variation in terms of the multiple identities of the young speakers participating in the study. In all three towns the young people's linguistic identity was formed, in part, in opposition to the idea of "being posh"—in other words, to being



perceived as snobbish and/or upper class (Kerswill and Williams 1997). Importantly, for the Hull adolescents 'posh' speech was London speech. Although Received Pronunciation is a social accent, not tied to any region of Britain, there seems no doubt that for young people in the north of England RP is associated negatively both with 'posh' speech and with the south of England, particularly London (see also Cheshire and Edwards 1991). This, then, may account for the Hull adolescents' apparent avoidance of initial [h]. The innovating consonant features, which the same adolescents in Hull have apparently been very happy to adopt, are also southern in origin; but these are associated, we assume, not with RP but with nonstandard southeastern varieties of English (Foulkes and Docherty 1999: 11). They may even have lost any association with London and Southeast England: the increase in the number of TV and radio stations and programmes directed at young people has led to a widespread use of informal and nonstandard registers in the broadcast media, many of which emanate from London and the south (Williams and Kerswill (1999: 162). Thus these features may now be associated with a general youth culture, which is not tied to a particular region. At the same time, the Hull working class realisation of the PRICE vowel allows young people in that town to retain an allegiance to their local class-based social networks, and their local Hull identity.

In summary, the phonological analysis reveals both convergence and divergence in the three urban centres. There is convergence in the rapid diffusion to all three towns of consonant features presumed to originate in London. However, a regional North-South divide is maintained through the continuing use of H-dropping by Hull adolescents and their divergent realisations of some vowel variables that are converging in the southern towns. Social class is an important factor in all three towns, but gender appears to be a considerably less important factor.

### *3.2. Variation and change in morphosyntax*

Six of the well known English morphosyntactic variables occurred relatively frequently in the recordings. This meant that for these features we could analyse patterns of variation across the three towns, and draw some comparisons with the findings of the phonological analysis. All six have nonstandard variants thought to be part of a generalised nonstandard variety of English typical of the urban centres in

present-day England (Cheshire et al 1989, Coupland 1988, Hughes and Trudgill 1987). These are:

1. multiple negation e.g. *I like England...I'm happy with it...we haven't got no diseases.. no nothing* (Reading; cf. standard English *we haven't got any diseases... nothing*)
2. nonstandard *was* e.g. *we just held the brake and we was upside down all the way* (cf. Milton Keynes; standard English *we were upside down*)
3. nonstandard *were* e.g. *we was in the first year and he was in the last year weren't he?* (Reading; cf. standard English *he was in the first year wasn't he?*)
4. third person singular negative *don't* e.g. *my mum don't go to work* (Milton Keynes; cf. standard English *my mum doesn't go to work*)
4. preterite form *come* e.g. *it [my favourite food] used to be steak until the mad cow come about* (Milton Keynes; cf. *came about*)
5. preterite form *done* for full verb DO e.g. *he used to play for Reading football club and he done his knees in so he's had loads of operations* (Reading; cf. standard English *he did his knee in*)
6. relative pronoun *what* e.g. *have you noticed though there's no lads what want to do it really* (Hull; cf. standard English *no lads who want to do it*)

We calculated a frequency index for these features following the usual variationist procedure (in other words, calculating the percentage of nonstandard variants relative to the total number of standard and nonstandard variants). Table 4 displays the results.

Table 4. Frequency indices of nonstandard variants and total number of variants in the speech of working class adolescents in Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull

variant	frequency index of nonstandard variants (total number of standard and nonstandard forms)		
	Milton Keynes	Reading	Hull
negative concord	33.7 (92)	37.2 (43)	67.0 (68)
nonstandard <i>was</i>	20.6 (63)	28.9 (45)	78.3 (69)
nonstandard <i>were</i>	66.7 (6)	36.0 (25)	3.1 (224)
nonstandard <i>don't</i>	47.2 (36)	63.6 (33)	25.0 (28)
preterite <i>come</i>	56.8 (37)	82.4 (17)	72.3 (33)
preterite <i>done</i>	85.7 (7)	33.3 (24)	7.7 (13)
relative <i>what</i>	3.2 (95)	3.8 (52)	25.5 (51)

Although the total number of variants is low in a few cases (for example, for preterite *done* in Milton Keynes) the table broadly confirms that these common core nonstandard features are robustly used in the three towns (the nonstandard relative pronoun seems a possible exception, but further investigation has to wait for future work). It is striking that they are as frequent overall in the new town of Milton Keynes as in the longer-established urban centres of Reading and Hull.

