

'Ah cannae talk like him': Television and accent change in urban Scots

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‘Ah cannae talk like him’:

Television and accent change in urban Scots

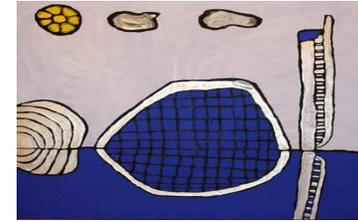


Paper overview

This paper presents the correlational study for TH-/DH-fronting and L-vocalization. The results are similar to those discussed at Toronto, i.e. use stronger dialect contact variables. All 5 variables show the same pattern of links: several factor groups are needed to achieve a satisfactory model, engagement with TV occurs alongside dialect contact, (overt) attitudinal factors are weak.

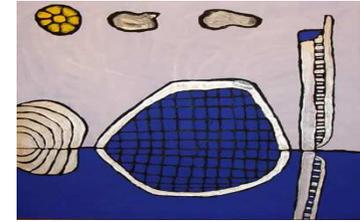
We discuss the lack of evidence for imitation, the accepted mechanism for TV influence on language change. We point to the importance of the local context, and those features which are not changing (and that the informants intend to sound Glaswegian). We propose an interpretation which takes appropriation as a key concept as the way forward (but we are hesitant).

Television and accent change in urban Scots



- Background
- Glasgow media project
- Consonant changes in Glasgow
 1. Is Glaswegian changing?
 2. If so, which social factors are involved? (and TV?)
 3. Are Glaswegian adolescents aware of these features in TV shows based in London?
 4. Can they successfully imitate 'media-Cockney' accents?
- Concluding remarks

Consonant changes in UK urban accents



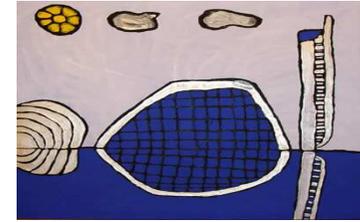
- Certain features of pronunciation, such as the use of [f] for (th), TH-fronting, in e.g. *think*, *tooth*, are spreading across the UK

e.g. Foulkes and Docherty (1999), Kerswill (2003)

In Glasgow, these features are found exclusively in speech of working-class adolescents with relatively low social and geographical mobility (e.g. Stuart-Smith et al, 2007)



Consonant changes in UK urban accents



- is this to do with the media, e.g. London-based dramas, such as the popular soap drama, *EastEnders*?
- screened 4 times/week plus weekend omnibus
- regularly attracted 18 million viewers/episode (i.e. almost one-third UK population)
- viewing of key episodes have caused exceptional surges in electricity demand (e.g. National Grid 2001)
- viewers can be highly engaged (e.g. Buckingham 1987)

Media and language change?



- Within quantitative sociolinguistics, media thought to:
 - raise awareness of linguistic varieties/variation
 - affect attitudes towards linguistic varieties/variation(e.g. Milroy and Milroy 1985)
- If core features of grammar are affected by media
 - voluntary orientation towards media
 - conscious copying from media modelsTrudgill (1986), Carvalho (2004)

The Glasgow media project



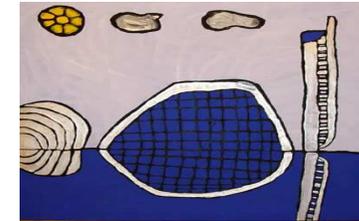
Is TV a contributory factor in accent change in adolescents?
(2002-5) ESRC R000239757

Does TV play a role in the appearance of ‘Cockney’
accent features in the speech of Glaswegian
adolescents?

The research team

- The Research Fellow
Claire Timmins
- The Statistician
(Prof) Gwilym Pryce
- The Media expert
(Prof) Barrie Gunter

- a group of kids (and adults) from Maryhill in Glasgow

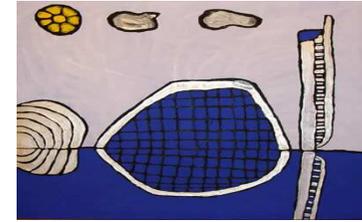


Method



- sample
 - 36 adolescents; 12 adults (working-class)
- data
 - speech: wordlist and spontaneous
 - Questionnaire; informal interviews
- design
 - Experiment; correlational study
- analysis
 - auditory transcription
 - all tokens of wordlist
 - first 30 tokens of spontaneous speech

Linguistic variables



- TH-fronting: [f] for [θ] in e.g. *think, both*
- DH-fronting: [v] for [ð] in e.g. *brother*
- L-vocalization: /l/ vocalized to high back (un)rounded vowel e.g. *people, milk, well*
- all unexpected in Glasgow English
- reported informally since 1980s (Macafee 1983)
- confirmed as changes in 1997, and argued to be part of sociolinguistic construction of identity distinguishing WC adolescents from MC speakers in the city

