

Multicultural London English

Below are links to two recent newspaper articles about Multicultural London English. Text A is from *The Guardian's* Education pages, first published in 2006. Text B is from *The Daily Mail*, first published in 2013.



- **Text A:** www.theguardian.com/education/2006/apr/12/research.highereducation
- **Text B:** <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2498152/Is-end-Cockney-Hybrid-dialect-dubbed-Multicultural-London-English-sweeps-country.html>

Task one - the titles

Looking closely at the titles of the two articles, compare how language is used to present the topic. Complete the table with examples and comments on the differences.

	Text A: 'Learn Jafaikan in two minutes'	Text B: 'Is this the end of Cockney? Hybrid dialect dubbed 'Multicultural London English' sweeps across the country'
Sentence functions		
Name used for new variety of English		
Lexis with negative connotations		
Discourse: what does each title suggest the article's stance on MLE will be?		

Task two - lexical choices

Both texts use the nickname 'Jafaikan'. Text A mentions the term in the title and later in the body of the article: 'One schoolteacher has used the term 'Jafaikan' to describe the new language, but the researchers insist on more technical terminology: 'multicultural London English'.'

Text B states 'It was originally nicknamed Jafaican - fake Jamaican - but scientists have now said it is a dialect that been influences [sic] by West Indian, South Asian, Cockney and Estuary English.'



1. What is the effect of Text A's attribution (even though it is done anonymously) for the origin of the name compared to Text B's use of a passive sentence 'It was originally nicknamed ...'?
2. Compare the effects of the lexical choices in the two articles. How are we made to feel about their use of these words?

Lexical choice	Effects
(Text A) 'researchers'	
(Text B) 'scientists'	
(Text A) 'insist'	
(Text B) 'have ... said'	

3. Both articles make the statement that MLE is appearing in place of the older, traditional Cockney English. Which word(s) do Text A and Text B use in their discussion of the rise of MLE and the subsequent decline of Cockney? What does this suggest about the articles' attitudes towards MLE?

4. Both texts include examples of MLE. For each text, identify which aspects (levels) of language are included:
- phonetics
 - phonology and prosodics
 - lexis and semantics
 - grammar
 - pragmatics
 - discourse and graphology.



Include examples for each aspect identified. Why do you think these aspects feature?

5. Using your earlier answers as a starting point, analyse how the texts use language to present views about language change. Add at least two more examples of language use.

Task three - use of MLE

According to researchers from various European universities, MLE innovations started in central London areas such as Hackney, but are making their way to outer London, Essex and even appearing in other multi-ethnic areas in Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester.

1. When English speakers from across England were asked to identify the ethnic origins of MLE speakers, they mostly labelled white Anglo speakers from inner London as “non-Anglo” (Black or Asian Minority Ethnic). Can you think of an explanation(s) for this finding?

Here are some typical features of MLE.

Plural form 2 nd person pronoun ‘youse’	Indefinite pronoun ‘man’
Conjoined verbs without linking ‘and’ e.g. ‘we sit talk’	Suffix ‘-dem’ as plural noun suffix e.g. ‘boydem’ instead of ‘boys’
Why ... for’ as a question structure	‘enough’ / ‘nuff’ as intensifier
Absence of preposition ‘to’ e.g. ‘Going my friend’s’	

2. The articles present some of the typical lexis of MLE. Did you know any of these already? Do you use any of these?
3. Another typical feature of MLE is distinctive ‘quotatives’ - words or phrases used as a type of discourse marker to introduce a quote. In Standard English we might use ‘say’ e.g. ‘So, she says what about a drink?’ MLE features ‘be like’ and ‘this is ...’ as in ‘This is me, I’m from Hackney’ or ‘This is my mum, what are you doing?’ Which quotatives do you and your peers use?

Extension task

Listen to the speech of your age group (young people are the most likely users of MLE). Keep a diary of when you or your peers use MLE.

Teaching notes

The following activities help students explore recent press coverage of Multicultural London English. The teaching notes include some suggested ‘answers’ and some discussion points. The articles are available online:

- **Text A:** ‘Learn Jafaikan in two minutes’

www.theguardian.com/education/2006/apr/12/research.highereducation

- **Text B:** ‘Is this the end of Cockney? Hybrid dialect dubbed ‘Multicultural London English’ sweeps across the country’

www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2498152/Is-end-Cockney-Hybrid-dialect-dubbed-Multicultural-London-English-sweeps-country.html

Task one

	Text A: ‘Learn Jafaikan in two minutes’	Text B: ‘Is this the end of Cockney? Hybrid dialect dubbed ‘Multicultural London English’ sweeps across the country’
Sentence functions	imperative	Interrogative - rhetorical question Declarative/indicative mood
Name used for new variety of English	Jafaikan	‘hybrid dialect’, ‘Multicultural London English’
Lexis with negative connotations	-	‘end of ...’ - death (of a well-known distinctive English dialect/accents), ‘hybrid’ - not pure, mongrel, ‘sweeps across ...’ - sounds like a disease or flood or natural disaster, leaving people powerless.
Discourse: what does each title suggest the article’s stance on MLE will be?	It sounds like an instruction for a self-study language course, which suggests an open, positive, accepting attitude towards MLE.	The rhetorical question positions the reader to assume that this is happening and it is a bad thing - it also assumes that Cockney would never have changed otherwise, which is not true about language and dialects. The term ‘hybrid dialect’ sounds pejorative, as if it isn’t somehow a valid variety of English; it is then modified by the verb phrase ‘dubbed MLE’, which implies criticism of political correctness in the labelling of MLE. The verb ‘dubbed’ suggests that the name MLE is slightly ridiculous. The verb ‘sweeps’ makes it sound like a natural disaster (bad thing) or a fashion craze, suggesting that it is not a serious, utterly understandable linguistic process.