In contrast, Table 5 gives the frequency indices for two regional features: nonstandard verbal *-s* in Reading and the zero definite article in Hull. In Reading and the south-west of England generally all present tense verbs can have the *-s* suffix (e.g. *I wants to be a hairdresser*), unlike standard English where the suffix is confined to third person singular subjects. In Hull there is sometimes no definite article where standard English would require one (e.g. *there was this fellow beating this other fellow up near flats*; cf. standard English *near the flats*). These nonstandard regional variants occur far less frequently (again, with the exception of nonstandard relative pronoun forms) than the common core nonstandard variants shown in Table 4.

Table 5. Frequency indices of localised nonstandard variants (total number of standard and nonstandard forms) in the speech of working class adolescents in Reading and Hull

variant	frequency index of nonstandard forms (total)	
	Reading	Hull
verbal –s (lexical verbs)	10.96 (657)	–
zero article	–	9.5 (738)

In both Reading and Hull, then, adolescents seem to be converging on the common core set of widespread urban nonstandard variants, in preference to more localised features. Milton Keynes, as a new town, has no localised features; but here too, as we said, there is convergence amongst the working class speakers to the nonstandard rather than the standard English variants.

There is evidence of convergence across the three towns in the morphosyntax, then, as there is in the phonology. We also note divergence in the morphosyntax, again as with the phonology, in that the speech of working class adolescents in Hull shows evidence of a continuing North-South regional divide. These young people show continuity with older speakers in the community through their use of certain morphosyntactic forms that do not occur in the southern towns. The forms include past participle forms not heard in the South (for example, *fol* for southern *fell*, as in *I've fell in the river twice*); and [wɑnt] for southern *wound*, as in *you could leave your car unlocked and the window [wɑnt] down*). There is a distinctive negative BE paradigm, with [ɪnʔ] as the third singular present tense form (cf. standard English *isn't*) and [ɑ:ʔ] elsewhere in the present (cf. standard English [ɑ:nt]). The adolescents also use several regional lexical forms, such as *twatted*, meaning 'hit' (e.g. *when I'm naughty I get twatted*), *croggy*, 'a ride on the crossbar of a bike' (e.g. *sometimes I give my brother a croggy*), *nowt*, 'nothing' and *owt*, 'anything'. Through their use of

lexical and morphosyntactic features, then, the young working class speakers can display a regional class-based identity, in much the same way as they do with their realisation of the PRICE vowel.

The middle class adolescents used nonstandard forms once or twice, but never more than sporadically. Social class is an important social dimension here, then, as it was for phonological variation: the effect is sharper, however, for morphosyntax, which exhibits the usual pattern for English of sharp stratification. The effect of gender, however, is less clear, as Table 6 shows.

Table 6. Frequency indices (total number of variants) for working class girls and boys

	MK girls	MK boys	Rdg girls	Rdg boys	Hull girls	Hull boys
negative concord	20.0 (50)	50.0 (42)	31.6 (24)	41.7 (19)	66.7 (39)	70.0 (29)
nonstandard <i>was</i>	15.8 (57)	66.7 (6)	42.3 (26)	10.5 (19)	77.8 (27)	78.6 (42)
nonstandard <i>were</i>	*	66.7 (6)	75.0 (8)	18.75 (16)	0.0 (63)	4.35 (161)
nonstandard <i>don't</i>	53.6 (28)	25.0 (8)	55.6 (18)	73.3 (15)	6.3 (16)	50.0 (12)
preterite <i>come</i>	40.0 (15)	68.2 (22)	100.0 (3)	78.6 (14)	58.3 (12)	80.1 (21)
preterite <i>done</i>	*	83.3 (6)	66.7 (6)	25 (6)	*	11.1 (9)
relative <i>what</i>	6.4 (47)	0.0 (48)	6.1 (33)	0.0 (19)	32.0 (25)	19.2 (26)
nonstandard <i>-s</i>			14.8 (357)	6.3 (300)		
zero definite article					8.3 (337)	10.5 (401)

\* indicates a total number of variants of less than 4

There is no clear pattern of gender variation, perhaps because for many of the gender groups the numbers of tokens are very low: a common obstacle to analyses of variation beyond phonology (see section 2.3). There are statistically significant gender differences only for the use of negative concord in Milton Keynes ( $\chi^2 = 9.155$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) where, following the conventional pattern, male speakers use a higher proportion of nonstandard forms than female speakers (see Chambers

2003:116). The differences for negative concord are not significant, however, in Reading and Hull.

Milroy et al (1994) suggest that female speakers may lead in the spread of forms with a supralocal distribution. This may be so for phonological forms, but if it applied equally well to morphosyntactic forms we would expect the regional variants – nonstandard verbal *-s* and the zero definite article – to occur less often in the girls’ speech, since they should be using more of the supralocal standard English forms. In Hull the gender difference is small and not statistically significant; and in Reading it is in fact the girls who use a significantly higher proportion of nonstandard verbal *-s* ( $\chi^2 = 12.1057$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus although there is a clear pattern of social class differentiation, the role of gender in convergence in the morphosyntactic component is unclear – as it was for convergence in the phonological component.

