ESTUARY ENGLISH AND RP: SOME RECENT FINDINGS

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1. Introduction

In mid-1980s Rosewarne published an article discussing recently observed pronunciation tendencies, which he collectively labelled as "Estuary English" (henceforth EE).[1] The accent in question was in evidence in radio and television, and the pronunciation of its speakers could be placed on a continuum between RP and Cockney. In what was to become perhaps the most frequently quoted definition of EE, the author called it "a variety of modified regional speech ..., a mixture of non-regional and local south-eastern English pronunciation and intonation" (Rosewarne 1984).

Before long, claims of the fast spread of the variety followed. Geographically, it was said to be heard all over southern Britain; as for its social dissemination, it allegedly penetrated up to the aristocratic circles. While not attempting at an exhaustive phonetic description, several articles drew attention to the salient features of the accent, thus (perhaps unintentionally) implying the existence of a clearly definable variety. Undoubtedly, these accounts had certain accuracy, especially with reference to individual speakers. However, as generalisations about the speech of an area or a social group, they were perhaps premature.

This putative variety of Southern British English has become the subject of much speculation. The term itself has gained wide currency. Its mention in Gimson's *Pronunciation of English* (fifth edition, revised by Cruttenden), a stan-

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[1] Abbreviations used in the paper: EE – Estuary English, RP – Received Pronunciation, SED – Survey of English Dialects, WC – Working Class, MC – Middle Class, U-RP – upper crust RP, i.e. the RP of the upper class. I use abbreviations U and M to refer to the two RP informants, the former representing U-, the latter mainstream RP.

dard and perhaps one of the most well-known textbooks on English phonetics is a testimony to the interest the issue had sparked. Paradoxically, despite the wide currency of the term, there still appears to be no consensus as to what EE actually constitutes. Definitions of the concept have been extremely divergent, if not contradictory. Thus, EE was simultaneously called a "type of Regional RP ... a middle-class pronunciation" (Cruttenden 1994: 86), and "working-class and lower-middle class speech" (Davenport – Hannahs 1998: 34).

In the popular press, its ratings depended on the author's sentiment towards regional varieties. Therefore, EE elicited a lot of prescriptive comments as an example of declining language standards. Simultaneously, it was hailed (largely by journalists) as the new standard accent, supposedly classless and more democratic than RP. A somewhat far-fetched suggestion was put forward that EE was to become its successor (for discussion, see Trudgill, this volume). Alternatively, EE was considered to exert an influence both upon RP and non-standard accents. Such myths could reasonably be attributed to the very fuzziness of the concept itself.

2. Aims

For the purpose of the present study I adopt Wells's (1998) definition of EE as "the speech of London and the Southeast". The present contribution seeks to clear up some of the misconceptions regarding EE. Here, we are not concerned with issues such as whether EE is an accent or a dialect, the question of its disputable candidacy for the future pronunciation standard, or the problem of its alleged prestige. Rosewarne (1994: 6) himself called his research "perhaps the first attempt to investigate the 'levelling' of English speech in Britain". If EE is a levelled out variety, then it is an unlikely candidate for a standard accent. Watt and Milroy (1999: 43) remark that "standards by definition are institutionally imposed ... and the essence of a levelled variety is that it develops by quite regular sociolinguistic process".

This paper investigates whether such a coherent and uniform variety really exists. The following questions are addressed:

(a)   Are the tendencies regarded as EE indeed taking place?
(b)   Is it legitimate to say that they are new to the area?

In order to tackle those issues, recent data from the area need to be examined. The results of a systematic study of the problem are presented in Section 5 and a brief outline of the methods is offered in Section 3.

The evidence comes from the speech of 16 adolescents, born and brought up within a 50-mile radius of Greater London. The analysis of the teenage speech data throws some light on the phonetic make-up of EE. The material below permits one to reveal some of the current tendencies in the Home Counties. In order to provide an answer to the question whether EE is a newly emerging variety,

our *t*-glottaling and *l*-vocalisation data are confronted with data from volumes 3 (Orton – Tilling 1970) and 4 (Orton – Wakelin 1967) of *The Survey of English Dialects* (SED). A fuller account of this diachronic comparison is presented in Przedlacka (1999).

