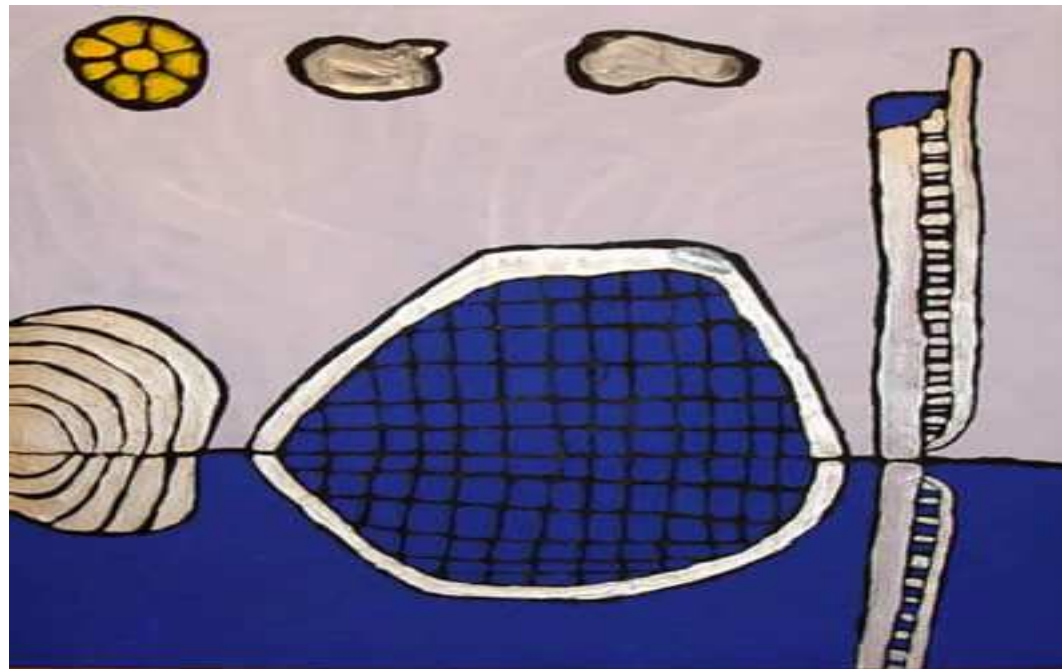# From Cockney to Jockney? The role of television in accent change in Modern Urban Scots
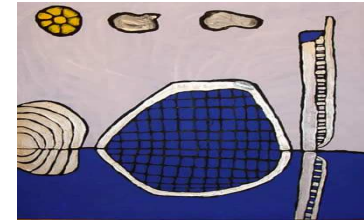
Jane Stuart-Smith

Department of English Language, University of Glasgow

14 December 2006

History of Scots, University of Giessen

From Cockney to Jockney? The role of television in accent change in Modern Urban Scots
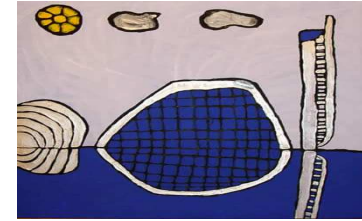
Paper overview

This paper was given as part of a seminar on the History of Scots at Giessen University.

The paper presents the same material as the previous paper given at Nijmegen, but moves the interpretation on to consider the impact of these changes in Urban Scots more generally, and hence to think more about the local context of these changes (and so the intersection of media and localness).

JSS 22/12/07

From Cockney to Jockney? The role of television in accent change in Modern Urban Scots
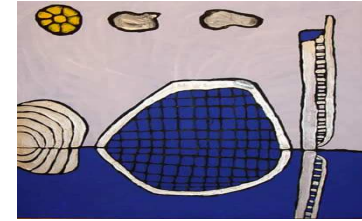

- Context – Modern Scots
- Variation and change in Modern Scots
- The problem of TH-fronting in Scots
- TV and language change
- The Glasgow media project
- Results: TH-fronting in Glaswegian
  - dialect contact; accent attitudes; TV
  - taking social factors together
  - awareness, imitation and TV
  - discussion
- Concluding remarks

Context – Modern Scots
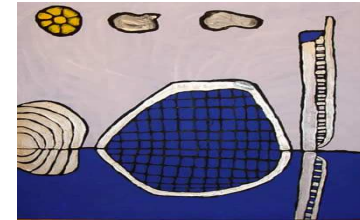
- Older Scots (1100 – 1700)
- 1603 Union of the Crowns
- 1707 Treaty of Union (parliaments)
  - gradual shift towards Southern English by upper/middle-classes
  - Scots retained by working-classes

- Modern Scots 1700 –
  - continued development of Scottish Standard English (e.g. Aitken 1979)
  - Scots increasingly restricted to spoken medium, rural and/or urban working classes
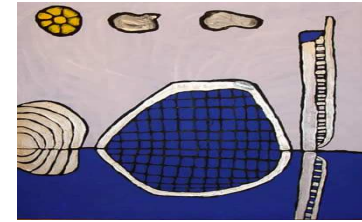 - 'good' (rural) and 'bad' (urban) Scots (e.g. Aitken 1984)

Modern Scots

- Main dialect divisions in Lowland Scots

  (*Scottish National Dictionary*)

  – Central/Mid Scots (Scottish 'Central Belt' – urban vernacular)
  – Southern/Border Scots
  – Northern Scots (Doric)
  – Insular Scots

'Scottish English'

- sociolinguistic continuum (cf. Aitken, 1979; 1984)

Scots ⟷ Standard Scottish English

- style switching or style shifting along continuum

Variation and change in Scottish English

- Standard Scottish English drifting towards Standard English
- Scots gradually undergoing levelling towards Standard Scottish English

or are they?