We can observe some parallels, then, between variation and change in the phonological and morphosyntactic components of language in the three towns. In each component there is evidence of convergence: in the morphosyntax, convergence lies in the use of forms typical of the generalised nonstandard variety of English among the working class adolescents, and in a lower frequency of use of the regionally marked forms. There is also evidence of divergence, seen here in the retention of some regionally marked morphosyntactic forms in Hull. Social class is an important social dimension of variation for both phonology and morphosyntax, but gender appears to be less important.

### 3.3. Discourse features

The rapidly innovating consonant features have a parallel in discourse in the rapid grammaticalisation of *like* as a focus marker and a marker of reported speech and thought (as in, respectively, *and we were like rushing home and she was like “where are you off to?”*). Unlike the consonant features, however, these uses of *like* have been observed not only in Britain but in urban centres throughout the English-speaking world (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999).<sup>4</sup> The origins are thought to lie in

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<sup>4</sup> Glottal realisations of /t/, however, are now found in New Zealand English; see Holmes (1995b).

southern Californian ‘valley speak’ (Dailey O’Cain 2000), as heard in the early 1980s Frank Zappa song ‘Valley Girl’. The rapidity of the spread can be seen for one of the towns by comparing the frequency of occurrence of focus marker *like* in the Reading working class group with its use by working class speakers of roughly the same age in an earlier Reading study (Cheshire 1982): in our recent data there are between 6 and 10 tokens of *like* per 1,000 words, whereas in the earlier study the largest group of speakers (the ‘Orts Road’ group) uttered only one token of *like* in 8948 words.

As with the southeastern consonant features, the rapid dissemination of focus marker *like* has been associated with a general youth culture – though this time, of course, we would have to assume an international dimension to the culture (see Macaulay 2001). The idea that there is an international dimension here is strengthened by the similar contemporary grammaticalisations of forms with an original meaning equivalent to ‘like’ that are in progress in several other languages, including Hebrew (Maschler 2002) and German (Golato 2000) – though the mechanism by which this cross-linguistic phenomenon could occur is far from understood.

Table 7 shows the frequencies per thousand words for adolescents in the three towns. We can observe a parallel with the incoming consonant features in that it is the adolescents in Hull who use focus marker *like* most frequently. In the case of *like*, however, the existence of a clause final discourse marker *like* in Hull may have played a role in the fast adoption of the focus marker. This is frequent in the speech of the elderly speakers (consider, as an example, *there was only three of us living together like...we lost two brothers*; Mrs. Roberts), but occurs only rarely in the young people’s speech. Individual adolescents varied in the frequency with which they used focus marker *like*, of course, but every speaker in the three towns used this feature, some very often indeed. In Hull there was a clear social class difference, with the middle class groups using new *like* more often than the working class groups, as Table 7 shows; apart from this, there were no discernible patterns of social class or gender variation. Despite some parallels with the rapidly diffusing consonants, then, the social distribution of this new discourse form differs from the phonological innovations, which were led by the working class groups.

Table 7. Focus marker *like* in the three towns

group	frequency per 1000 words	(no. words)
Milton Keynes WC girls	11.05	18,916
Milton Keynes WC boys	14.32	12,703
Milton Keynes MC girls	10.19	24,045
Milton Keynes MC boys	5.96	27,875
Reading WC girls	6.53	15,012
Reading WC boys	9.16	14,274
Reading MC girls	6.0	25,353
Reading MC boys	9.44	15,681
Hull WC girls	10.79	162,214
Hull WC boys	10.41	17,199
Hull MC girls	15.56	23,536
Hull MC boys	14.05	19,287

Another discourse marker that is thought to be rapidly innovating in the urban centres of Britain is *innit* as an invariant tag. This time the origins of the new uses are thought to lie not in the USA but in the speech of British ethnic minorities (Rampton 1995: 127; Andersen 1999: 116). *Innit* is presumably a contraction of *isn't it* (Andersen 1999: 192) but it is now used 'non-paradigmatically' – in other words, not copying *is* and *it* from a preceding main clause. As an example of the non-paradigmatic use, consider Extract 1: here Ann Williams and Dave are discussing the route from Milton Keynes to Chelmsford, where Dave's father's family live. The conventional tag question for Dave's main clause in f would presumably be *don't you* (copying the verb *do* in the main clause and an 'understood' subject *you*).