Section 4 of the paper offers samples of the current teenage RP speech. The evidence serves both as an illustration of idiolectal variation and a control set to be confronted with the EE data. Although small (two speakers), the RP sample can furnish clues as to the direction in which the accent is changing. Some of the features of the informants' speech could tentatively be taken to be a sign of incipient phonetic changes.

3. Method

The descriptive material adduced is based on data collected in 1997-1998. My research project (Przedlacka 1999) was aimed at testing the validity of claims concerning the supposed realisations of EE phonemes, and therefore the relevant fieldwork covered only selected phonetic variables. The field data were drawn from different sides of London. The four localities from which subjects were recruited mark off an area of approximately 50 miles in diameter and represent geographical spread to the Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest of London (see Table 1 and the map). Except Aylesbury, the localities were formerly investigated in the SED.

Table 1. Localities selected for the study

County	Locality
Bucks	Aylesbury
Essex	Little Baddow
Kent	Farningham
Surrey	Walton-on-the-Hill

One-to-one interviews were carried out with 16 adolescents (8 girls, 8 boys; aged 14-16). Such choice of informants reflected a fact well established in sociolinguistic research that the middle teenage years is a period especially productive for innovations. All the subjects were natives or newcomers to the locality within their first 5 years of life. None had attended elocution lessons or suffered any speech impediments. To introduce a social class dimension to the study the subjects were drawn from two types of schools, which differed in terms of selection procedures, percentage of GSCE examination passes, and percentage of school leavers going on to higher education. The subjects could thus

be grouped in three ways: by social class (eight speakers per cell), by gender (eight speakers per cell) and by county (four subjects per cell).

The interview task, based on the SED questionnaire, consisted of 116 questions, out of which 60 exemplified more than one variable. The selected sample thus provided at least seven words to represent each variable, with the exception of the PRICE lexical set (5 items) and yod (4 items). Whenever possible, the original formulation of the questions was preserved, with certain modifications. With the teenage informant in mind, some questions needed to be rephrased to elicit the SED target word. Each subject gave answers to the same set of questions, asked consecutively without a break during the interview. To ensure strict comparability of the material, the RP speakers and the Home Counties teenagers participated in the same lexical elicitation task. Naturally, some questions failed to elicit the expected answer or produced a variety of responses. The total number of data points, 2254 for the EE and 285 for the RP recordings were subjected to auditory analysis of the speech data, a standard method in sociophonetic research, was employed. The tokens were transcribed using IPA notation in its 1996 format. A reliability check of 10% of the database was performed by two phoneticians, who transcribed the words independently. Following the discussion of the reasons for any discrepancies (5.35% altogether) a version agreed upon was jointly accepted.

4. Received Pronunciation

Although RP is adequately described, little, if any, material relates specifically to the youngest speakers. The data below come from two 13 year-old male adolescents, students of Eton College, selected by their English teacher, himself an RP speaker, who regarded the boys' accents as RP. The one informant (U) exhibits features of U-RP (a number of U-type phonetic realisations, a characteristic 'plummy' voice quality, stereotypically associated with upper-class RP). The other teenager can tentatively be classified as a mainstream RP speaker (M). The description below makes use of Wells's (1982) keywords for vowel sounds.

4.1. Vowels

FLEECE. Four words (= 8 tokens), i.e. *deal, eat, feet* and *meet*, were elicited from both speakers. Apart from a single occurrence of [ɪi] (M), all other instances of the vowel had a monophthongal realisation ([iː]).

TRAP. Both [æ] and [a] were used by each speaker. The open realisation [a] is reported by Wells (1982: 291) as "newly current", while Cruttenden (1994) observes that it is used by many younger speakers of RP. The traditional accounts, Jones (1960) and Gimson (1984), describe the RP quality as a sound intermediate between cardinal vowels 3 and 4, and specify its more open quality only before dark /l/.

