



Universität Hannover | Deutsches Seminar | Juniorprofessur Medienkommunikation

Wintersemester 2006/07

Medien und Sprachwandel | media and language change

Woche 6 : 23.11.06

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Paper overview

This paper was given during a seminar on media and language change given at Hannover University run by Jannis Androustopoulos and Jane Stuart-Smith.

The paper discusses critically previous views about the influence of the media on core features of language, presents an outline of the Glasgow media project, details the correlational results (with TH-fronting as an example, same results as for Copenhagen), and discusses the lack of evidence for the informants' awareness and/or ability to imitate London English accent features.

JSS 22/12/07

Gliederung

- » Haben Medien einen Einfluss auf Sprachwandel?
- » Example problem: TH-fronting in Glasgow
- » The Glasgow project
 - ▶ Scope
 - ▶ Results – evidence from statistical correlations:
 - > Dialect contact
 - > Attitudes
 - > TV
 - ▶ Awareness?
 - ▶ Imitation?
 - ▶ Conclusions



Does media influence language change? The 'Anglo' view

e.g. Chambers (1998), Milroy and Milroy (1985), Trudgill (1986), (1988), Labov (2001)

NO (well, if they do, it can only be superficial)

'at the deeper reaches of language change – sound changes and grammatical changes - the media have no significant effect at all' (Chambers 1998: 124)

'language is not systematically affected by the mass media'

Labov (2001), 228



Does media influence language change? The 'Anglo' view

- » Language change takes place during face to face interaction
- » Media do not permit the same kind of interaction, so cannot 'cause' language change
- » There is no evidence for media influencing systemic language change
- » Media can be involved in language change at a conscious level
 - » help spread vocabulary
 - » raise awareness of standard language
 - » be used as model for conscious changes (imitation)

Does media influence language change? The 'Anglo' view

Critique

The main anxiety is that experience of broadcast media will be sufficient to impel a speaker to alter an aspect of their core grammar subconsciously (and as the only reason).

- » Standardization ('authority' media)
- » Media consumers are 'passive'
- » Levels of language
- » Consciousness/control over language
- » Evidence?

Does media influence language change? The 'Germanic' view

e.g. Holly (1995), Schmitz (2004), Brandt (2000), (1985)

PROBABLY (but it's all a bit uncertain)

'Das Hörfunk und Fernsehen wie jedes Massenmedium in irgendeiner Weise ihr Publikum beeinflussen, ist unumstritten.'

Brandt (2000), 2164

'Sie [= Moderne Medien] bringen mehr Energie in das Sprachleben: beschleunigen Sprachgeschichte, multiplizieren Varianten und Varietäten und stärken gleichzeitig Wirkungsgrad und Geltungsbereich von Normen.'

Schmitz (2004), 30



Does media influence language change? The 'Germanic' view

- » Media do affect language change (but it is not always clear in what way)
- » Media increase awareness of language varieties, both of standard language, and also of different dialects
- » Media speed up language changes already underway
- » Media present and develop norms for written and spoken standard language
- » Media may affect vocabulary, and also core aspects of grammar (morphology: Schmitz)

Critique

- » Standardization ('authority' media)
- » Influence of prevalent linguistic model(s)?
- » Media as locus of linguistic innovation?
- » Media consumers can be 'active'?
- » Evidence?

Does media influence language change? 'Anglo' vs 'Germanic'

Common features:

- » Generalization
- » 'authority' media and standardization
- » Media spread vocabulary
- » Media increase linguistic awareness
- » Lack of evidence

Main difference:

- » 'Anglo' preoccupied with one model of change via personal interaction, and notion of linguistic levels/consciousness



Does media influence language change? Results: Carvalho 2004

- » Spread of Brazilian Portuguese palatalization into Uruguayan Portuguese
 - ▶ urbanization (i.e. mobility of population)
 - ▶ TV
 - ▶ Uruguayan speakers are linguistically insecure
 - ▶ They admire Brazilian Portuguese shown on TV
- » TV is an indirect factor in this change, relying on positive attitudes, conscious orientation to TV speech, and active imitation/copying of features from TV



Does media influence language change? Results: Carvalho 2004

Critique I: status of evidence

- » No correlations found to support connection between palatalization and TV
- » Informal correlation given only for general exposure to TV and palatalization
- » Qualitative (discourse) evidence used to support claim that TV is 'corrective agent'. This is sensible, but do *these* speakers palatalize?



Does media influence language change? Results: Carvalho 2004

Critique II: on correlating language and TV

'It is doubtful that exposure to television and adoption of standard features may ever be directly correlated' (p. 143)

But Naro (1981) did find significant statistical correlations between watching novelas and the use of Standard Portuguese morpho-syntactic variants in Brazilian Portuguese. (They are reported as such in Naro and Scherre 1996.)



Critique II: on correlating language and TV

... and ...