Extract 1

a. AW:           so who do you go and see



- b. Dave: we mostly go see my Mum's side of the family
- c. AW: yeah in Chelmsford
- d. Dave: yeah but we sometimes also go down to my Dads' cause it's sort of on the way really
- e. AW: on the way out [cause you come down the M1
- f. Dave: [yeah do a little circle really innit
- g. AW: and go down whatever it is to Chelmsford
- h. Dave: yeah and then come back round on the M25 and back up the M1

In our recordings *innit* occurs far less frequently than the discourse marker *like*: there are only 36 tokens in total. A further difference is that *innit* is used exclusively by working class speakers. Andersen's analysis of the Corpus of London Teenage Speech (COLT) revealed a similar social distribution for these two discourse forms: in London *like* was used by all social groups (though more frequently by the middle class speakers) whereas *innit* was used more frequently by working class speakers. Perhaps, then, convergence in the use of globally innovating features (such as focus marker *like*) is not led by any single social group. This would fit with the idea mentioned earlier that the international media, especially TV and films from the USA, play a role in the dissemination of features that are spreading on a global scale. Global identities are additive, and need not affect existing social or regional identities; and if the spread of globally diffusing forms does not rely on face-to-face contact – or relies less exclusively, at least, on face-to-face contact – speakers of all social and regional groups may acquire the forms simultaneously.

The use of *innit* by the two higher social class groups in COLT as well as the lowest class group perhaps indicates that *innit* has a longer history in London speech, and is now spreading through the different social class groups: certainly it was reported as used by young people there nearly twenty years ago (Hewitt 1986:132). Furthermore, in London teenage speech non-paradigmatic<sup>5</sup> uses outnumbered paradigmatic uses (181, or 56 per cent, of the 323 tokens of *innit* in Andersen's sample were used non-paradigmatically) whereas in our data it is paradigmatic uses

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<sup>5</sup> e.g.: *We might as well go home, innit?* for *We might as well go home, mightn't we?* (though, in this instance, in the spoken standard the *shouldn't we* is increasingly preferred).

that are more frequent. 31 of the 36 tokens in our corpus, or 82 per cent, correspond to standard English *isn't it*. Extract 2 below is an example. This suggests to us that the discourse marker *innit* is not yet as grammaticalised in the three towns we have studied as it is in London. A further difference between *innit* and *like*, then, is that *innit* is spreading by social and regional diffusion.

### Extract 2

- Kay: I'm going..first thing when I leave school I'm going to go to  
MacDonalds and see if I can get a job there
- R: <LAUGHS> MacDonalds
- Kay: yeah it's a start though innit then weekly go to college so I've still got  
a bit of money anyway

However, the low frequency of *innit* in our recordings means that we cannot be as certain about its social and regional distribution as we can for the phonological features and the morphological features – nor, indeed, as we can for *like*. A surprisingly high proportion of *innit* tokens in our data – 8 of the 36 tokens – come from working class adolescents in Hull: of the remaining 8 tokens, 5 are from Reading and 3 from Milton Keynes. We think it unlikely that these figures accurately reflect the geographical distribution of the form, firstly because non-paradigmatic *innit* was already used, albeit infrequently, by adolescents recorded in the late 1970s for Cheshire's earlier study in Reading (Cheshire 1982: 61) and secondly because if geographical diffusion plays a part in the spread of *innit*, it would be strange if the form had reached Hull, the town farthest from London, before Reading and Milton Keynes. Our assumption that the use of *innit* indicates dialect convergence is therefore based largely on a comparison with Andersen's analysis of London teenage speech.

Conventional tag questions such as *don't you*, *aren't you* and *isn't it* are also relatively rare in adolescent speech in our data. This makes it impossible to comment on whether *innit* is an invariant form that is replacing conventional tag questions in adolescent speech, and on whether its use in Hull indicates convergence in that *innit* is

replacing the regionally marked tag form [intr?] there. This regional form is used only once in our data, by a middle class boy. The infrequency of all tags reflects, we assume, the nature of an interview setting. When the adolescents do use tags it is in those sections of the interview where they are talking with a friend as well as the interviewer, and the tags are often directed to their friend: extract 1 contains an infrequent example of *innit* directed to the interviewer. Like syntactic alternants, then, discourse forms may occur rarely or unpredictably in interviews (see section 2. 3).

A further problem in the analysis of discourse features, and a further similarity with syntactic forms, lies in their role in social interaction. *Innit* in our data functions as an addressee-oriented positive politeness strategy, indicating that the speaker assumes that the information expressed in the previous clause is shared by the addressee. In Extract 1, it is factual information that is assumed to be shared; in extract 2 the speaker assumes that her addressee shares the opinion she has just uttered. On other occasions *innit* functions as a negative politeness marker, softening an utterance where there are conflicting views between the speaker and the addressee. This is illustrated by extract 3, where Charles and his friend Max disagree about the ideal age to marry. Charles softens his explicit disagreement in d with *innit*, as well as a joke about being a granddad:

### Extract 3

- a. AW            do you think you'll get married then? what's a good age do you think?
- b. Charles     about twenty-five twenty-six
- c. Max           I reckon about thirty thirty-five
- d. Charles   too old innit you're going to be a granddad
- e. Max           no you've got to live your life first haven't you