STRUT. U demonstrates a prevailingly back range [ʌ̟ ~ ʌ], except in *drunk*, where the vowel has a central quality. M's vowels reveal the quality [ɐ̝ ~ ɐ], ranging between central and slightly fronted, not fully front. In U's speech, the auditory distance between the minimal pairs is larger. Consequently, vowels in *cat – cut* are realised as [a̠ ~ ɐ̝] and those in *ankle – uncle* as [a̠ – ʌ̟], while M realises them as [a – ɐ̝] and [æ – ɐ] respectively.

THOUGHT. The realisations of the lexical set THOUGHT are prevailingly monophthongal, ranging between [o̞] and [ɔ̝]. The slight differences between the speakers are reflected in U's consistent employing a closer quality of the vowel [o̞] and M's exhibiting variability, with both closer and more open realisations ([o̞ ~ ɔ̝]). Several tokens in the speech of both informants have a slight centring offglide, evident in U's *snore, forty* ([o̞ᵊ]) and M's *four, more, board* ([ɔ̝ᵊ]).

GOOSE. Both speakers have only monophthongal variants, with a slight off-glide in several cases. U consistently employs retracted variants, of the type [u̟ ~ u̠], while M has chiefly realisations in the central area, ranging between rounded and unrounded ([ʉ ~ ɨ]). In his speech, vowels in *blue, boots* and *shoes* are slightly to the front of the central region, the last of these producing the auditory impression of a front rounded vowel with the quality [ʉ̟].

FACE. The realisations of the phoneme range between [e̞ɪ] and [ɛ̝ɪ]. The idiosyncratic differences between the two informants involved U's consistent employment of variants with a closer starting point, and M's wider range, between [e̞ɪ] and [ɛ̝ɪ], with a closer and slightly more open onglides respectively.

PRICE. A total of ten tokens were recorded. The realisations of this phoneme range between [a̠ɪ] and [ʌ̟ɪ], i.e. from a diphthong with a front central-ised onset to a back and raised onset. Three tokens, i.e. two instances of *white* and one of *tried,* give an impression of a slight rounding of the onset ([ɑ̹ɪ]). The speakers' vowel ranges partly overlap, U consistently having back, even slightly raised onsets [ɑ̝ɪ ~ ʌ̟ɪ], and M using both back and central onsets ([ɑɪ ~ a̠ɪ]).

GOAT. The onset is a vowel in the central region, ranging between [ə̝] and [ɜ]. The offglide, weak in some tokens, is back and rounded in roughly a half of the data points. The rest of the tokens reveal no rounding, which is in line with Wells's (1982: 294) statement concerning the second element of /əʊ/, which is "weak and may be non-existent". In my data the realisations represent the type [əʊ ~ ɜ ~ ɵʊ]. Yet another idiolectal difference involves U's higher onset [ə̝ˠ ~ əʊ] and M's more open onsets, of the type [ɜˠ ~ ɵʊ].

Both informants demonstrate variable offset rounding. The presence of the variants "with very little diphthongal movement and minimal lip rounding" confirms Wells's (1982: 294) prediction that this realisation "is due to remain the predominant RP variant for some time yet." In word-final position, as in *tomor-row, ago* and *no,* the offglide is weak, while one item (U's *ago*) reveals a length-

ened monophthong ([ə̠ˌɪ̈]). Such pronunciations are classified by Cruttenden (1994: 125) as Refined RP (Wells's U-RP).

MOUTH. Only eight tokens were recorded. These are *eyebrows, mouth* and *trousers,* elicited from both speakers, *cow* uttered by U, and *mouse* said by M. The first element ranges between front and front retracted ([aɔ ~ a̠ʊ]). U's *eyebrows* demonstrates the onglide with a back advanced quality and a slightly unrounded offset ([ɑ̟ˌʊ̜]), while M has front retracted or front-raised onsets and a rounded offglide ([æ̠ʊ ~ a̠ɔ]) in all four tokens.

4.2. Consonants

T (syllable non-initial). Glottaling in RP is not new. In an earlier description of the accent, Jones (1960: 151) states that "some speakers of received English pronounce like this, especially when m, n, r, j or w follows." Cruttenden (1994: 156) talks about a broader context for glottal replacement "before all non-syllabic consonants" and even "sometimes to be heard for /t/ before syllabic /n/ as in *cotton, Eton*."