- » Naro and Scherre (1996) also find statistical correlations between morpho-syntactic features of standardization and interaction/exposure to media
- » But gross media variable, so it is difficult to know exactly what standardization is really correlating to here.
- » 'we do not feel that it can be concluded from our research that involvement with the mass media causes changes in linguistic behavior. Rather we feel that a third factor, such as a general orientation or attitude towards the surrounding society, might be responsible ...' (p. 228)



Does media influence language change? Do we have the answer?

All South American Portuguese data fit with assumption of media involved in language change which is

- ▶ high up in linguistic level (e.g. lexis)
- ▶ and/or requires a conscious orientation such that speakers knowingly copy features from the linguistic models presented on TV

Cf. Trudgill (1986: 41)

The Glasgow media project – motivation

Working-class Glaswegian teenagers use phonetic variants typical of Southern English, e.g. TH-fronting, using [f] for [θ] in e.g. *think*.

Is this because they watch TV programmes set in London?
(recall Trudgill's findings, and discussion of the same in Norwich in 1980s)

New project:

Is TV a contributory factor in accent change in adolescents?

(2002-5)

funded by Economic and Social Research Council
(R000239757)



The Glasgow media project – assumptions

1. It is necessary, and possible, to investigate the relationships between the media and language variation and change
2. There are several potential causes for language change
3. If the media are involved in language change, this is most likely to be as **a contributory factor**, alongside other social factors

cf, media effects research:

‘Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences.’ Klapper (1960: 8)

The Glasgow media project – Research questions

Are the media a contributory factor in systemic language change under certain circumstances for certain individuals?

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

The Glasgow media project – The research team

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

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



Kippochill Road. As with many other parts of the city, new housing has been built on



The Glasgow media project – scope

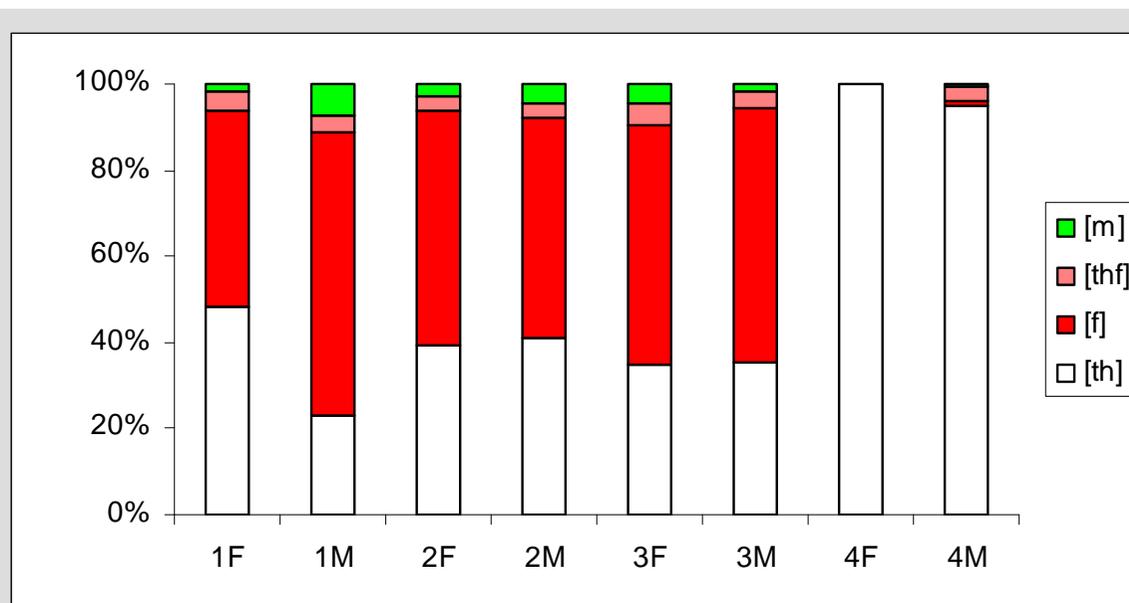
- » sample
 - ▶ 36 adolescents (3 age groups); 12 adults (working-class)
 - ▶ longitudinal - tracks 2 age groups across 2 years
- » methods
 - ▶ quantitative and qualitative
- » data
 - ▶ speech: wordlist and spontaneous conversations
 - ▶ questionnaire
 - ▶ informal interviews
 - ▶ diaries
 - ▶ television/language experiment (quiz show)

Specific theme for this seminar

1. Is TH-fronting spreading in Glaswegian vernacular?
2. If so, is this correlated with:
 - a. **Dialect contact** with Cockney and/or other dialects of English?
 - b. **attitudes** to Cockney and/or other urban accents?
 - c. **watching TV** programmes set in London?
 - d. or these and more *together*?
3. Are the Glaswegian kids **aware** of this feature in 'Cockney' shown on TV?
4. Can they successfully **imitate** 'media-Cockney' phonology?