Note that the conventional tag *haven't you* in e is also used to attenuate disagreement by Max. Stubbe and Holmes (1995) point out that discourse forms do not function in isolation: their analysis of *I mean* and *you know* included a range of other features, such as tag questions and set marking tags (e.g. *or whatever* and *and stuff like that*). They found that speakers combined different discourse forms in complex ways at specific points in interactions, to communicate subtle shades of meaning. Often this

phenomenon was related to particular discourse or topic types. They conclude that “the whole is somewhat greater than the sum of its parts” (Stubbe and Holmes 1995: 83). We need to consider therefore whether the relationship between the working class use of *innit* and their interactional style, as well as to the topics they discuss. If there is indeed convergence in the use of *innit* throughout Britain, we can ask whether this represents a convergence simply in the use of a new, invariant tag, or whether it represents a convergence in interactional style. Perhaps young working class speakers prefer a more involved, addressee-oriented interactive style, predisposing them to use new forms that have specific politeness functions. If so, we can ask whether this is an example of age-grading, with the discourse style – and the use of forms such as *innit* – becoming less used as they enter adult life, or whether it represents a more permanent aspect of their language use. A further question concerns the apparent diffusion through the social class hierarchy, as found in Andersen’s London study: is it diffusion of a more addressee-oriented interactive style, or is it simply diffusion of a single form, that is perhaps replacing *isn’t it* and other the paradigmatic tags?

The diffusion of the new discourse marker *like* raises similar general questions, but the fact that *like* occurred in such large numbers allowed us to at least chart its regional and social distribution and draw some broad comparisons with phonological features. For a full understanding of its use, however, we would need to consider how speakers use it in interaction. None of these issues were raised by phonological features, where the link to the construction of discourse is more indirect. Nor were they raised by morphosyntactic features: these occurred in relatively large numbers and they could be analysed using the linguistic variable, so that we could make confident claims about the social and regional distribution of specific variants, and ignore their use in interaction. The issues are, however, important for our understanding of processes of convergence and divergence, for they can help us understand the micro-interactions where these processes have their roots.

In summary, we found evidence of convergence in the three towns in the use of discourse markers, most clearly in the widespread use of the new discourse marker *like*, less clearly in the use of *innit*. The social distribution of *like* does not parallel that of the consonant features that are innovating with equal rapidity, since unlike the

consonant features there is no clear pattern of differentiation with social class. *Innit*, on the other hand, seems to be confined to working class speech; here, then, social class remains an important division, as it does for the nonstandard morphosyntactic variants. The relative infrequency of *innit* confronted us with some of the analytical problems discussed in section 2.3. The main point to emerge, however, is that discourse features such as these need to be analysed within their interactional context in order to fully understand the nature of any ongoing convergence or divergence. For those discourse features that occur frequently such an analysis would be possible, in principle, using the same recordings as for the analysis of convergence and divergence in phonology (we can do this for a future analysis of *like*, for example). However, a different research design is necessary for features that occur less frequently or less predictably, such as *innit*.

#### *Syntactic variation*

The analysis of syntactic variation in the data set raises similar problems to the analysis of discourse features. We will use regionally distinctive emphatic pronoun tags to briefly illustrate the problems, and will also consider the question of using a variationist framework for the analysis of syntactic variation. As discussed in section 2.4.

Emphatic pronoun tags involve subject copying. Thus in extract 4 the subject *I* of Matt's construction in d (*I used to me*) is copied in the tag the right of the Verb Phrase, and has the default form *me*. Charlie's *I haven't even tried it me* is a similar construction.

#### Extract 4

- Charlie: the only time I drink is like at parties or  
Matt: yeah.. not one of the things  
you do every day really is it...daft  
Charlie: don't like smoking or anything like that ..no that's disgusting  
→Matt: I used to me...well I tried it  
→Charlie: I haven't even tried it me

Matt: my mam wouldn't say nowt  
AW: do your parents smoke?  
Charlie: my mam does  
Matt: all of them do..got my real dad my step dad and my mam  
→Charlie: I don't like it me

The tags occur in some Northern varieties of English, as do 'amplificatory' tags involving subject and operator inversion, such as *she's a lovely girl is Ann* (Quirk et al 1985: 1417). A similar construction where the tag consists of a demonstrative pronoun is widespread in colloquial English generally. As an example consider extract 5, where Kay and Ruth are talking about their favourite TV programmes.

#### Extract 5

Kay: I like that Tracy and [xxxxxxx]  
Ruth: [Birds of a Feather ...that's funny that  
Kay: that's real funny that

Tags such as these are assumed to emphasise either the proposition of the clause or, in the case of emphatic pronoun tags, the subject of the clause.