In the present data only 8% of the tokens exhibit *t*-glottaling. Glottalled variants are present in 11 words. Both informants have a glottal stop before an obstruent in *Great* (*Britain)*, U has it in *sit down* and *boots*, while M has glottalling in *sweets* and *wheatbread.* Moreover, U has glottal realisations in the high frequency words *it, not* (in the phrase *not worth it*) and before a syllabic nasal in *eaten* and *lightning*. In addition, M uses a glottal variant in the sequence *cut your hair.*

As regards other realisations of syllable non-initial /t/ itself, the informants differ. U favours inaudible final release and tends to avoid the preglottalised variant, while M has audibly released *t*'s and uses [ʔt] more frequently than U.

TH. While U has dental fricatives throughout, M's realisation of the final segment in *mouth* produces a clear auditory impression of a voiceless labiodental fricative [f], which can be attributed to the preceding rounded vowel. In the incidental material, where the informant uses the verb *think* twice in the same sentence, /θ/ is also realised as labiodental. In *nothing,* the precise quality of the sound is difficult to determine solely by auditory analysis. Possibly, the realisation is a dental fricative with a labial gesture ([θᵛ]). Its voiced correspondence /ð/ is never fronted.

L (syllable non-initial). A third (34%) of the tokens are vocalised. This figure seems quite high when we consider existing descriptions of RP. While Jones (1960) makes no mention of this variant, Wells (1982: 295) states that it is "occasionally met with in RP, particularly in the environment of a preceding labial". Cruttenden (1994: 184) shares this view, adding that it is "somewhat less usual" after other consonants. Looking at the chronology of the descriptions, it could be inferred that *l*-vocalisation has seeped into RP and is extending to more contexts.

Interestingly, in the present sample the extent of *l*-vocalisation seems to be an idiosyncratic characteristic. As can be seen, the two speakers clearly differ, one using twice as many vocalised tokens as the other. U's speech largely fits the above descriptions. Out of 33 tokens, he vocalises 7 *l*'s, including 2 before labials (cf. *almost, always*)*,* and 2 *l*'s after a rounded vowel (cf. *coal*, *mole*), the remaining instances being *tail, milk* and *ill.* M vocalises 16 out of 32 tokens (50%). In his speech, *l*-vocalisation does not appear to be confined to a particular environment: absent from *almost,* it occurs in *always*, *devil,* and *milk*. Both informants have a back and rounded vocoid ([ö ~ ʊ]).

YOD. Four words (= 8 tokens): *new* (twice in the questionnaire), *suit* and *Tuesday* were elicited from both speakers. Both informants had a yod in *Tuesday* and *new*, but M also pronounced it in *New (Year's Day).* Neither speaker had a yod in *suit.*

The above data illustrate variation at the level of the individual speaker. Consequently, classifying U's language as Refined RP poses few problems, since some of his phonetic realisations match the existing descriptions of that variety. His speech reveals back variants of STRUT and GOOSE, back onset in PRICE, and predominance of non-glottalised /t/. U's accent demonstrates a textbook-like overlap between social criteria and phonetic facts: his education and an upper-class family background find a reflection in his speech.

As regards M's phonetic realisations, there seems to exist a discrepancy between the teacher's impressionistic estimate of the boy's speech and the number of apparently non-RP phonetic features. Despite this, the classification of the adolescent's speech as mainstream RP rather than non-RP appears more relevant for three reasons. First, the teacher was considered to give an undoubtedly valid judgement of his native accent. Second, setting up parameters to delimit which features fall within the scope of an accent before examining the data might be prejudging the issue. (At this point, I cannot help agreeing with Ramsaran (1990: 180), who points out, that "if one excludes certain non-traditional forms from one's data, how can one discover the ways in which the accent is changing?"). Third, since innovations tend to be resisted, any incorporation of non-standard features into RP has always been regarded as non-RP. M's speech, which does not match available descriptions, could be treated as a case in point.