- Recent results from Glasgow show different pattern

  (e.g. Stuart-Smith *et al* forthcoming, Brato 2004)

  – maintenance of Scots features, e.g. /x/ in Scottish Standard English
  – phonological innovations, including TH-fronting, in urban Scots

The 'problem' of TH-fronting in Scots

TH-fronting, [f] for (th) in e.g. *think, tooth* is spreading across the UK

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

In Glasgow, this feature
is found exclusively
in working-class adolescents with
relatively low social and
geographical mobility, i.e. in Modern
Urban Scots.
(e.g. Stuart-Smith, 1999)

the media themselves are happy to blame

television

especially popular soap dramas set in London, such as *EastEnders,* apparently featuring Cockney dialect

Jockney = Jock (= Scot) +
Cock(ney)

From Cockney to Jockney?

(circ:550, 251)

28 JUN 2000

Cockneys are killing off the Scots accent

6455

SOAP operas like EastEnders are the most likely culprits for the growing spread of Estuary English among Glaswegian teenagers, academics claimed yesterday.

Youngsters in the city are developing a 'southern drawl' at the expense of distinctive Scottish sounds such as the 'ch' in 'loch', according to the study by Glasgow University. Researchers found pronunciations such as 'toof' for 'tooth' are becoming more common, while traditional Glasgow variations such as 'mulk' for 'milk' are in decline. They believe the influence of TV is to blame as many of the youngsters surveyed had little direct contact English people.

Glaswegians aged 13-14 were asked to read lists of words and talk in pairs before comparing the results with people aged 40-60. Dr Jane Stuart-Smith, of the Department of English Language, said: 'The finger of suspicion points to the media and programmes like EastEnders, which are rich in Cockney accents. 'Whatever the cause, it is certain that Glasgow's accent is changing.'

TV and language change
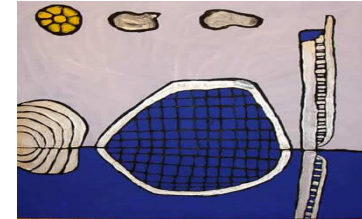
traditional view of 'variationist'/'quantitative' sociolinguistics

- watching TV may affect vocabulary
- but not core features of language, e.g. pronunciation, grammar

(e.g. Chambers, e.g. 1998, Trudgill, 1986)

- Language change primarily takes place through accommodation during face-to-face interaction
- assumption of strong media effects with 'direct' influence on behaviour

TV and language change
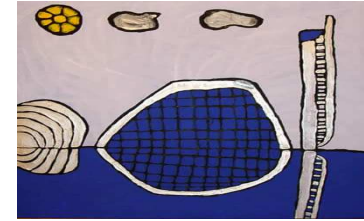
- TV may
  - increase awareness of linguistic varieties
  - and/or affect attitudes towards other varieties

(e.g. Milroy and Milroy 1985)

- If core features of grammar are affected, this must be in some way voluntary, and/or involve imitation

(Trudgill 1986)

and linguists?
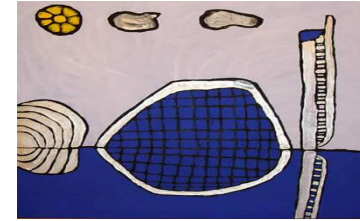
about TH-fronting in Norwich (Trudgill 1986: 54):

probably a combination of factors working together

- less overt forms of dialect contact
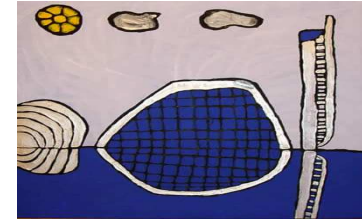- attitudes towards Cockney might play a role

and – (Trudgill 1988: 44):

'[the] sheer speed [of the change] may be due to a 'softening-up' process produced by the engendering of favourable attitudes through TV programmes'
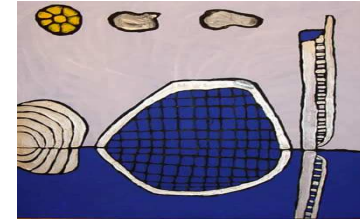
Why consider TV? (1)

- TV is exceptionally prevalent

- 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)
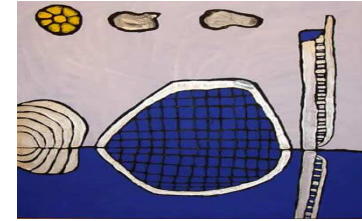 - viewers can be highly engaged (e.g. Buckingham 1987)