As expected, pronoun tags occurred only in the northern town, Hull. Further, they occurred only in the speech of the working class adolescents in Hull. There seems to be a parallel here, then, with the divergent phonological and morphosyntactic features mentioned earlier, in that by using these tags working class speakers are maintaining a North-South dialect divide. However, as we mentioned, there are several problems that prevent us from drawing clear parallels.

The first problem we encountered was that, like *innit*, the tags are not very frequent in the data set. There are 30 in total – 16 from four of the male speakers and 14 from three of the female speakers. Twenty-five of the thirty tokens came from just three of these speakers. It is relevant, of course, that three adolescents use the forms relatively frequently, and as with *innit* it is necessary to examine the interviews to see why this might be so (for instance, the two boys who were high users of emphatic tags

were friends recorded together). For the time being, however, we can simply note that the infrequency of the forms limits the possibilities of a quantitative analysis.

The second problem concerns the situational context in which speakers use the tags. All the tokens occurred in the parts of the interviews where pairs of friends were recorded with the fieldworker, and where the young people were interacting as much with each other as with the fieldworker. Like *innit*, then, these constructions may never occur within the conventional format of the sociolinguistic interview. The four elderly speakers used no pronoun tags at all, presumably, again, because they were recorded in one to one interviews. The result is that we have no way of knowing whether the tags are used less frequently by younger speakers than older speakers, so we cannot draw any conclusions about whether they are declining in use in Hull. As with *innit*, the sociolinguistic interviews that are such a good methodology for investigating convergence in phonology within a socially structured data set do not provide the kind of data that allow us to address the same questions for syntactic convergence; it is not possible, then, to systematically compare convergence and divergence in these different components of language using the same data set.

Third, the choice of analytical framework poses several difficulties. Macaulay (1991) analysed emphatic pronoun tags as the result of movement, in line with the generativist framework of that time. In extract 2, however, Kay's *Peter André me* can only be considered as the result of syntactic movement if we assume an ellipited subject and verb (e.g. *I like*); and if we rely on the notion of ellipsis, we resort to our intuitions about the nature of well-formed utterances. This is a dangerous procedure, since intuitions about language are likely to be influenced by the norms of written standard language, which are not necessarily appropriate for analysing spoken language (for discussion see Cheshire 1999). Unlike generativists, sociolinguists tend to be suspicious of attributing structures in this way to forms that we cannot observe.

A variationist framework raises a different problem. Rightly or wrongly, when analysing morphosyntactic variation it is common to set up a variable consisting of a 'standard' and a 'nonstandard' variant. Unlike the morphosyntactic forms we analysed in section 3.2, however, the emphatic pronoun tags do not seem to have attracted the attention of language prescriptivists and there is no obvious 'standard'

equivalent with which they could be said to alternate. We could try, instead, to set up a variable on the basis of the discourse function of the tags; but what exactly is their discourse function? If we accept that they provide emphasis, we might consider setting up a variable consisting of two variants, one with the tag and one without (for example, *he's got a real nice chest him* and *he's got a real nice chest*). Emphasis does not affect truth conditions, so the variants are semantically equivalent. But appeals to the concept of emphasis lack theoretical rigour. As Sells et al point out (1996:174), we need to clearly specify its status in the grammar, and the extent to which it can affect the form and function of different linguistic phenomena; otherwise the very ubiquity of appeals to this type of affective meaning may reduce its analytic value.

A further problem for a variationist analysis is that we surely cannot assume that every clause that is uttered has an equal chance of being expressed emphatically. The tags in our data can, indeed, all be loosely considered 'emphatic', but the emphasis affects the utterances and the ongoing interaction in different ways. For example, in extract 4 the tags mark an explicit contrast between the content of the speaker's clause and the content of the previous turn. Matt and Charlie are discussing smoking with the fieldworker, Ann Williams (AW). Charlie is a keen anti-smoker, and his first utterance about smoking makes it clear that he does not like smoking (*don't like smoking or anything like that ...no that's disgusting*). Matt, with his *I used to me*, claims, in contrast, to have enjoyed smoking in the past, though he immediately modifies this to state that he has merely tried smoking. Charlie's *I haven't even tried it me* then emphatically contrasts his own experience of smoking with Matt's. His *I don't like it me* in the final clause in extract 1 then contrasts his dislike of smoking with the behaviour of Matt's family, which Matt has described in the previous two turns. The tags in Extract 4, then, highlight the contrasts.

In extract 6, on the other hand, the tags are not explicitly contrastive; instead, they emphasise the speaker's stance towards the proposition expressed in the clause.