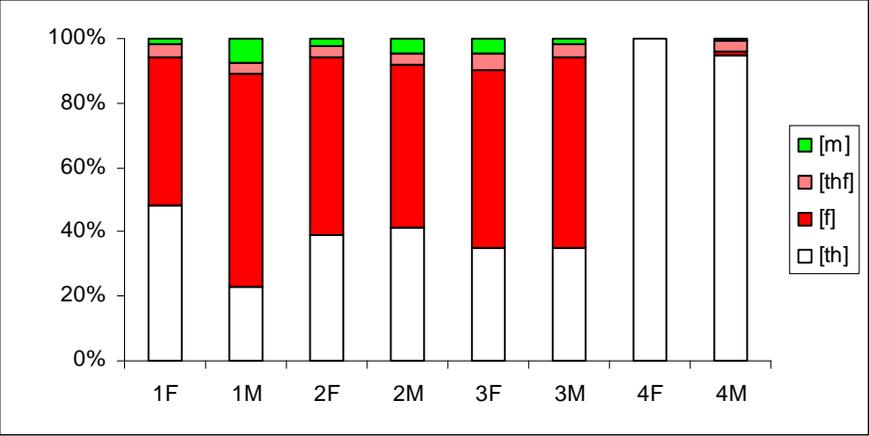
(Stuart-Smith *et al* 2007)

1. Glaswegian is changing

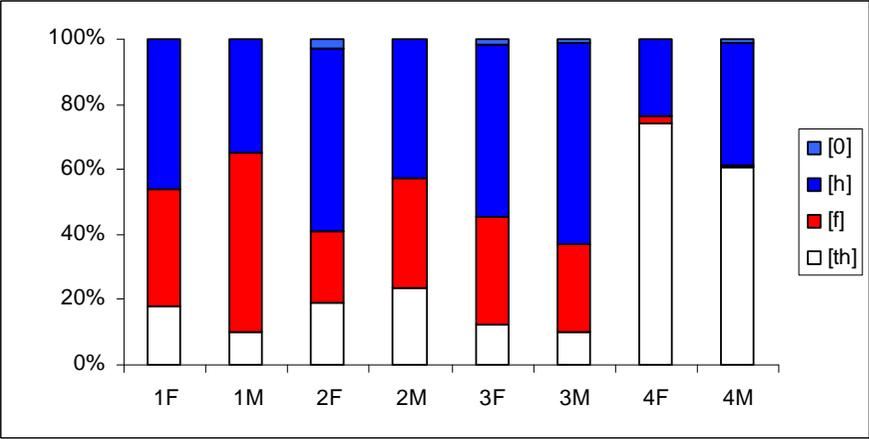


- For all three variables, in wordlists and conversational speech
 - apparent-time change: adolescents use more **'new'** variants than adults
 - real-time change: we find more **'new'** variants in 2003 than in 1997

1. TH-fronting

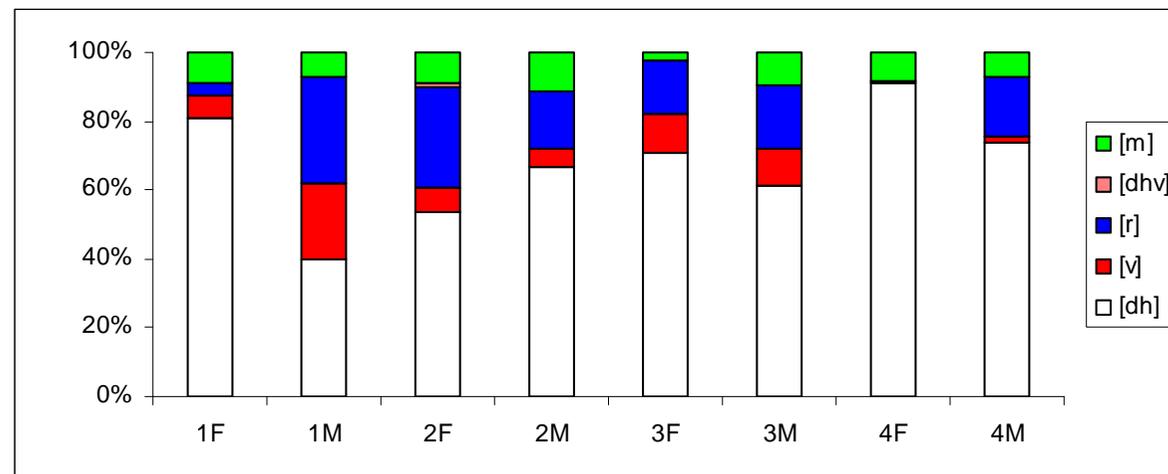


wordlists (n = 951)



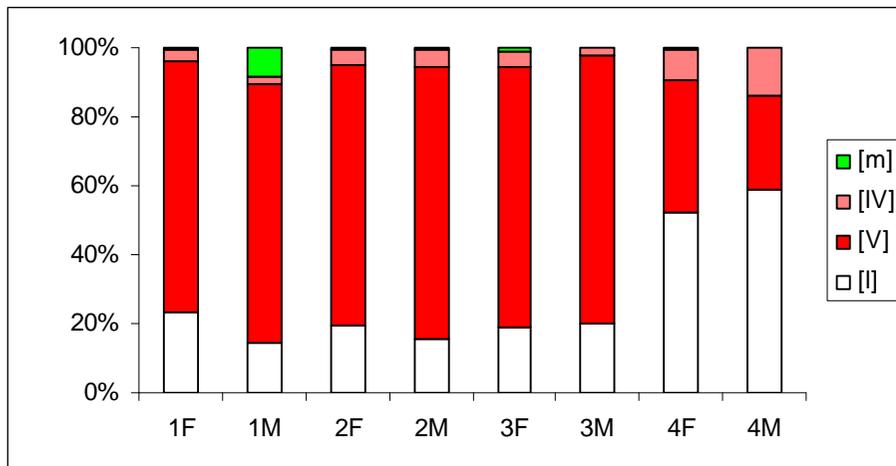
conversations (n = 2519)