Why consider TV? (2)

- Media are assumed to affect social behaviour

(e.g. McQuail 2000: 424f),

but

- – TV is assumed to be a contributory factor, along with other factors (Klapper 1960: 8)
- – Audience assumed to be active interpreters of media texts (e.g. Philo 1999)

- TV and para-social interaction (e.g. Abercrombie 1996)

Why consider TV? (3)

- linguists are starting to include TV:
  - 'as part of the global sociolinguistic condition'

    (Androutsopoulos 2001: 4)

  - as possible cause of language change, in German

    (e.g. Lameli 2004; Muhr 2003)

  - in accounts of language variation

    e.g. Br. Portuguese (Naro 1981, Naro and Scherre 1996);
       Ur. Portuguese (Carvalho 2004).

- and to wonder about TV in TH-fronting

e.g. Williams and Kerswill (1999); Foulkes and Docherty (2000)

From Cockney to Jockney?
The Glasgow media project

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

Economic and Social Research Council (R000239757)

specific research question:

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

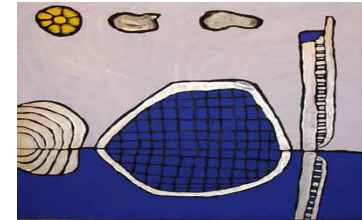# The research team

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

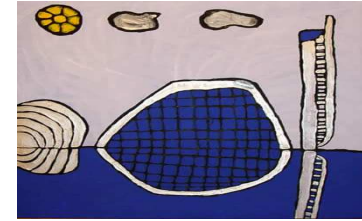- a group of kids (and adults) from Maryhill in Glasgow
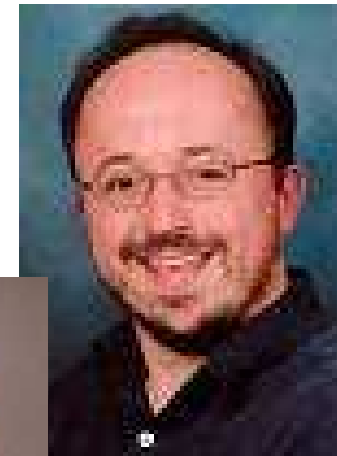
Scope of the project

- **sample**
  - 36 adolescents; 12 adults (working-class)
  - longitudinal - tracks 2 age groups across 2 years
- **methods**
  - quantitative and qualitative
- **data**
  - speech: wordlist and spontaneous
  - 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 adolescents 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

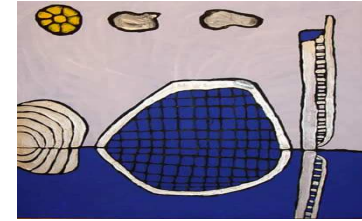# 1. TH-fronting is spreading in Glaswegian
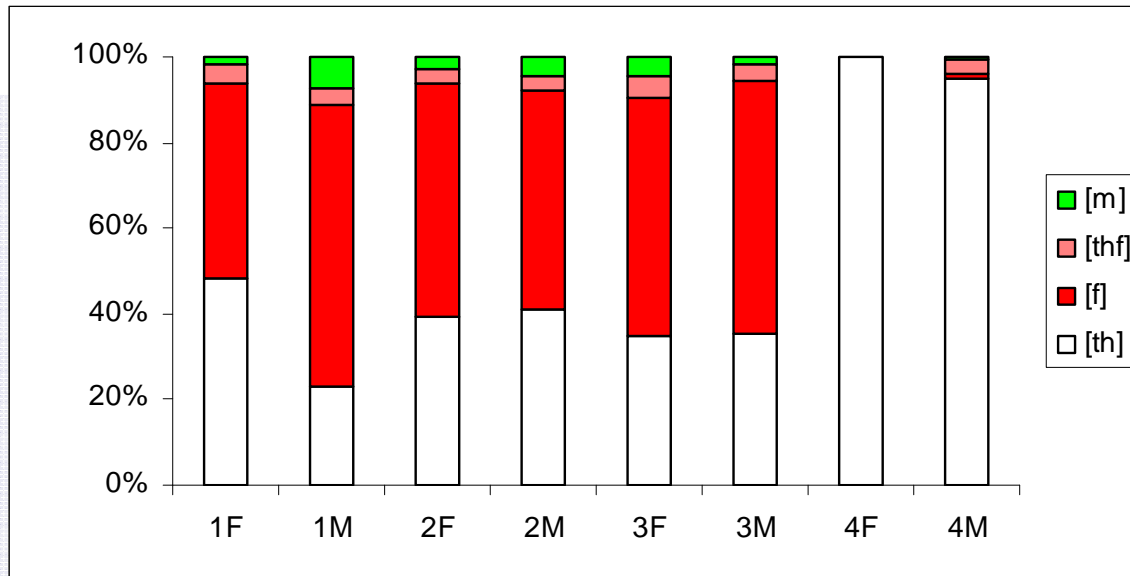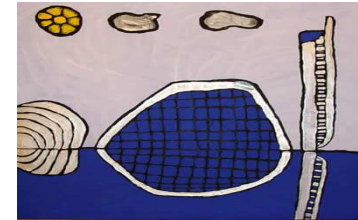
n = 951