There is consensus in the literature that nowadays the defining characteristic of the RP accent is its non-localizability. If RP is then defined with phonological criteria in mind, or as a "regionally neutral" accent (Crystal 1997: 322), M's speech falls within the scope of both definitions and, phonologically, represents the RP system. Despite the presence of non-RP phonetic variants (e.g., an extended context for *l*-vocalisation, certain front realisations of the vowel in the GOOSE lexical set), applying the label Regional RP to his speech seems less fortunate. In this type of RP, regionalisms "would enable the provenance of the

speaker to be localised within England" (Wells 1982: 297). However, the features in question are not specifically regional, their emergence being part of widespread changes currently going on in non-standard accents in Britain. Indeed, RP is gradually incorporating features, which previously fell into the scope of non-standard accents (cf. Lewis 1990 and Wells 1994). More specifically, features like *l*-vocalisation and *t*-glottaling present in the speech of both informants appear to corroborate speculations concerning Cockney as the source of influence (Wells 1994).

5. Estuary English

The EE material comes from the adolescents chosen according to the set of predetermined criteria mentioned above in Section 3. However, the final selection of the informants was left to the teachers. Being exposed to the speech of local teenagers, they were considered to give the most accurate judgement on whether a given adolescent's speech was representative of the local vernacular. One of the informants lived in London for the first 24 months of his life, two other subjects were resident in Bexleyheath and Ilford, located on the verge of Greater London, but not within the capital itself. Six of the informants were children of London parents. To give a clear picture of geographical differences, the prevailing vocalic variants are summarised in Table 2 below. Where gender or class differences were observed, this is indicated in the description. For three of the variables, FLEECE, PRICE and MOUTH, such comparisons were not possible due to the insufficient amount of data.

Table 2. Predominant realisations of EE vowels

	Bucks	Essex	Kent	Surrey
FLEECE	ɪi~ i			
TRAP	a ~ æ ~ ɛ̝	æ ~ ɛ̝	a ~ æ	
STRUT	ɐ̝̈ ~ ɐ	ʌ		
THOUGHT	ɔˢ	ɔ	ɔˢ	ɔ
GOOSE	ʉ ~ ʏ	u̟ ~ ʉ	ʉ ~ ʏ	ʉ
FACE	ɛɪ	ɛ ~ ɪɜ	ɛɪ	
PRICE	ɑɪ ~ ɒɪ	a̠ɪ ~ ɑɪ		
MOUTH	æʊ ~ æʏ aʊ ~ aʏ			
GOAT	əʏ	əʏ ~ əʊ	əʏ	əʏ ~ əʊ

5.1. Vowels

FLEECE. This class contains [iː], [ɪi] and a Cockney-type diphthongal realisation with a centralised onset [əi] (approximately a quarter of the tokens), the last variant also occurring among the SED realisations. A diphthongal quality [iᵊ] is sometimes present before the dark variants of /l/.

   TRAP. All the three realisations [a ~ æ ~ ɛ] are present in the four localities. The differences between the counties consist in the predominance of one type of variant over another. Speakers in Buckinghamshire prevailingly use the closer variants [æ] and [ɛ], while the open realisation [a], characteristic of the county's speech in the 1950s, is still present, but constitutes about only one fifth of the tokens. Surrey has a more open range, between [æ] and [a], with the former variant prevailing. Essex and Kent are similar in that they have predominantly closer realisations in the region of open-mid and slightly more open ([ɛ ~ ɛ̞]). In the speech of all informants *ladder* and *handle* hardly contain the [æ] variant, this vowel having either open [a ~ a̠] or open-mid [ɛ] realisations.

   STRUT. Realisations range widely from a fully back unrounded [ʌ] and back rounded [ɒ] to fronted [ɐ̟], with predominant central [ɐ]. The back variants [ɒ ~ ʌ̞] chiefly occur before the velar nasal, as exemplified by *drunk.* Like the very back ones, the fronted realisations [ɐ ~ ɐ̟] constitute approximately one fifth of the data (about a half of all the data points in Buckinghamshire). Fronting is most evident in female speech (two females from Buckinghamshire and one from Kent). Male speakers tend to use central to back realisations ([ɐ ~ ʌ̟]).

