

Introduction: Multicultural youth vernaculars in Paris and urban France

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The papers in this Special Issue present some of the results of the *Multicultural London English/Multicultural Paris French* project, supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) from October 2010 to December 2014 and by the French *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* (ANR) from 2010–2012¹. The project compared language variation and change in multilingual areas of London and Paris, focusing on the language of young people of recent immigrant origin as well as that of young people whose families had lived in London or Paris for many generations. Similar projects in other European cities have documented the emergence of new ways of speaking and rapid language change in the dominant ‘host’ language, which are attributed to the direct and indirect effects of language contact; see, for example, Wiese 2009 on young people’s language in Berlin, Quist 2008 on youth language in Copenhagen, and Svendsen and Røyneland 2008 on Norwegian). In London, young children from diverse linguistic backgrounds tend to acquire English in their peer groups at nursery school rather than from their parents, many of whom do not speak English or are in the early stages of learning English. Since their peers speak a wide range of different languages, the only language the young children have in common is English; and since many of their friends are also acquiring English, there is no clear target model, a high tolerance of linguistic variation, and plenty of scope for linguistic innovation. By the time they reach adolescence, young people’s English has stabilized, and many innovations have become part of a new London dialect, now known as Multicultural London English (Cheshire et al., 2013). New urban dialects and language practices such as these have been termed ‘multiethnolects’: they contain a variable repertoire of innovative phonetic, grammatical, and discourse-pragmatic features. In multiethnic peer groups, where local children from many different linguistic backgrounds grow up together, the innovative features are used by speakers of all ethnicities, including those of local descent such as, in London, young monolingual English speakers from Cockney families. Nevertheless they tend to be more frequent in the speech

¹ The ESRC-funded project (ref. RES 062-33-0006) had Penelope Gardner-Chloros and Jenny Cheshire as Principal and Co-investigators and Maria Secova as post-doctoral researcher; Zsuzsanna Fagyal and Raymonde Sneddon were consultants, on phonological developments and on impact respectively. In the initial stages the project also involved collaboration with a French team led by Françoise Gadet (Modyco, Paris X-Nanterre), with ANR funding (ref. ANR-09-FRBR-037-01). The data collected by the Paris team has not been used in the articles presented in this Issue.

of bilingual young people of recent immigrant origin, and by young speakers with highly multiethnic friendship groups (see further Quist 2008 for an account of the use of features associated with a multiethnolect in conjunction with nonlinguistic ‘markers’ of style, such as tastes in music and preferred ways of dressing). Our project aimed to determine whether a similar outcome had occurred in multicultural areas of Paris.

In order to do so, we replicated, as far as possible, the methodology of the London projects², with a fieldworker (Maria Secova) recording young people in various Paris *banlieues* in informal conversations with one, two or three friends, reflecting the social networks and patterns of interaction in these multi-ethnic areas. The resulting Multicultural Paris French (MPF)³ corpus consists of the recorded speech of 77 young people aged between 10 and 19, 41 of whom were female and 36 male. For many of our analyses we adopted a rigorous variationist quantitative approach, partly in order to see whether the same social factors favoured the use of linguistic innovations in multicultural areas of London and Paris and partly to allow a comparison of processes of ongoing language variation and change in London and Paris (and elsewhere).

The results obtained in Paris were very different from those found in London or, indeed, in other European cities where an emerging multiethnolect has been documented. Whilst the young people in Paris used some linguistic forms that had not been attested in earlier corpora and that may well, therefore, be innovations, most of the new forms were not used more often by bilingual speakers or by speakers with multiethnic friendship groups. On the other hand, one form (*in situ wh*-words in embedded questions), analysed in the paper by Gardner-Chloros and Secova, was very strongly favoured by speakers from immigrant backgrounds and rarely used by young people of local descent. Importantly, none of the features seems specific to Paris. We are currently researching the social, political and cultural factors that may account for this illustration of *l’exception française*: they include language policies in the former colonies, national ideologies concerning equality and diversity, and educational policies on the integration of newly arrived immigrant children in school. In the meantime, we focus in this Special Issue (with one exception, as we will explain) on the language of young people in the multilingual Paris *banlieues* where our project was based. This allows us to identify current developments within young people’s vernacular French and to situate these developments within general processes of language variation and change.