1. DH-fronting

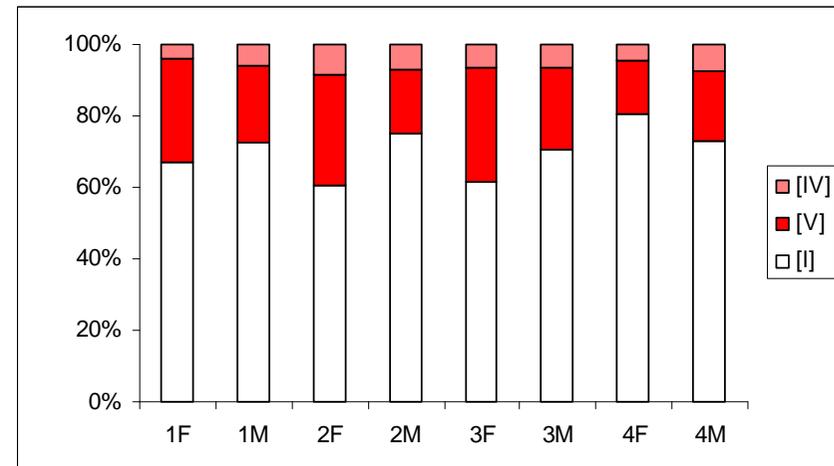


wordlists (only) (n = 973)

1. L-vocalization

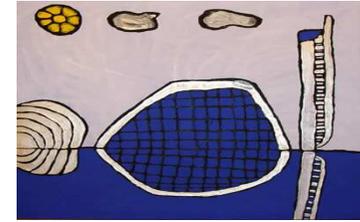


wordlists (n = 1165)



conversations (n = 1429)

2. Extra-linguistic variables



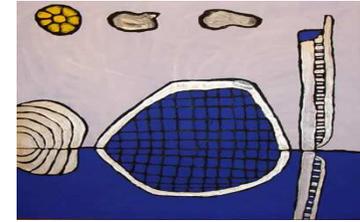
In addition to: linguistic (word-position); age; gender

thematic ‘categories’ of variables:

- dialect contact (beyond and within Glasgow)
- attitudes to accents (auditory/mental image)
- social practices/identities
- music (incl. radio)
- computers (incl. internet)
- film (incl. video/DVD)
- sport
- TV

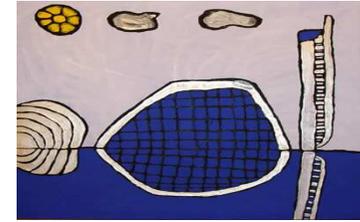
created from questionnaire; informal interviews;
conversations; participant observation

2. Statistical analysis



- logistic regression
- 'general-to-specific' model
- create list for each thematic category
- run regressions on each category list (e.g. dialect contact, attitudes, TV, etc.)
- significant variables from each list + theoretically interesting variables
- > overall shortlist
- run regressions on list until only significant variables remain

2. Dialect contact



Initial baseline criteria: informants born and raised in area
(2.8% born in England, 2001 Census)

Most have few relatives beyond Glasgow, whom they talk to more than they see. Main contact with friends and family within Glasgow.

- Some positive links with relatives and friends living in the South of England for all variables except L-vocalization in spontaneous speech
(variance explained: 5-8%)

2. Attitudes to accents

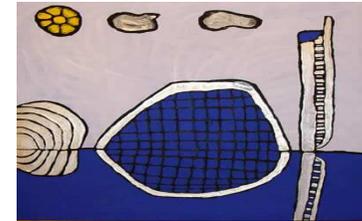


Attitudinal survey of 7 urban accents, and 'mental' image of 8 urban accents.

London accents rated lower than other accents.

- Some positive links for liking London accent, and/or being able to identify London accent correctly, but also scattered relationships with other accents.
(variance explained: 5-12%)
- No evidence that liking London accents results from liking London TV programmes

2. social practices



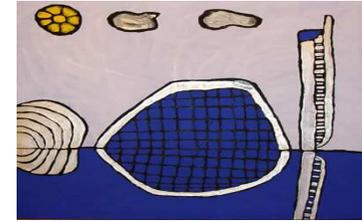
Our sample captures some existing groups and fragments of others

The majority of the sample identify each other as 'neds', i.e. young urban delinquents

"I'm a wee Glasgow person. I wouldnae say I'm a ned 'cause I don't like go oot and start fights an' aw that."
(2m3)

- some positive links with more anti-school practices (variance explained: 2-18%)

2. TV

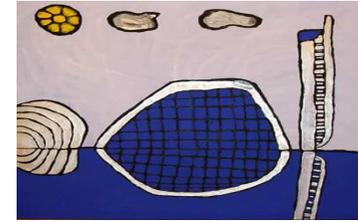


Our informants report access to 3+ TV sets at home, and say that they watch TV every day, with average exposure of around 3 hours/day.

London-based programmes are rated highest for soap (*EastEnders*), comedy (*Only Fools and Horses*), and police drama (*The Bill*).