#### Extract 6

- a. AW: right what about a favourite singer then?  
→b. Kay: Peter Andre me



- c. Ruth: Peter Andre's alright but  
 →d. Kay: he's got a real nice chest him  
 e. AW: has he? Is it hairy?  
 f. Kay: no it's real brown and greasy  
 g. Ruth: cos he has baby oil smothered on him

Perhaps the tags are implicitly contrastive: thus Kay's *Peter André me*, given in response to Ann William's enquiry about her favourite singer, might imply that no matter who her friend might prefer, Kay's choice would be Peter André. Ruth's grudging acceptance of this nomination confirms her acceptance of Kay's opinion, and seems to indicate that he is not her own choice. Indeed, perhaps Kay already knew Ruth's opinion. Similarly, the proposition in Kay's *he's got a real nice chest him* expresses her approving stance towards Peter André, and perhaps the tag emphasises this by implicitly contrasting his charms with those of other potential candidates. A further function of the tags in extract 2 is, perhaps, to propose a topic: Ruth elaborates the topic of Peter André in c, and Ann Williams picks up the topic of his chest in e.

Speaker stance, in act, is often expressed in the clause that precedes the emphatic pronoun tag. Often there is an adjective and/or an intensifier expressing a positive evaluation, as in Kay's *real nice* in 6.d, or a verb conveying speaker stance, as in Charlie's *I don't like it me* in Extract 4. Sometimes the contrast performed by the tag implicitly expresses speaker stance, as in Extract 7. Here Charlie and Matt nominate cider in response to Ann Williams' question about their favourite drink. Since this is an alcoholic drink they are too young to order this for themselves in a bar, and Charlie explains that a friend, Steve, buys his drink for him. Matt then states that he is able to buy his own drink, using a pronoun tag that explicitly contrasts what he is able to do with what Charlie is obliged to do. He is proud of the fact that he looks older than he is, and so is served without question, and in his next turn, in k, he drives the point home by telling Ann Williams that he was drinking in the bar on just the previous Saturday.

#### Extract 7

- a. Charlie oh I was going to say cider...cider cider



*extraordinarily* and *awfully*, as in 8 and 9.

8. I found it extraordinarily boring

9. Oh well Jock it's awfully tasty (Macaulay 1991: 82).

This is an unsuspected finding with potentially important social implications, but it underlines the difficulty of using the linguistic variable for this type of feature (and Macaulay does not attempt to do so). The variable may well be a heuristic construct that does not necessarily map directly onto the units of linguistic structure (see Wolfram 1993, Winford 1996), but to include left dislocation, say, and *it*-clefts in the same analytic unit as adverbials is surely stretching the concept of the variable beyond all credibility. A consequence is that, once again, we cannot draw a comparison between the use of this feature and the morphosyntactic and phonological features in the data set, since we cannot use the same analytical framework for the analyses.

A sociolinguistic analysis of the emphatic pronoun tags, then, forces us to look beyond a simple alternation of forms and to consider the linguistic strategies that different social groups employ to perform a similar discourse function, with the possibility that groups may converge or diverge on this level too. If we do not do this, we risk misinterpreting the nature of specific cases of syntactic variation, as García (1985) has argued with reference to some previous research on syntactic variation. We also risk failing to discover important social differences in the construction of discourse. Macaulay's further analyses (see Macaulay 2002b) led him to argue that the greater use of highlighting constructions by working class speakers in the data he analysed was one aspect of a discourse style that allowed hearers more freedom in interpretation than the style more typical of middle class speakers. The middle classes' greater use of evaluative adverbs (and adjectives), on the other hand, imposed the speaker's interpretation on the listener.

This fundamental methodological point is further illustrated by the analysis of existential *there* clauses in our data set (Cheshire 2002, Cheshire and Williams 2002), as in 10.

Extract 10.

it isn't a school no more It was a swimming baths but it's closed now...they've  
→ closed it down ...there was some petitions up to try and open it up but we don't  
think anything's happened about that (Mary; Hull)

We were interested in these constructions because previous studies have been found them to be an important linguistic environment conditioning the use of *was* rather than *were* – and we assume that the widespread use of nonstandard *was* by all the working class groups is an example of convergence, as we mentioned earlier. The first step in the analysis was to identify the functions of existential clauses in the data set. One frequent function was to introduce a noun phrase referring to an entity that was new to the discourse, like *petitions* in extract 10. We therefore identified the other linguistic forms that speakers used to introduce information that was discourse-new and hearer-new (using Prince's (1992) approach). These included syntactic constructions such as fronting and left dislocation as well as addressee-oriented lexical forms like *sort of*, and performance cues such as hesitations and false starts. We found statistically significant social class and gender differences in the overall use of these forms, with working class speakers in all three towns and, especially, female speakers, using a lower number of forms that marked the appearance of new information. In other words, they were more likely to use 'bare' noun phrases to refer to a discourse-new, hearer-new entity, like *instruction sheets* in extract 11.

Extract 11

David has been talking to Ann Williams about his stick insects.

AW: are you going to breed some more?

David: I doubt it . we run out of people to give them to . they bred so quickly  
→ we had to sell them with instruction sheets at the summer fair

The sociolinguistic variation, however, was revealed only when we analysed the full range of forms that speakers used to introduce new entities into their discourse – a range that was far more diverse than we had anticipated, and that took us a long way from the analysis of the existential constructions that had been our starting point.