TH-fronting in wordlists will be used as example

1. TH-fronting is spreading in Glaswegian



n = 951

1 = 10-11 years

2 = 12-13 years

3 = 14-15 years

4 = 40-60 years

- apparent-time change: adolescents use more **[f]** than adults
- real-time change: we find more **[f]** in 2003 than in 1997

2a. TH-fronting and dialect contact

Recall:

- » Language changes spread through speech accommodation in face-to-face interaction.

- » Diffusion (= spread) of TH-fronting presumes actual contact with speakers of other dialects.
 - ▶ Do Glaswegian kids have contact with people from the south of England?

2a. There is some contact with dialects outside Glasgow (mainly mediated/passive)

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

Questionnaire and interview data revealed:

- » most have a few relatives beyond Glasgow
- » they talk on the telephone to these relatives more than they see them (when the relatives visit them)
- » most show a low degree of active mobility outside the city.
- » most have face-to-face contact with friends (and family) within Glasgow.

Statistical methodology – logistic regression

- » One 'dependent' variable = linguistic
 - ▶ e.g. [f] for /θ/

- » Many 'independent' variables = extralinguistic
 - ▶ e.g. within category of 'dialect contact'
 - > number of relatives in London
 - > frequency of contact with relatives in London ...

- » Results indicate
 - ▶ whether there are statistically significant correlations with a particular variable
 - ▶ The direction and relative strength of these relationships
 - ▶ how much of overall variation is explained by variables in the regression (good explanation = < 20%)

2a. Result: TH-fronting is linked with dialect contact

TH-fronting is linked positively with

- ▶ having relatives in the South of England

(only 8% variance explained)

2b. TH-fronting and attitudes

Recall

'television may be a part of the 'softening-up' process leading to the adoption of the merger [of θ /f] but it does not cause it'

Trudgill (1986), 55

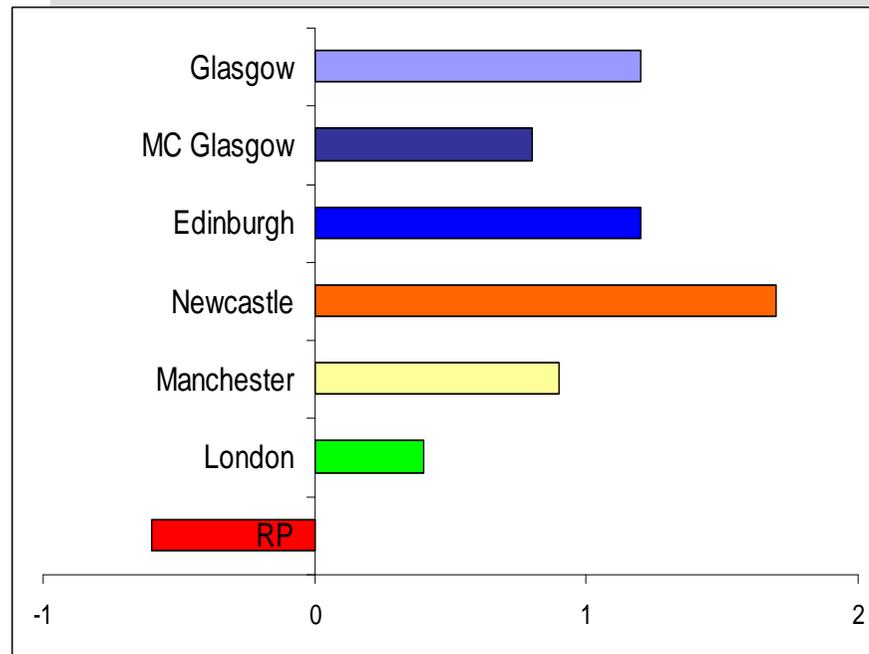
i.e. watching television is supposed to provoke positive attitudes towards Cockney, and so (in some way) support the adoption of [f] (a Cockney feature)

2b. Attitudes to UK urban accents - methodology

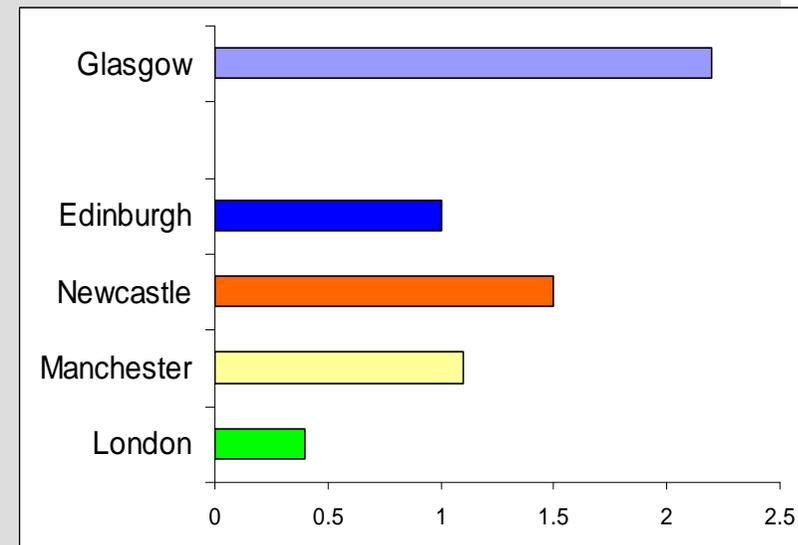
- » speech samples of 7 urban accents
 - ▶ female speakers of same age
 - ▶ reading same passage
 - ▶ beginning of questionnaire
 - ▶ also checked identification of accents