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
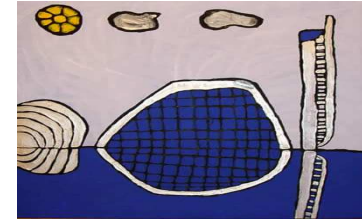- real-time change: we find more [f] in 2003 than in 1997

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. TH-fronting and dialect contact

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.
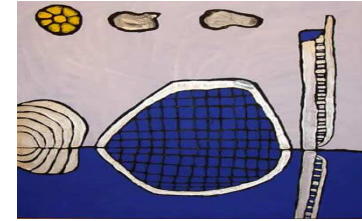
Statistical methodology – logistic regression
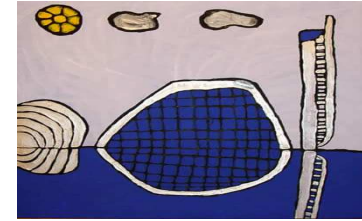
- One 'dependent' variable = linguistic, e.g. [f] for /θ/

- Many 'independent' variables = extralinguistic

  - e.g. within category of 'dialect contact'

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%)
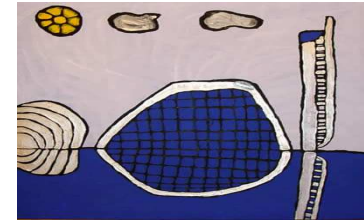
2a. TH-fronting and dialect contact

TH-fronting is linked positively with

– having relatives in the South of England

(only 8% variance explained)

2b. TH-fronting and accent 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'

<div align="right">Trudgill (1986), 55</div>

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)
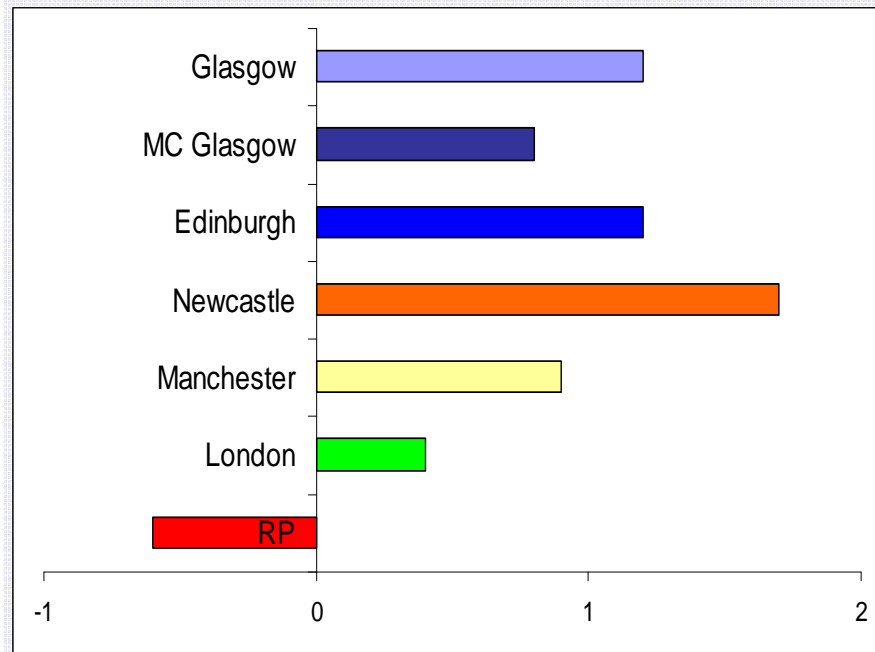
2b. TH-fronting and accent attitudes
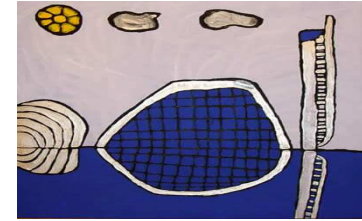
- **speech samples of 7 accents**
  - female speakers same age
  - reading same passage
  - beginning of questionnaire
  - also checked identification of accents

- **'mental image' of 8 urban accents (cf Preston 1999)**
  - 'what do you think of the accents in *London*?'
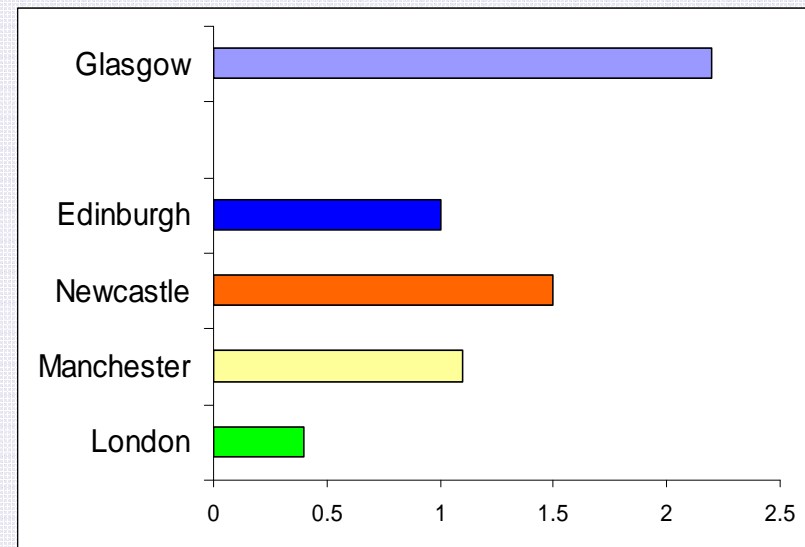 - end of questionnaire