   THOUGHT. The counties fall into two groups. Buckinghamshire and Kent reveal prevailingly diphthongal realisations, while Essex and Surrey have mainly monophthongal variants. In closed syllables, as in *horse* or *board,* vowels have a closing offglide of the type [oʊ]. In open syllables they tend to have more open realisations in the region of open-mid and halfway between open-mid and close-mid, with a centring offglide ([ɔə ~ ɔ̝ə]), this being in line with Wells's (1982: 304) observations about London speech.

   GOOSE. Central realisations [ʉ ~ ɨ ~ ɵ̞ɵ] constitute 61% of the material. A quarter of all data points have a back quality ([ʉ̠ ~ u]), while 14 % are front variants ([ʏ ~ ɵʏ ~ ʏⁱ]). Sharp gender difference is evidenced by female preference for central realisations (71%), with fronted variants accounting for 26% of their speech, regardless of social class. On the other hand, males use either central (52%) or back (43%) variants, with only sporadic front realisations. A front unrounded quality [ɪ] in *roof* was present in the speech of four informants. With respect to fronting, a slight social class difference can be observed. The WC speakers appear to be slightly ahead in this change as they more frequently use front (18%) and central (69%) realisations than the MC informants (10% and 57% respectively).

A geographical split into two groups is evident. Most frequent in Buckinghamshire and Kent, fronted variants constitute a fifth of all tokens, while Essex and Surrey have less than 10% of fronted tokens. Unlike the other three counties, Essex shows a high proportion of central and back realisations of [ʉ] (44%) and [ʊu] (47%). Central variants predominate in Buckinghamshire, Kent and Surrey.

FACE. The majority of the tokens have an onset in the region of open-mid, of the type [ɛɪ ~ ɛ̞ɪ]. Such realisations prevail in Buckinghamshire, Kent and Surrey. Essex has a slightly closer range, between [ɛɪ] and [ɛ̞ɪ]. Variants with a more open starting point (type [æɪ]) mainly occur in Kent. The WC informants use almost exclusively (96%) realisations with a more open onset (ɛ̞ɪ ~ æɪ), while for the MC speakers such variants constitute just over a half (58%) of the tokens.

PRICE. The onset ranges between front (retracted) [aɪ ~ a̠ɪ] and back (un)rounded [ɑɪ ~ ɑ̟ɪ ~ ɒɪ]. Most rounding ([ɒɪ ~ ɒ̟ɪ]) can be observed in Buckinghamshire.

MOUTH. A variety of realisations include onset ranges between front open and halfway between open and open-mid ([aʊ ~ æʊ]). The offset may also be fronted ([aʏ ~ æʏ]) or centring ([æə]).

GOAT. The onset quality ranges between central and low ([əʊ ~ ɐʊ]). Two Essex speakers have realisations with rounding present in both the onset and offset (i.e. [oʊ]). A large number of tokens have fronted offsets, representing realisations of the type [əʏ ~ ɐʏ]. Fronted offset variants are present in all the four localities, especially in Buckinghamshire (88%). Again, as in the case of STRUT and GOOSE, fronting is most evident in female speech. Similar findings concerning GOAT offset fronting have been reported for Milton Keynes (Buckinghamshire) by Kerswill and Williams (1994). Several monophthongal realisations ([ɐ] or [o̞]) were also recorded.

5.2. Consonants

T (syllable non-initial). Female speakers show much higher glottaling scores (47%) than males (28%), but social class has no significant impact. Glottal replacement is favoured before a syllabic nasal, as in *Britain* and *lightning,* before an obstruent, as in *sit down* and the high frequency pronoun *it.* Intervocalic glottaling across a word boundary is frequent in expressions like *eat it, shut it* or *get your hair cut.* Word-internal intervocalic glottaling is limited to the total of 4 instances (out of 335), i.e. *forty, butter* (WC Bucks female), and *cutting, whatever you like* (WC Bucks male). On the whole, glottal realisations of non-initial /t/ constitute only a third of the tokens.

An interesting and somewhat unexpected finding is that the geographical patterning of the feature has remained virtually unchanged for over 40 years, which

is evident on comparing my research results and the SED data (see Table 3). The SED data for selected localities and for the respective counties are based on a sample of 18 words, also elicited in the present study. Although highly similar material is compared, some inevitable discrepancies result from elicitation diffi-culties or due to the incompleteness of the SED data. The EE figures are based on the sample of 24 words uttered by every speaker. For this comparison, in-complete EE data sets were rejected.