- » 'mental image' of 8 urban accents
 - e.g. 'what do you think of the accents in *London*?'
 - ▶ end of questionnaire

2b. Glaswegian adolescents like **Cockney**, but less than other UK urban accents



Speech samples



mental image

average responses for all informants
 (scale: less positive more positive)

2b. TH-fronting is linked with attitudes to accents

TH-fronting is linked positively with

- ▶ liking the Cockney speech sample
- ▶ and liking the Manchester speech sample

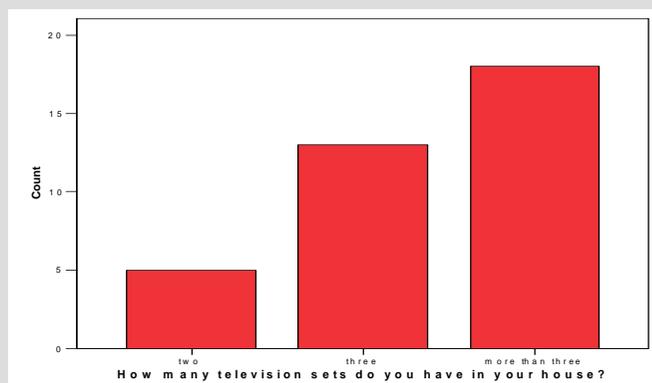
- ▶ but negatively with liking an Edinburgh accent ('posh')

(only 12% variance explained)

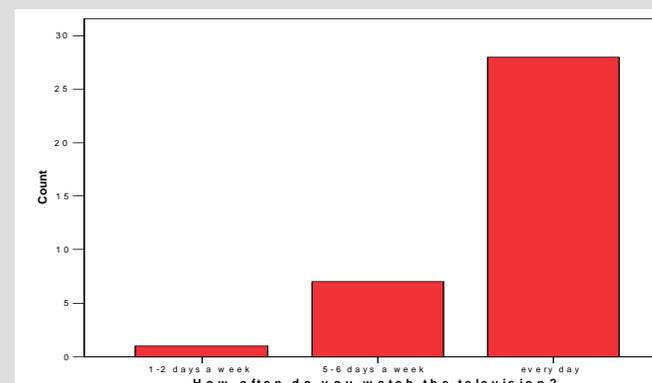
2b. Trudgill's notion of 'softening up'?

- » We have statistical evidence for TH-fronting being linked with positive attitudes towards the Cockney speech sample
- » Are these attitudes towards Cockney the result of watching popular programmes set in London (i.e. Trudgill's 'softening-up')?
 - ▶ We tested this claim statistically using multiple regression analysis to find out which variables might be linked with holding positive attitudes to Cockney.
 - ▶ The only significant result was in fact a **negative** link between liking the Cockney speech sample and watching *EastEnders*.
- » Our evidence suggests not

2c. TH-fronting and TV – do they watch TV?