2b. TH-fronting and accent attitudes

- Glasgow kids like Cockney, but less than other accents

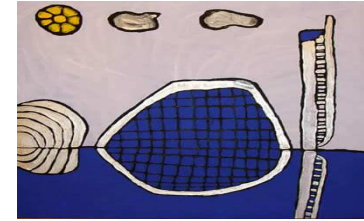Speech samples   mental image

average responses for all informants

(scale: less positive ……….. more positive)
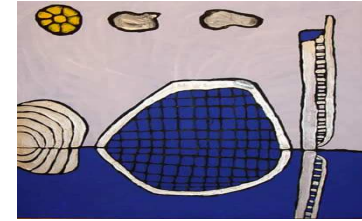
2b. TH-fronting and accent attitudes

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
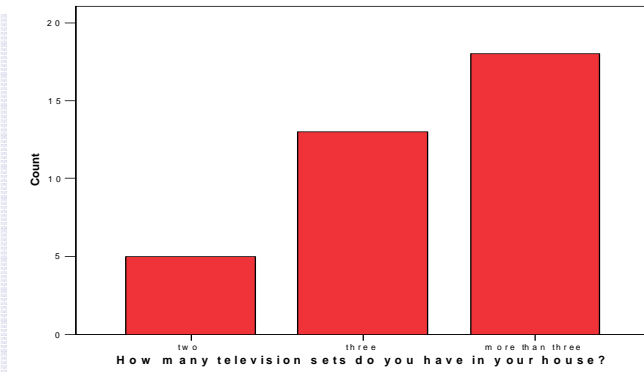
many have 3 or more TV sets
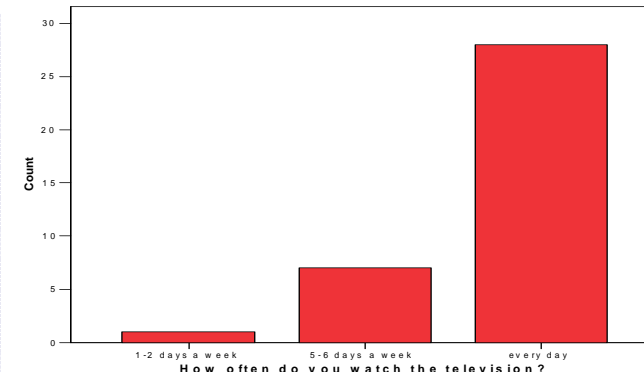
most watch TV every day

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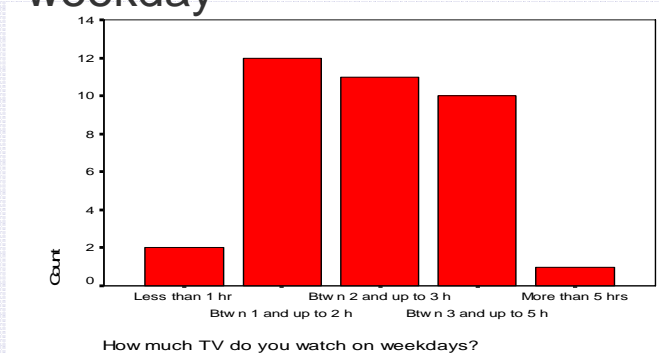
weekend
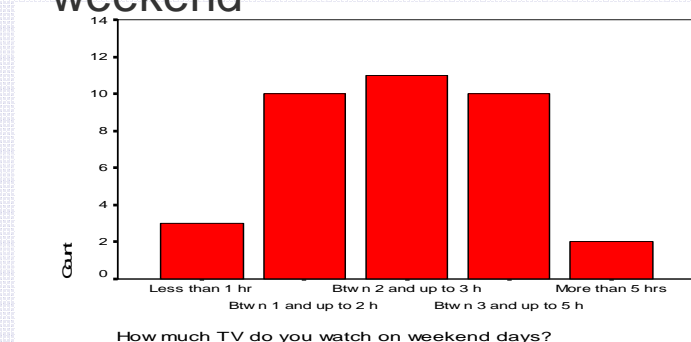
self-reported TV exposure of between 1 to 5 hours a day (av. 3hrs)