TH-/DH-fronting and L-vocalization occur (variably) in 'media-Cockney'

2. TV



- A number of factors are significant,
 - positive correlations mainly with engagement with *EastEnders*
 - negative with simply watching TV, or engaging with Scottish/Northern/US programmes.
 - The relationships with reported activities during TV watching, and/or discussing TV during the recorded conversations are more mixed.
 - Fairly consistent pattern across the five variables.
- (variance explained: 4-13%)

2. TH-fronting (wordlists) across categories



Variables tested:

linguistic

film

music

sport

computers

social

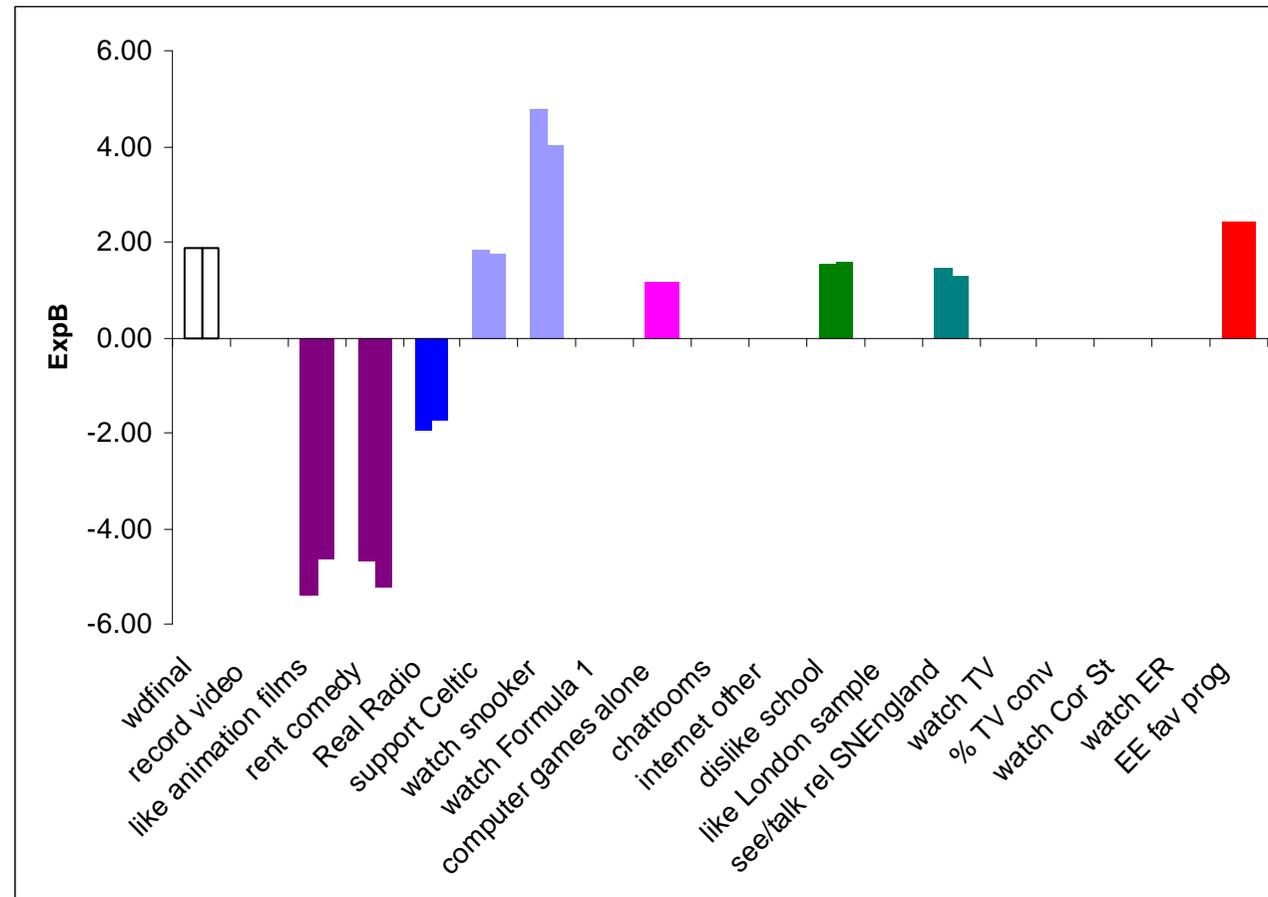
attitudes

dialect

contact

TV

15/06/07



Reg 1: $n = 756$, $r^2 = 34$; Reg 2: $n = 756$, $r^2 = 33$

2. TH-fronting (conversations) across categories



Variables tested:

linguistic

film

music

sport

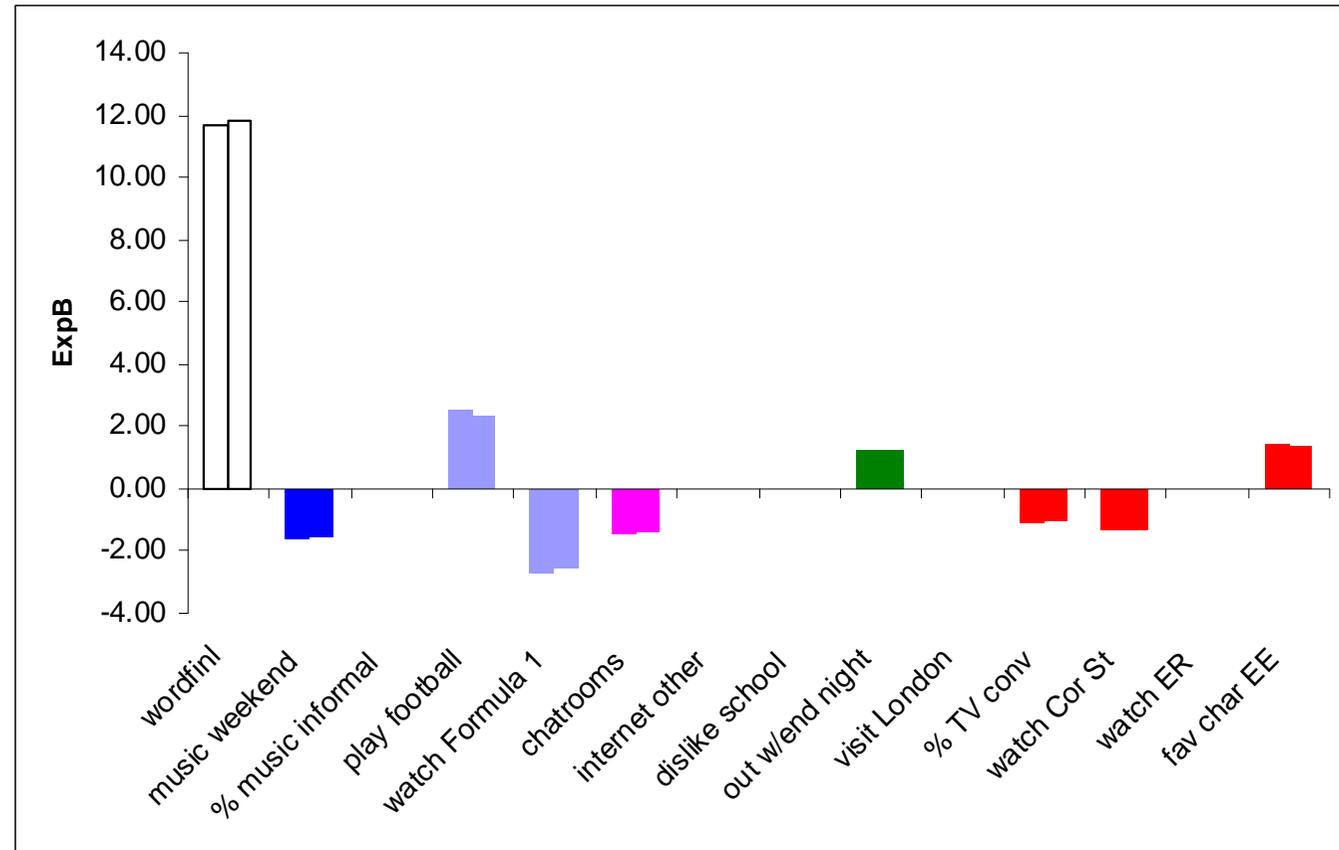
computers

social

dialect

contact

TV



Reg 1: $n = 1327$, $r^2 = 23$; Reg 2: $n = 1327$, $r^2 = 23$

2. DH-fronting (wordlists) across categories



Variables tested:

linguistic

film

music

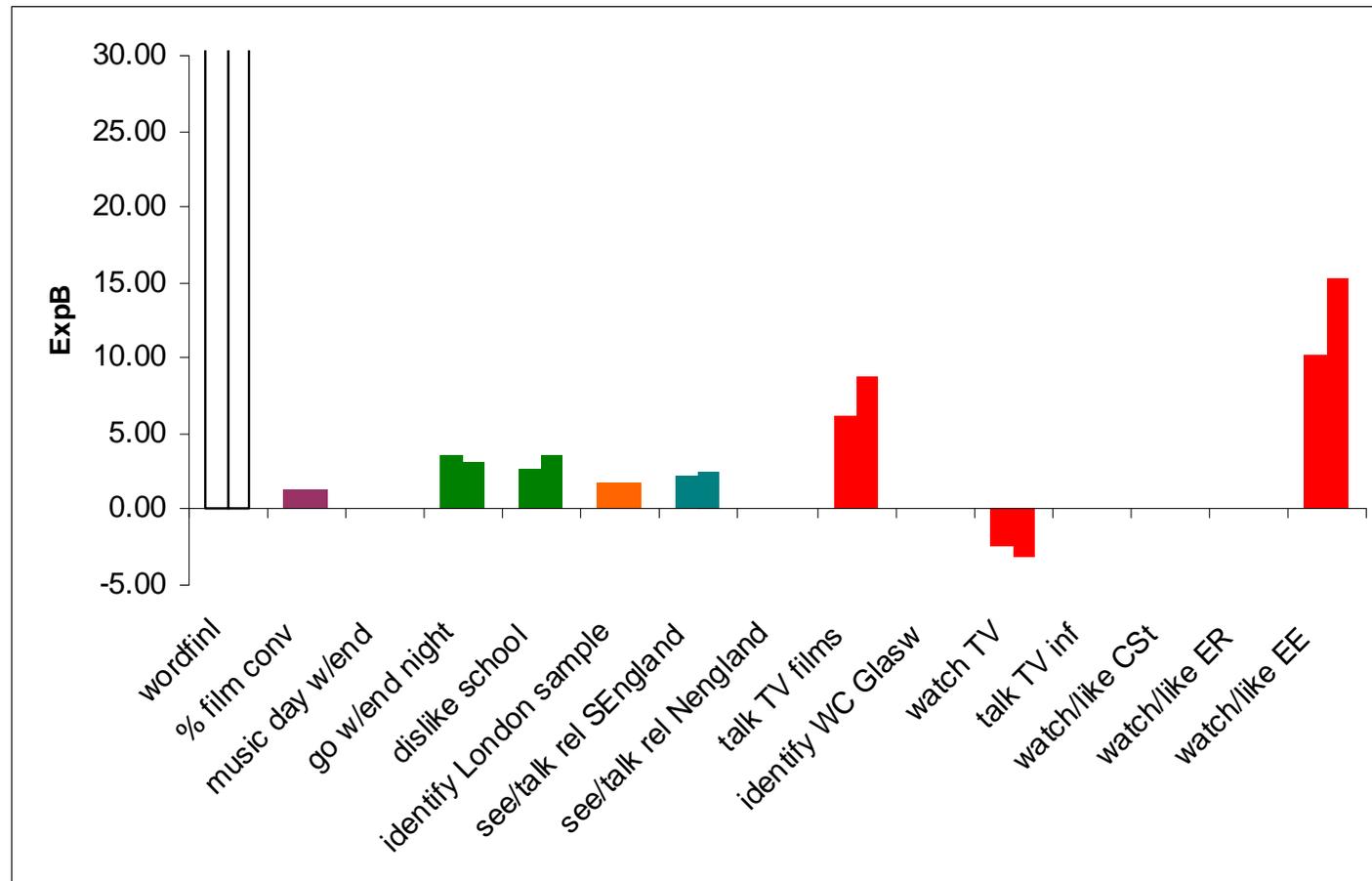
social

attitudes

dialect

contact

TV



Reg 1: $n = 665$, $r^2 = 53$; Reg 2: $n = 684$, $r^2 = 50$

2. L-vocalization (wordlists) across categories



Variables tested:

linguistic

music

sport

computers

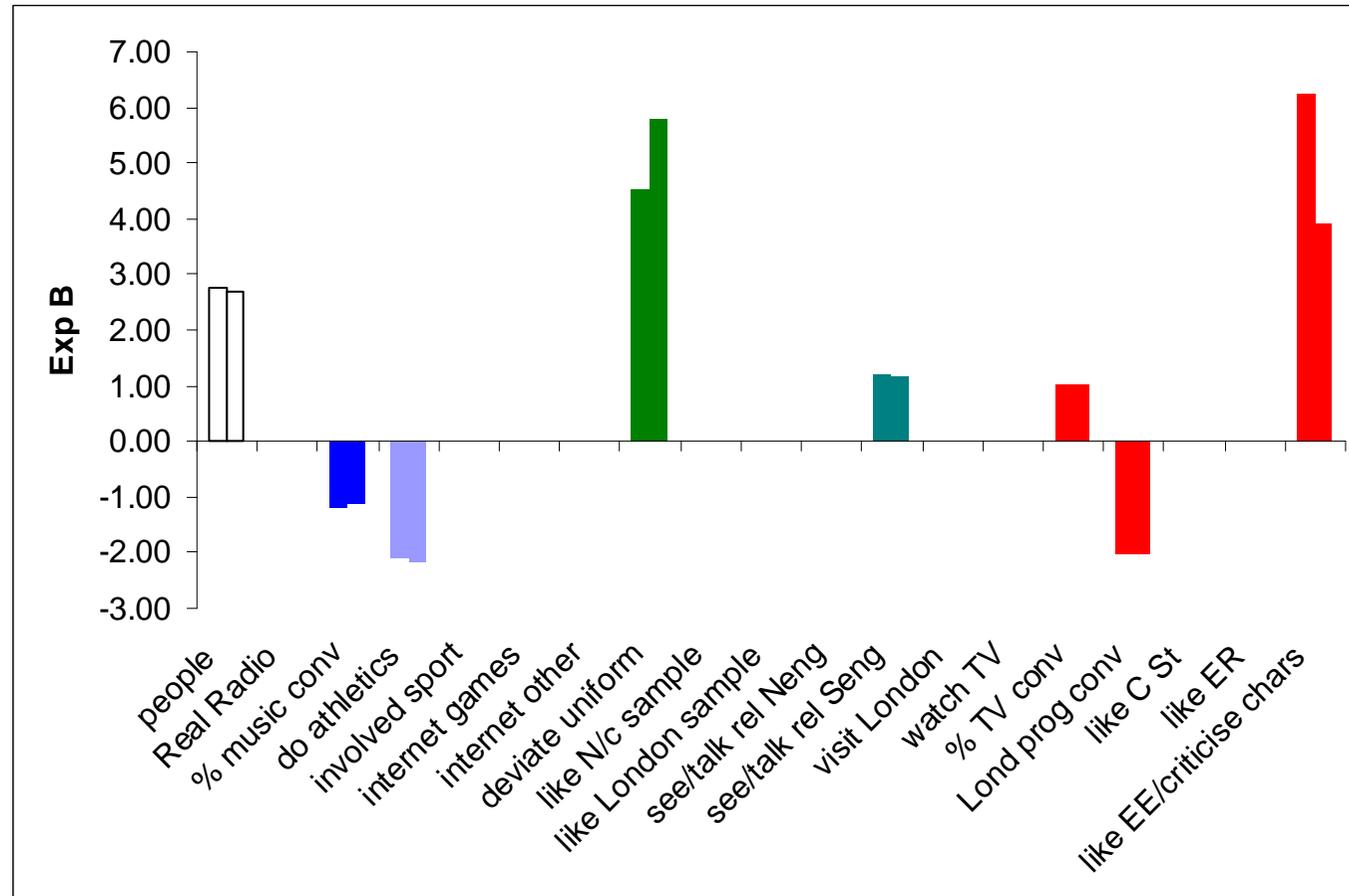
social

attitudes

dialect

contact

TV



Reg 1: $n = 900$, $r^2 = 20$; Reg 2: $n = 900$, $r^2 = 18$

2. L-vocalization (conversations) across categories



Variables tested:

Linguistic

film

sport

computers

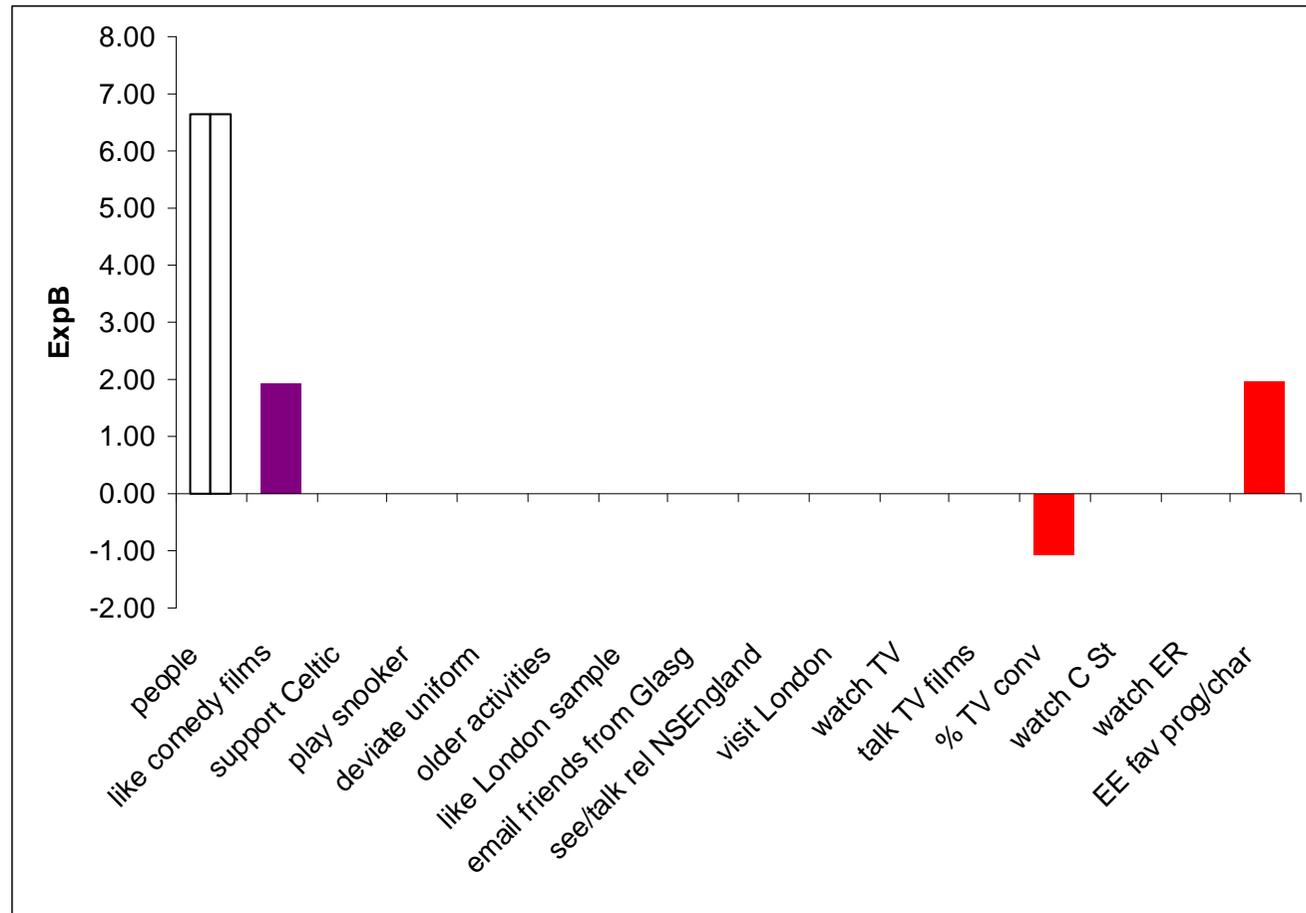
social

attitudes

dialect

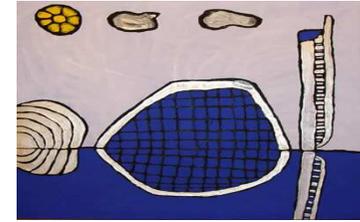
contact

TV



Reg 1: $n = 1015$, $r^2 = 20$; Reg 2: $n = 1015$, $r^2 = 19$

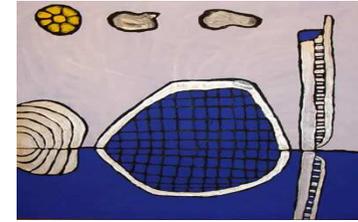
2. Interpreting the correlations with TV