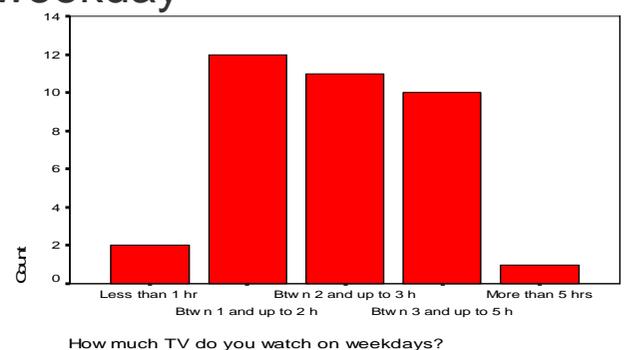


many have 3 or more TV sets

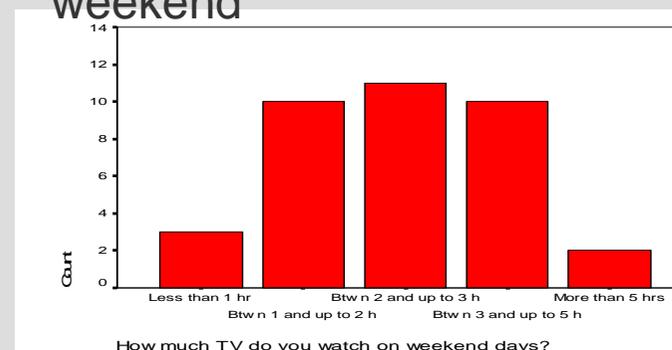


most watch TV every day

weekday



weekend

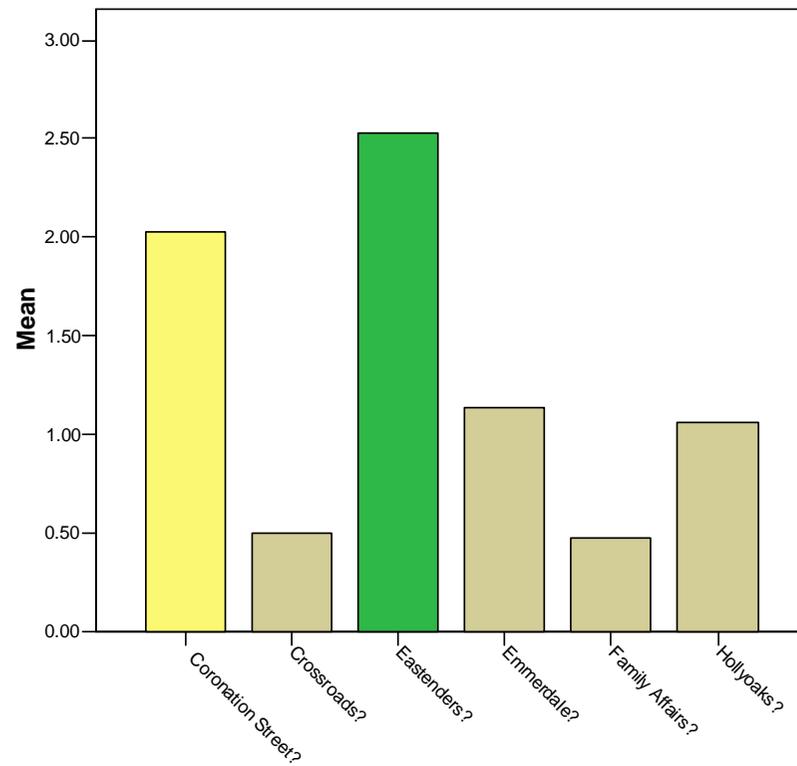


self-reported TV exposure of between 1 to 5 hours a day (av. 3hrs)

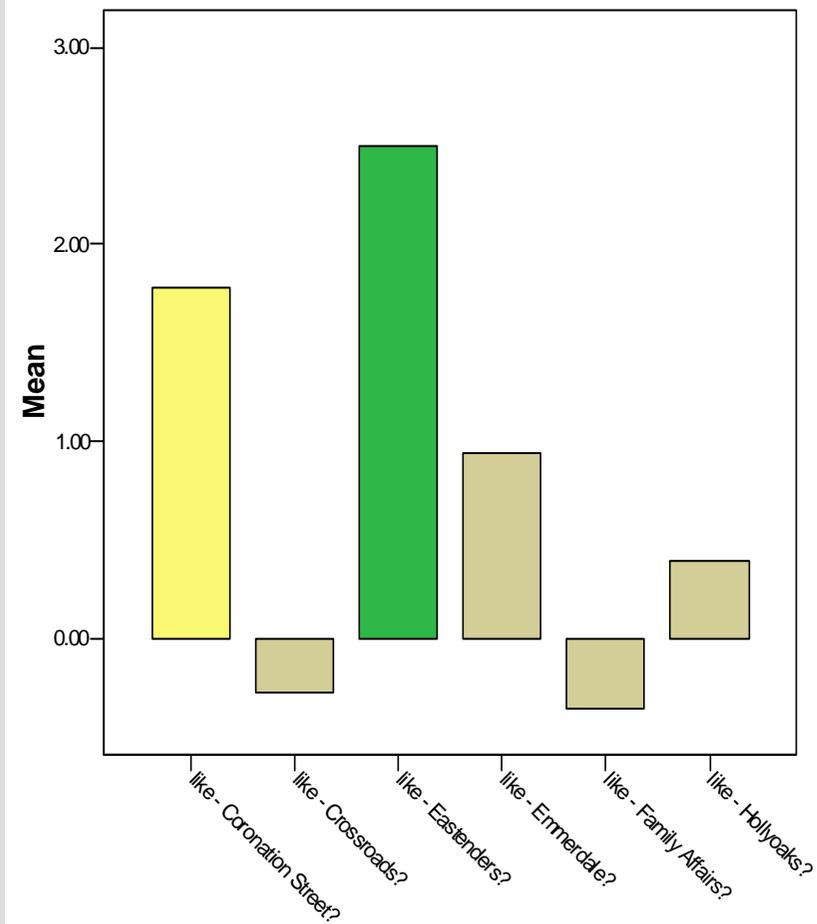
2c. They watch and like *EastEnders* the most