2c. They watch and like *EastEnders* most

watch

like
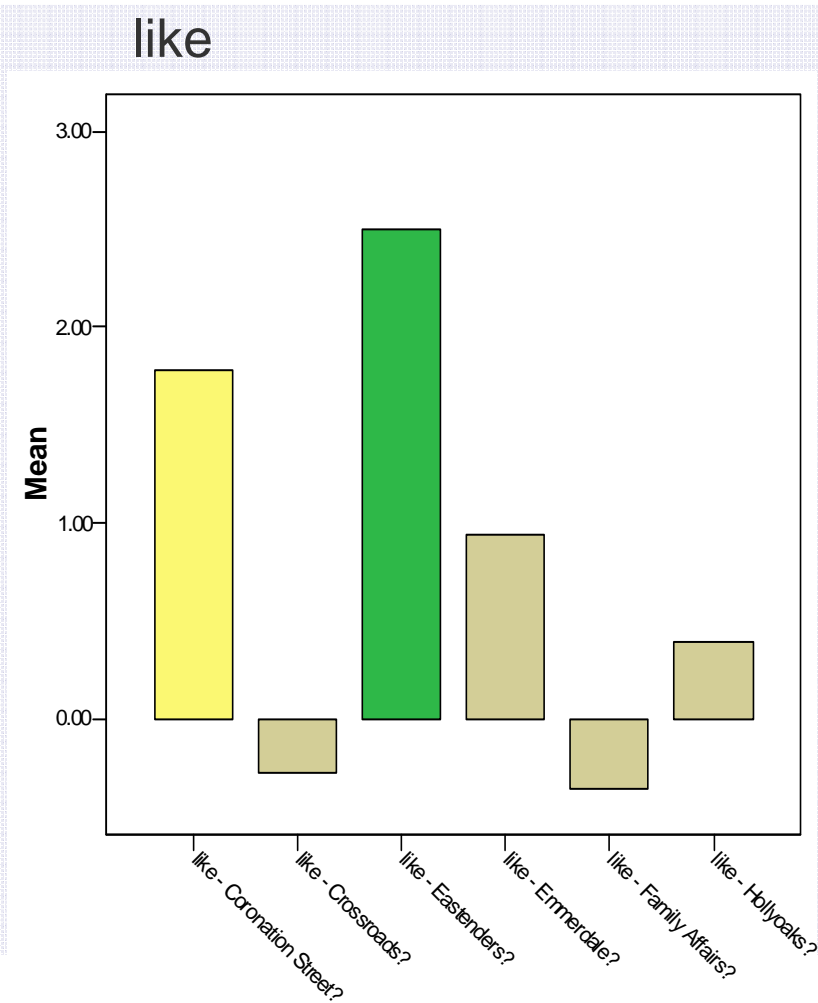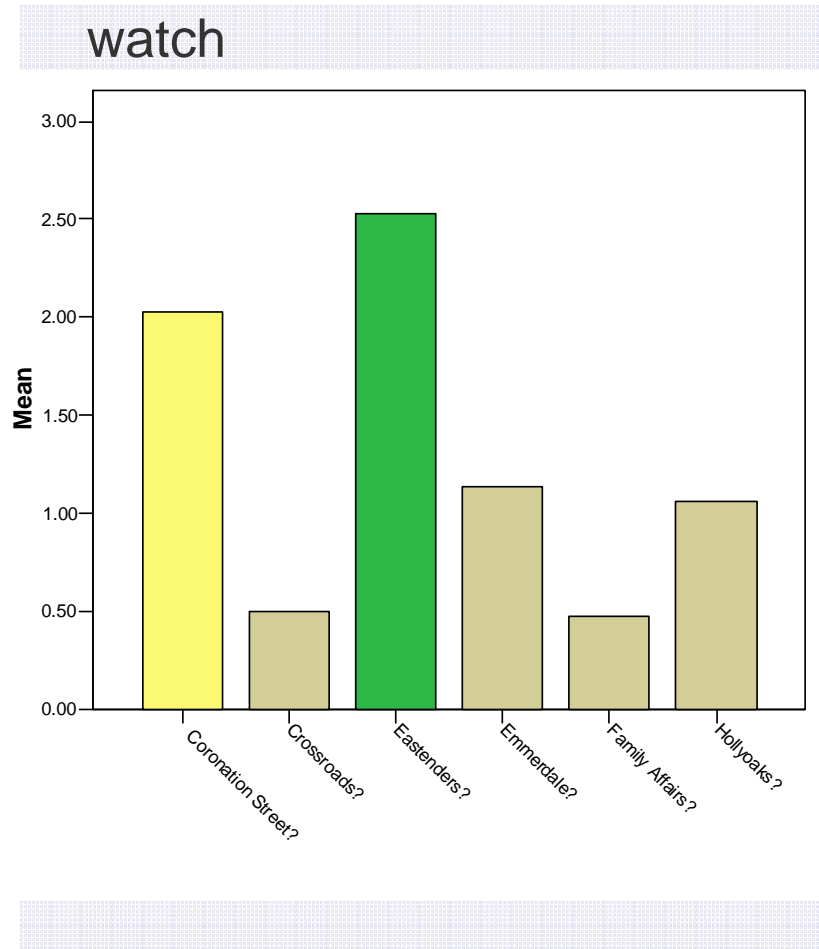
2c. TH-fronting occurs in *EastEnders*