- may stand for another factor unaccounted for within the model, e.g. possibly covert positive attitudes towards Cockney (cf. Kristiansen 2003)
- may refer to those adolescents, who show such features, and who also prefer *EastEnders*/other programmes set in London
- may result – in some way – from their engagement with popular programmes set in London

NB other significant factors in model are unlikely to be assumed to have a direct causal effect e.g. seeing relatives from Southern England

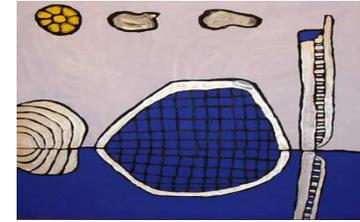
3. Awareness of 'media-Cockney'?



- Explored using informal imitation task (boys only) given during informal interview (cf Preston 1992)
 - informants shown a set of picture cards
 - asked to pronounce words first in their own accent
 - shown a picture of a leading actor from *EastEnders*
 - asked to talk about his accent and theirs
 - asked to say words again, but with the same accent as the actor
 - Fine phonetic analysis of the pairs of words



3. Awareness of media-Cockney



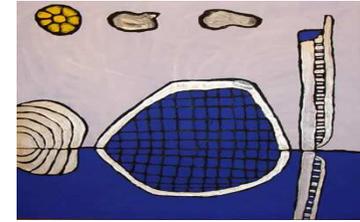
All children thought the actor's accent was different from theirs

- *'he's from a different place ... just different'*
- *'English' 'he's fae England' 's just ... pure English, no?'*
- *'English snobby' 'says it posher'*

- *'It's like a sore throat accent ... or ... they took his tonsils oot or something'*
- *'Ah 'hink they pronounce more'*
- *'He changes the letters, if it was "f" he'd use "v"'*

- *'he talks different' 'he talks more tough'*
- *'It's aw right ... I wouldnae like to speak like it but'*

4. Imitation of 'media-Cockney'



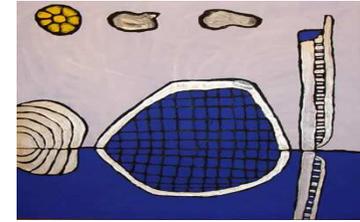
- First impression: 'Ah cannae talk like him'
- idiosyncratic, subtle, alteration of segments
- more alteration to suprasegmentals
- no apparent systematic alteration of (th dh l)
- no evidence from this, of awareness of these features as particular features of this character's speech
- Implication: variation in these speakers is not resulting from conscious copying/orientation

Summary



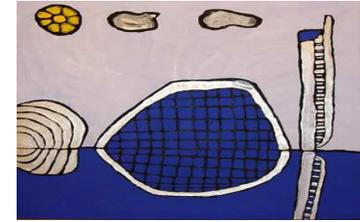
- consistent patterns across 3 linguistic variables point to involvement of a range of social factors, including:
 - Dialect contact
 - Social practices
 - Engagement with TV, though not apparently leading to awareness/(overt) positive attitudes
- empirical support for role of dialect contact in these changes (as always assumed)
- importance of social practices, and development of sociolinguistic patterns, for these speakers within local context (as assumed by Stuart-Smith et al, 2007)

Concluding remarks



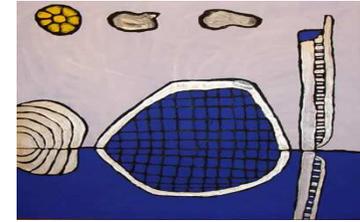
- The correlations (implicitly), and other evidence from the project (e.g. the experiment, qualitative analysis) highlights the role of individuals.
- Modelling the results for TV (amongst other factors) probably requires us to return to individual speakers in their local environment.
- and with that a shift of perspective, specifically to one which emphasizes watching TV as a socio-culturally embedded activity during which viewers appropriate such elements as fit their view of the world ('communicative appropriation'), cf. e.g. Holly *et al* (2001).

Concluding remarks



- We suggest that phonetic variants may be/have been /are being appropriated into the existing system, but only to the extent that existing sociolinguistic identity is not compromised. We note:
 - No evidence for any shifts in vowels relating to London-based models, or of similar statistical patterns for vowels
 - ‘new’ variants occur as part of a thriving system of local non-standard variation, such as [h] for (th), Scots L-vocalization, Scots vowel variation (e.g. *oot/out*, *aff/off*)
 - Awareness of TH-fronting developed recently
 - There is no evidence that our informants want to sound anything other than ‘pure Glaswegian’

Concluding remarks



- Thus if TV is involved in these changes, we assume that it must be another socially-bound process dependent on local context.
- But note that until we have further evidence, i.e. ethnographically-collected data for interactions including those in front of, and after TV engagement), this remains the beginnings of a speculative model.