Table 3. Percentage of non-initial *t*-glottaling in the four localities (SED and EE data)

	SED county	SED locality	EE
Bucks	65.5	89.2	43.2
Essex	18.1	16.6	8.3
Kent	8.5	7.1	56.5F 19.5M
Surrey	11.0	0.0	21.1

TH. Social class differences were not statistically significant. However, gen-der differences are clearly marked. Male speakers use the labiodental realisa-tions [f v] more frequently (42%) than females (15%). Most informants employ various realisations, such as standard [θ ð], labiodental fricatives [f v] or tokens which produce an auditory impression of dental fricatives with a labial gesture [ðᵛ]. Still, standard [θ] and [ð] predominate in all the four localities.

Th-fronting is one of London features spreading rapidly in all directions. The change has been reported for other urban centres: Leeds (Wakelin 1977), Norwich (Trudgill 1988), Milton Keynes (Kerswill – Williams 1994), and Derby (Milroy 1996). The spread is explained by multiple causation, with system-inter-nal and affective factors playing a role. Trudgill (1988) attributes *th*-fronting to the dental fricatives being phonologically marked and the covert prestige of London WC accent. Milroy (1996) adopts a similar stand, considering social causes a likely trigger. The speed of the change is also attributed to the influence of the media.

L (syllable non-initial). The product of *l*-vocalisation is usually a back rounded vocoid, between close-mid and close ([o ~ ʊ]). Dark and clear variants of /l/ are also present in the data, albeit infrequently. In two items, *pull* and *ill,* non-vocalised variants prevail. Interestingly, all the four Essex speakers have a clear [l] in *pull.*

Vocalised realisations predominate (77.4%) in all the four localities, scores being highest in Kent and Essex. The social class split in Surrey also shows WC

speakers to be leaders in this change and MC speech closer to the old local usage. As compared to the SED data (see Table 4) the use of this feature has increased in all localities investigated. The *l*-vocalisation figures are based on a sample of 28 words from the SED and a similar set of words elicited from each teenage informant.

Table 4. Percentage of *l*-vocalisation in the four localities (SED and EE data)

	SED county	SED locality	Estuary locality
Bucks	3.5	3.5	69.9
Essex	9.5	30.7	90.9
Kent	12.2	50.0	93.8
Surrey	35.0	39.5	40.3MC 77.4WC

YOD. The 4 tokens for this variable were *suit, Tuesday* and *new* (recorded twice). Only 3 (all MC) out of 16 informants had a yod in *suit*. In *new,* a yod was present in 19 out of 32 tokens. In *Tuesday,* a half (8) of the informants had the glide.

5.3. Sociophonetic patterns

a) County

The above data throw some light on the phonetic make-up of EE. It appears that some of the trends evidenced above are new to the area. These include *th*-fronting and offset fronting, both in the lexical set of GOAT, as well as fronting of the vowel in the lexical set of STRUT, these three phenomena not recorded in the SED survey. Less extensively represented in the SED records, *l*-vocalisation is now on the increase in the four Home Counties.

As regards other trends, they appear to be a continuation of tendencies observed earlier, as the comparison of the SED data with the present-day teenage speech suggests (cf. GOOSE and MOUTH fronting). Taking the SED records as evidence of an earlier stage, we can see the progress of the change. In the 1950s, the Buckinghamshire locality was the only one exhibiting offset fronting. Currently, fronted offsets are found in the teenage speech in all the localities investigated, but in Buckinghamshire offset fronting is most advanced. Likewise, this county appears to lead the fronting of GOOSE. In both the SED records and my EE data fronting is most advanced in the speech of Buckinghamshire.