All positions TH _ EastEnders

Legend:
- 0 (green)
- f (red)
- th (white)

y-axis: % (100%, 80%, 60%, 40%, 20%, 0%)

x-axis (Characters): BILLY, PEGGY, PHIL, LITTLE, PAUL, PAT, IAN, SHARON, SAM, RICKY, ALFIE, NATALIE, SONIA, SPENCER, KAT, KELLY
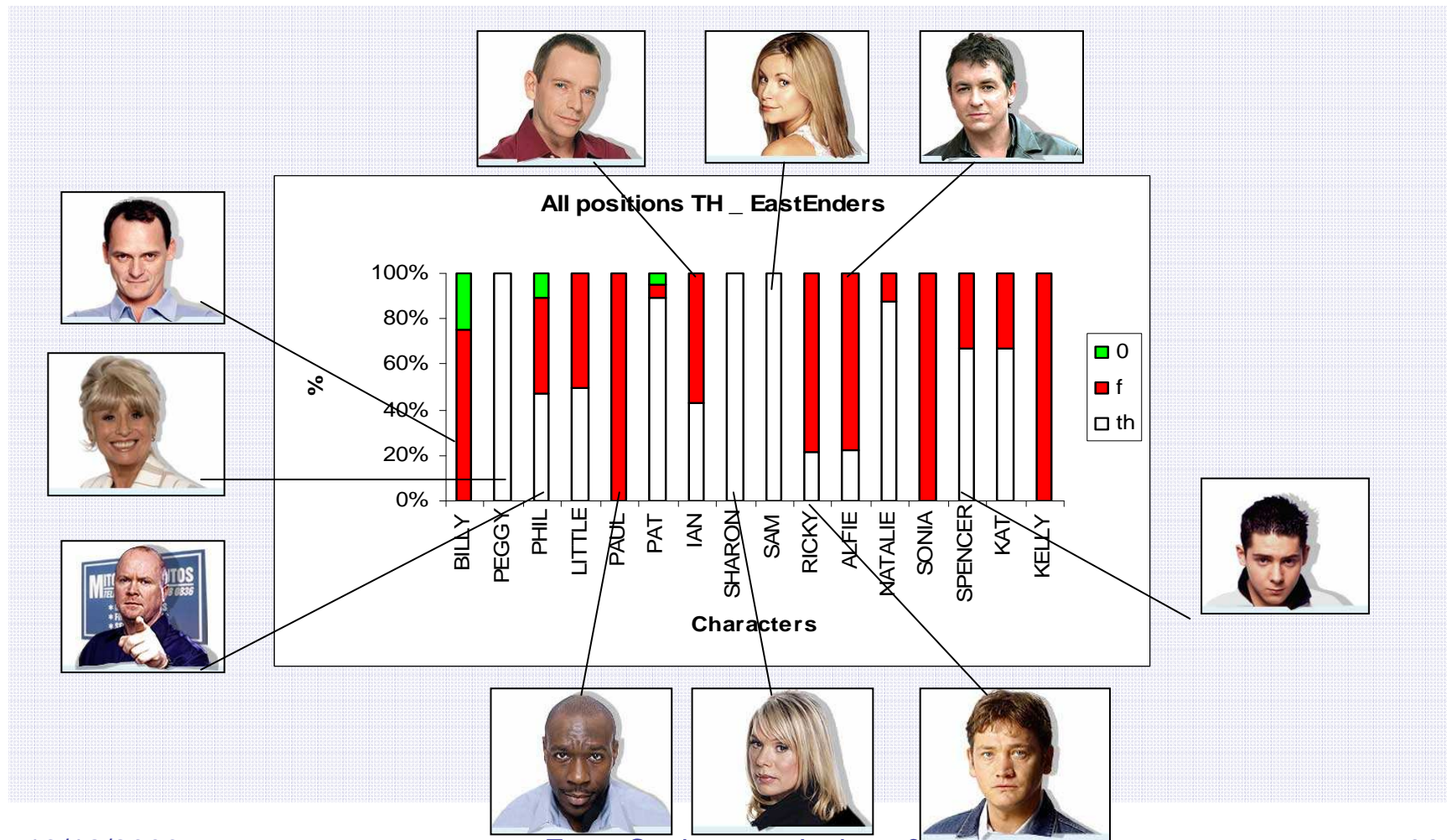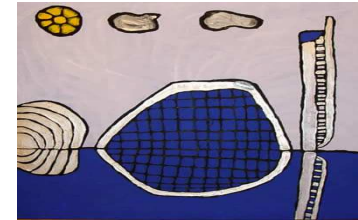
2c. TH-fronting and TV
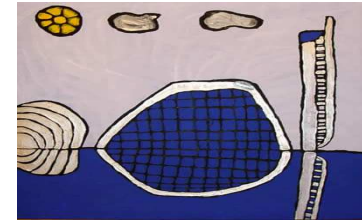
TH-fronting is linked positively with
- giving *EastEnders* as favourite programme
- criticizing soap characters
- liking *EastEnders* (also *The Bill*, London police drama)