Exposure and engagement with urban-based soap dramas

watch



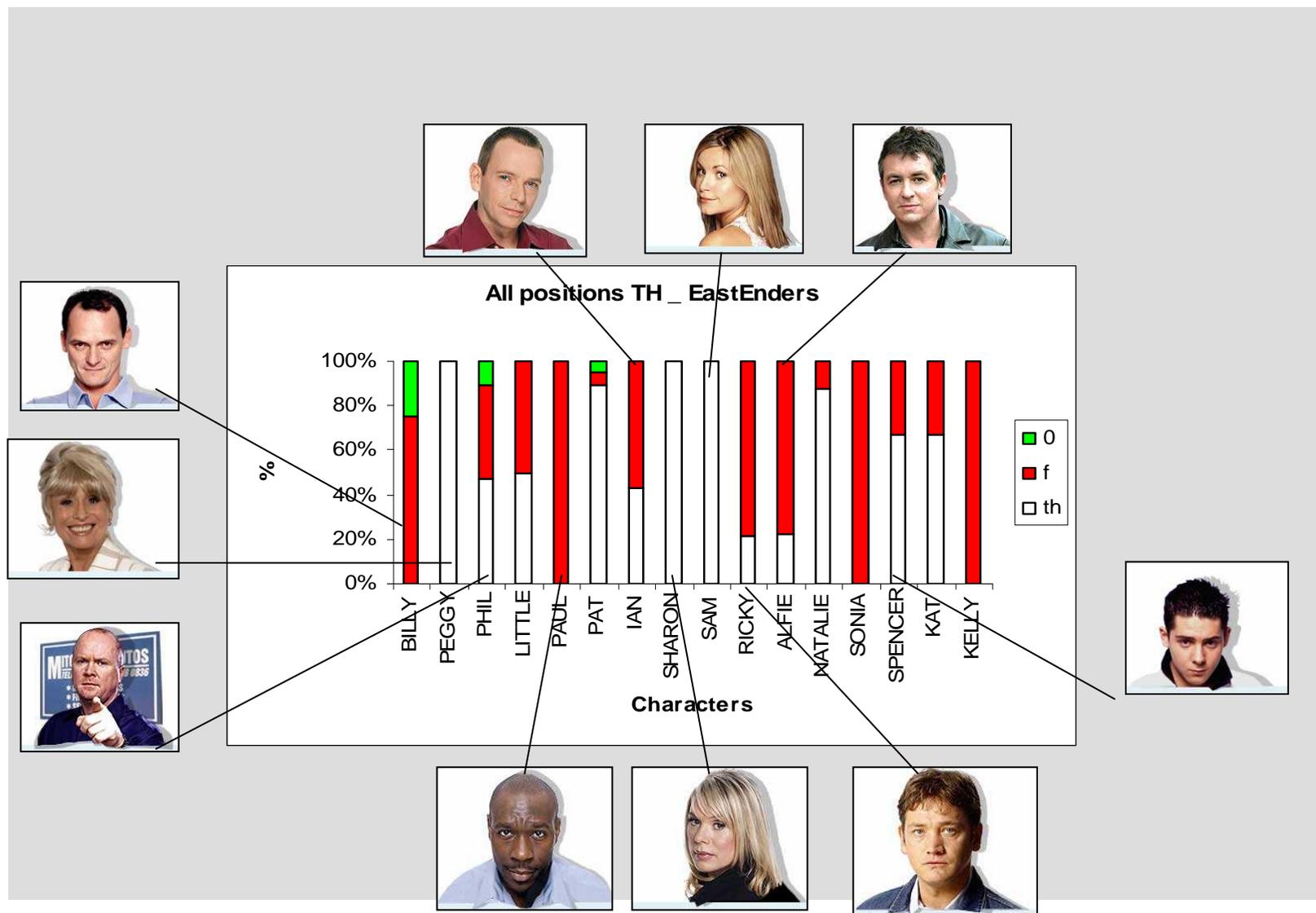
like



2c. *EastEnders* is special

- » Some TV programmes constitute social phenomena.
- » e.g. the London-based soap *EastEnders* (1985-)
 - ▶ 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)

2c. TH-fronting occurs in *EastEnders*, but is variable



2c. TH-fronting is linked with TV factors

TH-fronting is linked positively with

- ▶ giving *EastEnders* as favourite programme
- ▶ criticizing soap characters
- ▶ liking *EastEnders* (also *The Bill*, London police drama)

but negatively with

- ▶ general exposure to TV; watching Scottish, Northern, and US-based dramas
- ▶ reported talking about TV whilst watching TV
- ▶ talking about TV programmes in the conversations

(only around 5% variance explained)

2d. TH-fronting – a combination of factors

In fact, our statistical model was designed to consider a *range* of 'social' factors *together*:

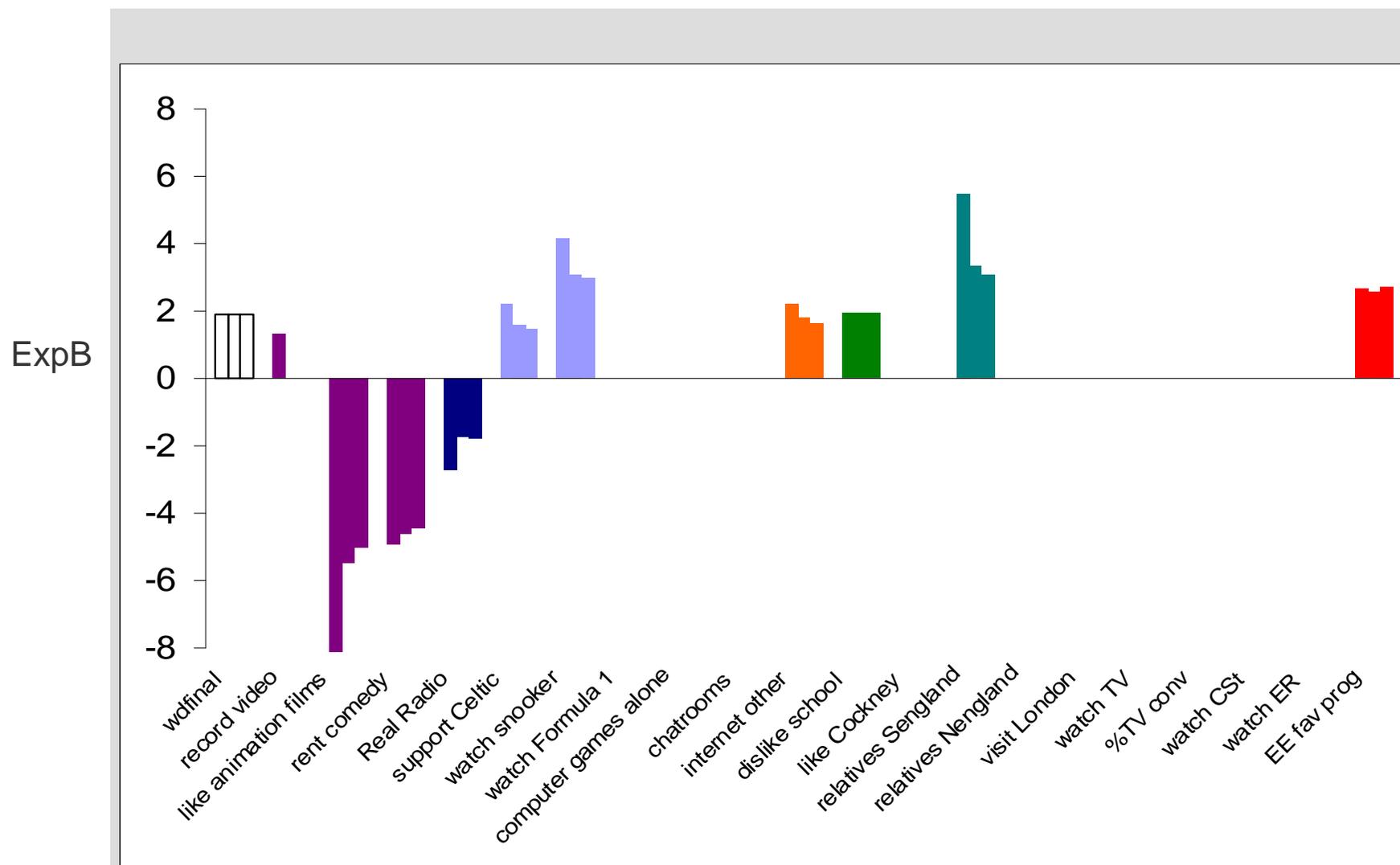
- ▶ dialect contact
- ▶ attitudes to accents
- ▶ TV

and

- ▶ social practices/identities
- ▶ music (incl. radio)
- ▶ computers (incl. internet)
- ▶ film (incl. video/DVD)
- ▶ sport
- ▶ age
- ▶ gender
- ▶ (and linguistic: word position)



2d. 'combined' regression



Reg 1: n=756; $r^2=.377$; Reg 2: n=756; $r^2=.358$; Reg 3: n=756; $r^2=.354$

2. Summary of results

- » There is statistical evidence for correlations between TH-fronting and
 - ▶ Contact with those living in the South of England
 - ▶ Positive attitudes towards Cockney
 - ▶ The popular TV show
- » combined analysis shows (as we might expect)
 - ▶ **several** factors linked with TH-fronting
 - ▶ **engagement** with TV (*EastEnders*) is robust **alongside** dialect contact
 - ▶ attitudinal factors weaker than other factors

3. Does watching TV promote awareness of linguistic features?

Recall

It is continually claimed in the literature that the representation of varieties on television increase awareness of (aspects) of these linguistic models.

Are our Glaswegian informants aware of the linguistic features of 'media-Cockney'?

Or of TH-fronting as a feature of that variety?