   With respect to five variables (four vowels and *t*-glottaling), the counties can be grouped into two sets: Buckinghamshire and Kent vs. Essex and Surrey. Counties in the former set exhibit most fronting in GOOSE and GOAT, highest incidence of glottaling (Buckinghamshire males and females, Kent females), diphthongal variants of THOUGHT, and slightly more open onsets in the FACE lexical set. Admittedly, such geographical grouping of the phonetic variants is not easily explained.

b) Gender

Female lead is evident in vowel fronting (GOOSE and STRUT), offset fronting of GOAT, and glottaling. The only change led by male adolescents is *th*-fronting. Given the nature of these changes, such a result is in line with the principle that men preserve non-standard forms in stable situations, or indeed "are leading changes that introduce or revitalise vernacular forms" (Mathisen 1999: 113). However, in the majority of linguistic changes it is females who are instrumental in the diffusion of incoming prestige forms (Labov 1990). The new status of glottaling is now a sociolinguistic fact. Admittedly, the change has moved from vernacular to prestige standard (cf. Mathisen 1999: 114, and Holmes 1997).

c) Social class

Class appears to be a less important indicator of change than gender (in line with Milroy, Milroy and Hartley 1994). Out of 14 phonetic variables investigated, 7 showed statistically significant gender differences, while social class had a remarkable effect on only two variables (GOOSE and FACE). Alternatively, this result can be attributed to the younger speakers being peer- rather than society-oriented (Kerswill and Williams 1997). For adolescents, social stratification of the adult society becomes irrelevant, which is reflected in their language.

6. Conclusions

The present study is a contribution to the problem of EE. The examination of the phonetic make up of the variety revealed that the extent of geographical variability between the localities allows one to conclude that we are still dealing with a number of distinct accents. Thus, the existence of a clearly definable uniform variety seems doubtful. However, as the regional accents of the Southeast indeed reveal a weaker presence of old regional variants, it is plausible that the levelling tendencies, reported elsewhere, are at work. At this stage however, the differences between the four localities are still quite sharp.
   At the same time, EE tendencies appear to be part of more general changes. The trends observed in the Home Counties speech, such as GOOSE fronting, *l*-vocalisation or labiodental variants of /θ/, have been adopted by other urban

centres in England. On the other hand, somewhat impressionistically observed features associated with this putative variety, like diphthong shift or increased glottaling could not be observed and are absent from the data. Likewise, the fronted variants of STRUT, although present, are scant.

Some of the above changes have been attributed to Cockney. Indeed, it is true that some London features are found in the data collected outside the capital. However, currently those variants are no longer uniquely Cockney or EE, but have already made inroads into the speech of other English towns. Only the features that form part of what Williams and Kerswill (1999) identify as "youth norms" have been adopted by the Home Counties adolescents. Their covert prestige might therefore be a factor facilitating their spread. However, in other respects, the speech of the Southeast appears not to be affected by Cockney.

Because London "constitutes the principal spatial diffusing nucleus, from which innovation normally radiate outwards" (Hernandez-Campoy 1999: 18), it is tempting to suggest a link between the proximity of the capital city and the emergence of those features. Undoubtedly, as regards its potential to introduce linguistic innovations, London remains the most influential urban centre not only in the Southeast, but also in England (Wells 1982 and Hernandez-Campoy 1999). In the light of gravity models (Hernandez-Campoy 1999) it seems plausible to assume that EE is receiving influence rather than exerting it. Some of the new non-regional features are also found in the RP data. Possibly, for both RP and EE the source of innovation is Cockney.

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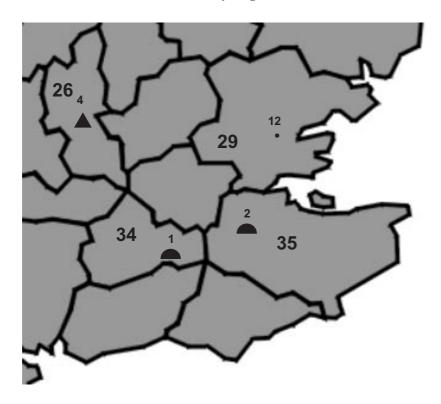Holmes, Janet
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Map reproduced from the *Survey of English Dialects* with modifications.

County	Locality
26 Bucks	Buckland[2]
29 Essex	Little Baddow
35 Kent	Farningham
34 Surrey	Walton-on-the-Hill

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[2] The present data were collected in Aylesbury. Buckland was the nearest locality visited by the SED fieldworkers.

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