² *The two projects carried out in London were Linguistic innovators: the English of adolescents in London (2004–7), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Principal Investigator Paul Kerswill, Co-investigator Jenny Cheshire, Research Associates Susan Fox and Eivind Torgersen; ref. RES 000-23-0680); and Multicultural London English: The emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety (2007–10), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Principal Investigator Paul Kerswill, Co-investigator Jenny Cheshire, Research Associates Susan Fox, Arfaan Khan and Eivind Torgersen; ref. RES-062-23-0814).*

³ Note that our MPF corpus should be distinguished from the corpus collected at Paris Ouest Nanterre which has the same name (Gadet, 2017).

Fagyal and Torgersen analyse prosodic rhythm in the speech of young people in our MPF corpus. As found in other multilingual urban cities in Europe and beyond, there are innovations in prosodic rhythm. What is unique to Fagyal and Torgersen's analysis, however, is that the innovations were most frequent among young people of immigrant descent who tended to dominate in talk and, specifically, in certain types of performative speech and stance. These speakers also use phonetic features found by other researchers to be typical of vernacular youth varieties of French, such as palatalised and affricated realisations of dental stops. This work points to the need, then, for future research to consider the interactional function of rhythm and phonetic features in the speech of young speakers of vernacular French (and, indeed, of other languages).

Gardner-Chloros and Secova's paper points to the (limited) extent to which innovative grammatical features are found in our Paris corpus; the main focus of their paper is embedded questions with a post-verb question word (for example *je sais pas il va où*). This *in situ* structure has previously been studied extensively in direct questions but much less so in indirect ones. In this corpus it is used far more frequently by male speakers with highly multiethnic friendship groups. Gardner-Chloros and Secova discuss the origins of the form and propose a mix of internal and external motivations for its current development.

Cheshire and Secova analyse the different expressions used by young people in the Paris *banlieues* to introduce reported speech (quotative expressions), focusing on two new forms, *genre* and *être là*, and discussing the language processes that have led to their emergence. They consider the evidence for and against the possibility of quotative *genre* being a calque on English BE LIKE, concluding that far from being a borrowing from English, it represents an internal development in the French language. The evidence from Paris suggests, however, that young people in Paris are adopting a similar discourse style to young speakers of other languages where quotatives of this kind have also recently emerged.

Secova, Gardner-Chloros and Atangana's article is an important complement to the three previous ones, presenting an analysis of the attitudes of young *banlieue* speakers to a range of linguistic features found in our MPF corpus and to some of the MPF speakers themselves. They show that features differ in their perceptual salience, their perceived acceptability and their relationship to different kinds of youth identities. Their paper adds a new attitudinal dimension to the descriptions of youth varieties available so far.

We have included in this Special Issue Marchessou's analysis of young people's French in a multilingual area of Strasbourg, which shows that young people living in multilingual urban communities elsewhere in France use many of the innovative features we found in the *banlieues* of Paris. It remains to be seen whether these features have emerged independently in Strasbourg and Paris or whether they are part of a more general youth vernacular that is perhaps diffusing via social media or other communication channels. Marchessou's work shows how local and regional forms coexist with the more widespread forms discussed in other articles in this Special Issue, demonstrating the need to consider young people's vernacular

language in its local context as well as to compare it with youth language more generally.

Finally, David Britain puts the research presented in these articles into the wider sociolinguistic context, focussing on the development of variationist research on the French of France; the city as a site of current enquiry; and the contemporary focus in sociolinguistics on ethnicity as a social parameter both shaping and being shaped by linguistic variation.

We hope that the work presented here will encourage further systematic sociolinguistic investigations in the French context; this would improve our understanding of the factors that lead to the emergence of a multiethnolect and the spread – or the lack of it – of innovations in young people’s speech both in France and elsewhere.

NOTE

We would like to thank the reviewers of the papers included in this Special Issue, as well as Wim Remysen and Julia Herschensohn, for their helpful and constructive comments. We also thank Wim Remysen, Julia Herschensohn and Laurel Preston for their support and patience during the long gestation of this work.

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