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
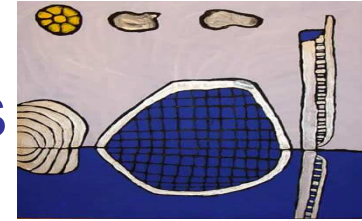
our statistical model was designed to consider a *range* of 'social' factors *together*:
- dialect contact
- attitudes to accents
- TV

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

2d. TH-fronting – a combination of factors
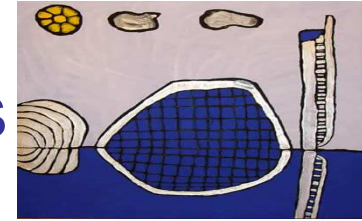
- We also considered a range of social factors together.

- Results showed significant links between TH-fronting and variables relating to:
  - occurring in word-final position, e.g. *tooth*
  - film (e.g. liking animation films like *The Simpsons)*
  - music (e.g. listening to local radio)
  - social practices/identities (e.g. disliking school)
  - computers (e.g. using the internet)
  - sport (e.g. supporting a football club)
  - dialect contact (having relatives in the South of England)
  - TV (engaging with *EastEnders*)

- around 35% variance explained

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, *EastEnders*
- combined analysis shows (as we might expect)
  - **several** factors are linked with TH-fronting
  - **engagement** with TV (*EastEnders*) is robust **alongside** dialect contact
  - attitudinal factors are weaker than other factors

2. Discussion – interpreting the results

- clearly a number of factors are involved in the spread of TH-fronting in Glasgow Scots
- the correlations with TV
  - may stand for another factor unaccounted for within the model, e.g. possibly covert positive attitudes towards Cockney (e.g. Kristiansen, pc, cf. Kristiansen (2003)
  - may refer to those adolescents, who show TH-fronting, 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 on the production of TH-fronting, e.g. using internet, disliking school.

3. Awareness of 'media-Cockney'?
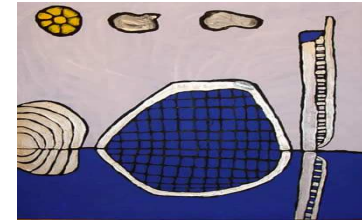
- Explored using informal imitation task (boys only) given during informal interview (cf Preston 1992)
  - informants shown a set of picture cards
  - asked to pronounce words first in their own accent
  - shown a picture of a leading actor from *EastEnders*
  - asked to talk about his accent and theirs
  - 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
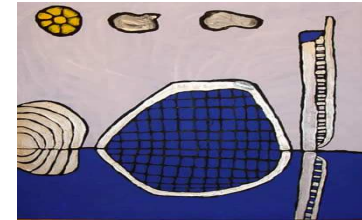
All children thought the actor's accent was different from theirs

- *'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

- 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 of media-Cockney
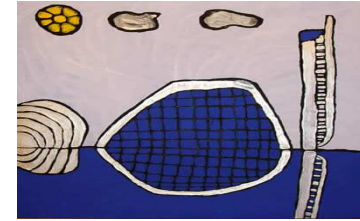
- first impressions were that little had been changed
- BUT most children altered at least something in response to the task
- Segments were altered
  - In the 'expected' direction: e.g. [th] > [f]
  - Also towards the standard: e.g. [f] > [th]
- changes in suprasegmental features were striking:
  - voice quality
  - length
  - pitch
- difficult to use this as evidence that imitation might be involved

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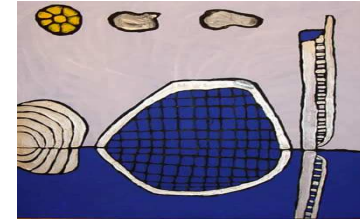
- TH-fronting is spreading in Glaswegian vernacular
- This change in progress is statistically linked to a number of extra-linguistic factors to do with the south of England, including those relating to dialect contact, attitudes and engagement with specific TV programmes
- There is little (?any) awareness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

- more satisfactory modelling of the role of TV requires different perspective, e.g. 'kommunikative Fernsehaneignen', cf Holly et al (2001)

Concluding remarks

- Modern Urban Scots of Glasgow is showing rapid innovations in consonantal phonology which take it closer to Southern English English systems
- But at the same time, vowels, and other Scots features, e.g. OUT, Scots L-vocalization, are remaining robust

  (Stuart-Smith 2003; Stuart-Smith *et al* 2006)

- So their phonology is mixture of Scots elements and 'new' non-local features
- Scots adolescents are exploiting resources, both local, and non-local (in some way via engagement with TV), in order to construct specific *local* identities
- In so doing, they are changing Modern Urban Scots

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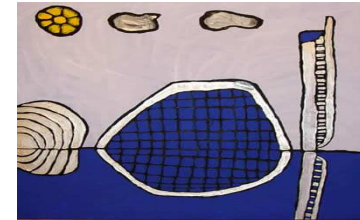
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