3. Investigating 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'*

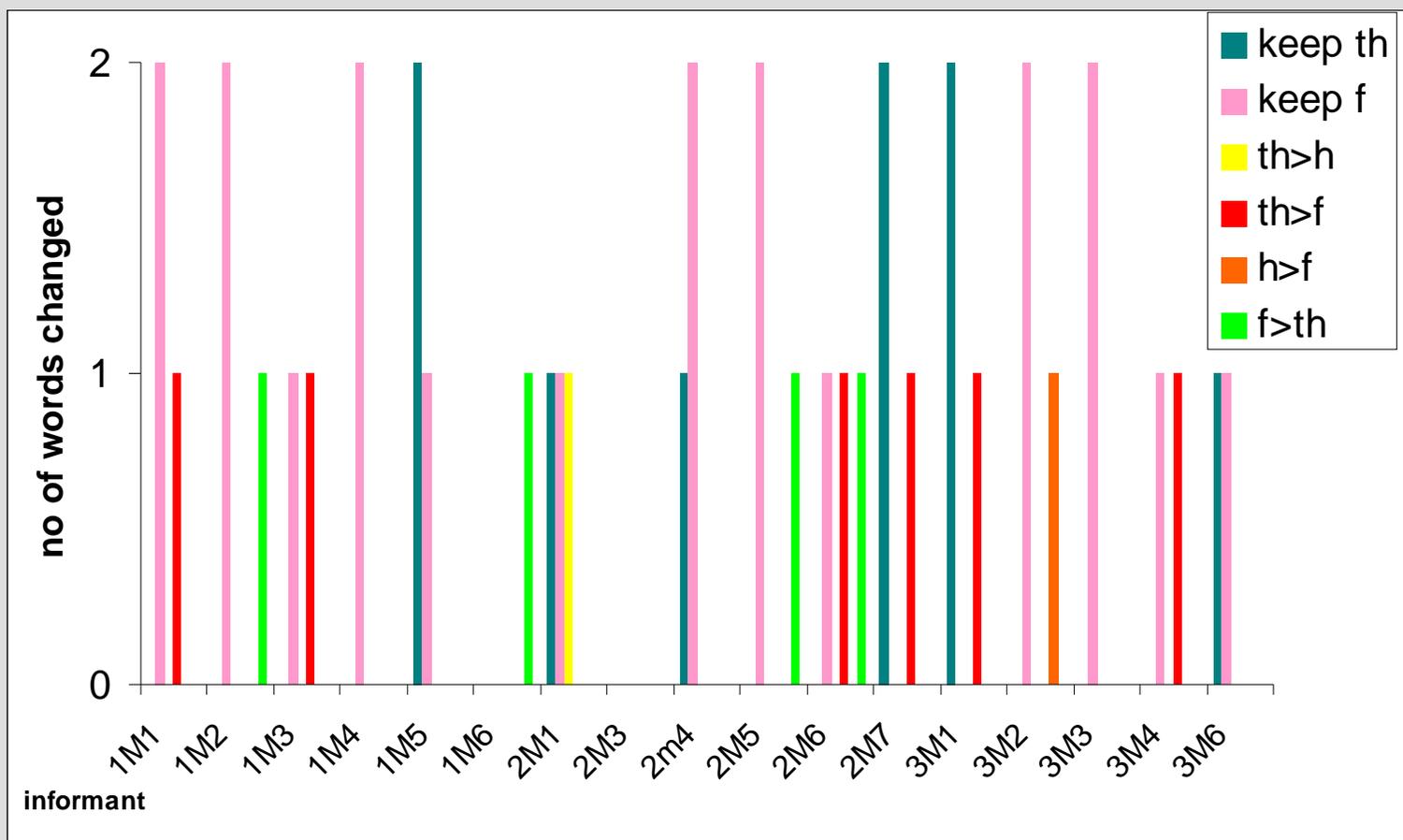
- » *'It's like a sore throat accent ... or ... they took his tonsils oot or something'*
- » *'Ah 'hink they pronounce more'*
- » *'He changes the letters, if it was 'f' he'd use 'v''*

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

4. Imitation of 'media-Cockney'

- » Our first impressions were that little had been changed
- » BUT close phonetic analysis revealed that most children altered at least something in response to the task
- » Not imitation so much as **phonetic alteration**

4. 'imitation' and TH-fronting



([h] is used for (th) in spontaneous speech in Glaswegian vernacular)

Example case: TH-fronting and media-Cockney – summary

- » TH-fronting is spreading in Glaswegian vernacular
- » This change in progress is statistically linked to a number of extra-linguistic factors to do with the south of England, including those relating to dialect contact, attitudes and TV.
- » There is little (?any) awareness amongst our informants that this feature occurs in media-Cockney
- » Evidence for an ability to imitate this feature is also limited

Critique

What does this information add to the debate?

How should we explain these findings?

Is TV a direct or an indirect factor in this change?



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