Like Macaulay, we interpreted our results in terms of discourse style, in this case seeing the greater use of ‘elaborated’ noun phrases by male speakers as an instance of the well-attested male discourse preference to focus on the successful communication of referential meaning (Holmes 1995a). This raises the same issues as discourse markers, in terms of whether convergence – or in this case divergence – is better understood as relating to interactional style. Again, then, this points to a deep-seated difference between the study of variation in syntax, and discourse, and the study of phonological and morphosyntactic variation.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Our analyses of variation and change in Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull showed some parallel patterns in phonological and morphosyntactic variation. We were able to discern similar processes of convergence and divergence in these components of language. Social class was an important factor; gender was less important.

We were also able to see a similar pattern of convergence in the rapid adoption of some specific phonological features and the discourse feature *like*. The social distribution was different, however: although the new phonological and discourse forms were used by all social groups, the adoption of *like* was widespread across all social groups, whereas the adoption of the consonant features appeared to be spearheaded by working class speakers. A second discourse feature, *innit*, was used only by working class speakers, so that in its social distribution it paralleled the morphosyntactic forms that we saw as indicating dialect convergence.

We encountered several problems in our analyses of innovative discourse features and syntactic variation. Variation in these components of language seems to us to be of a very different nature to variation in phonology and morphosyntax. Although it is possible, in principle, to analyse syntactic variation in terms of a simple alternation of forms, syntax is so central to the construction of discourse that we have to look beyond the superficial alternation to examine what speakers *do* with their grammar – in other words, to focus on social interaction. The point applies equally, we argued, to the analysis of discourse forms.

We found no evidence that there is less variation in syntax than in the morphology and in turn the phonology of language (see section 2.1). Our recordings contain, for example, many tokens of the emerging modals *wanna*, *gonna* and *gotta* (Krug 2000). There is variation in clause structure, including many passive clauses, clauses with left and right dislocation, fronting, clefting and existential HAVE and BE constructions. Most of these constructions would not normally be considered as social or regional dialect forms, though Krug (op.cit) reports both social and regional variation in the distribution of the new modals, and social class differences have been noted for *get*-passives, as we saw. Syntactic change may well be rare and hard to catch on the fly, as Kroch (2001) tells us; and, indeed, we have not so far found any sign of syntactic convergence in our three cities data. However, this is perhaps because we do not yet know what to look for: the analysis of morphosyntactic, discourse and syntactic variation brings us face to face with the pervasive ideology of the standard language, which may influence the way in which we conceptualise and analyse syntactic variation (Cheshire and Stein 1997) and may even lead us to overlook its existence. Frequency is relevant here: infrequent features tend not to be salient to researchers and speakers alike, and infrequent features may be less likely to be involved in convergence.

It seems clear to us that in order to gain a full understanding of how speakers use variation in syntactic and discourse forms, and how and why change occurs in these components of language, quantitative approaches need to be integrated with qualitative approaches. We argued that this is necessary for our understanding of convergence in the diffusion of the new discourse form *innit*, and for our understanding of what appears to be divergence in the continuing use of emphatic pronoun tags in working class speech in Hull. We also argued that a more holistic approach to the analysis of syntactic variation can reveal unexpected sociolinguistic patterns in the discourse styles preferred by different social groups, illustrating our argument with a discussion of emphatic pronoun tags and, more briefly, existential *there* constructions.

Finally, although we considered morphosyntactic variation as unproblematic, showing clear parallels with phonological variation, a more holistic qualitative approach might lead to new understandings here, too. Negation, for example, has a

range of interactional functions (Cheshire 1998, Ford 2001), some of which may well affect the use of specific negative forms, such as those found in multiple negation. It is possible, too, that this kind of approach would be revealing for syntactic phenomena that are not usually considered in this way. The presence or absence of complementiser *that*, for example, might seem to be neutral in interactional terms, but its presence is associated with speaker stance and speaker point of view (Biber 1988, Cheshire 1995, Dixon 1991). There are many features of this kind whose social and regional distribution has not yet been investigated and that may well contribute towards the expression of a distinctive discourse style or towards the empathetic aspect of spoken interaction. ‘Dialect’ can include interactional style, we suggest, as well as specific linguistic features.

Analysing phonological variation can lead us to see language in terms of social practice and social interaction, as Eckert (2000) has shown, but when analysing syntactic variation it seems essential to see language in this way. There is no reason, then, to expect to find more than a loose isomorphism in patterns of variation and change in phonology, syntax and discourse. In terms of dialect convergence or divergence, we can talk about structural changes in all linguistic components resulting from contact or isolation of speakers. However, for syntax and discourse, we must additionally take account of differences in the interactional strategies on the part of the social groups involved.

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