Task two

1. Text A juxtaposes an anonymous teacher with the linguists. The teacher named a linguistic development: this development has now been investigated by researchers who have given this form of English a more scientific name. This suggests a logical order of events, as well as hinting that young people have driven linguistic innovation.

Text B makes use of the passive, which makes it sound as if ‘Jafaican’ was already a well-established name for this variety of English. This makes the linguists sound like spoilsports for now naming it Multicultural London English.

2.

Lexical choice	Effects
(Text A) ‘researchers’	This is precise as the article is reporting on actual research findings.
(Text B) ‘scientists’	‘Scientists’ has serious connotations, with the idea of expertise, perhaps so that the notion of a new variety of English, rather than ‘bad English slang’ is taken more seriously.
(Text A) ‘insist’	This makes the linguists sound very pushy - they are presented as objecting to ‘Jafaican’ as a term and prefer a more scientific or linguistic term, perhaps hoping that audience will take this on board and stop using ‘Jafaican’.
(Text B) ‘have ... said’	This sounds neutral, as if it is a statement that was put forward and the audience can take it or leave it.

3. Text A: ‘the traditional Cockney accent is being replaced’

Text B: ‘Cockney rhyming slang is being driven out’ sounds much more aggressive and deliberate, however both sentences use progressive passives, which puts the emphasis on Cockney English as the subject of the passive construction.

Both pieces make ‘Cockney’ appear like the helpless victim, but Text B’s choice of verb makes it sound much more negative and deliberate, and as if this new form of English (based on the languages of immigrants) is threatening a ‘genuine, traditional’ English form.

4.

Text A	Text B
<p>Phonetics: the distinct pronunciation of MLE ‘more clipped vowels’ as opposed to the elongated Cockney vowels; the substitution of /ð/ with /d/ as in ‘dey’.</p> <p>Lexis and semantics: the glossary at the end of the article.</p> <p>Discourse: the conversation at the start gives an impression of adjacency pair structure and idiomatic expressions used as greetings.</p>	<p>Phonetics: pronunciation of ‘like’ is given as an example to illustrate that it is different from Caribbean English pronunciation. The substitution of the dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ with /v/ and /f/. No h-dropping.</p> <p>Lexis and semantics: only 2 examples in the text: ‘blud’ and ‘ends’. However, throughout the article ‘slang’ is used to refer to MLE, without it ever being exemplified (not all slang is MLE, a distinction the piece does not make).</p>

As the texts are both aimed at a general audience, the writers focus on the most noticeable aspects of English varieties, namely accent. Words and idiomatic phrases are also relevant. Neither text mentions grammar, which is possibly because this might be regarded as too technical or off-putting for a general audience.

5. Text A’s inclusion of conversation at the start puts MLE in context and gives it status as a proper discourse used by real speakers. Text B, with its focus on pronunciation and unspecified slang, suggests MLE is not really representing it as a living language (despite referring to it as a ‘language’ at times). Text B also mentions well-known actors and British hip-hop, both of which are held up as examples of MLE. This further enhances Text B’s implied suggestion that MLE is not a real variety of English, but a slang used by a subculture.

As well as the points made above, other points students could discuss include:

- Text B’s stand-alone sentence: ‘But unlike Cockney, MLE users do not drop their aitches’ - its position as a single paragraph gives it emphasis, suggesting that this is a positive for MLE speakers.
- Text B significant quotation from Paul Kerswill gives it reliability and weight. Text A also quotes an expert for the same reasons.
- Text B also relies on heavily pre-modified proper nouns, as is typical for tabloid journalism: ‘Rap artists such as Dizee Rascal’ and ‘Hackney-born actor Idris Elba’ - this is perhaps to aid the typical audience for the *Daily Mail* who may not have heard of these names. Yet, it is also typical for the *Mail* (and many other tabloids) to connect a news story to some celebrities. Text A avoids the celebrity angle altogether. As the piece was published in the Education section of the paper, it is understandable that the focus is instead on teachers who might have heard their students use MLE.
- Text A uses more sophisticated linguistic lexis such as ‘vowels’ when discussing the pronunciation of MLE. Text B attempts to describe pronunciation as ‘leaving out letters’.

- Text A uses synthetic personalisation through the use of direct address: ‘parents’, ‘teachers’, with imperatives (in the title and at the end ‘worry not’), and with the use of the second personal pronoun ‘you’. Text B avoids any form of direct address, positioning their audience in such a way that it is assumed they will never hear MLE, unless it is from celebrities or British hip-hop artists.
- Although Text A mentions Sue Fox, the text makes it clear that she is one of a team of researchers, while Text B implies that ‘linguistics professor Paul Kerswill’ has coined the label ‘MLE’ and has effectively discovered this variety of English on his own. Perhaps this makes the text as a news item seem more newsworthy as the paper can get the news from the one expert at the heart of it. It also presents a stereotypical image of science as a field in which individuals make amazing discoveries by themselves - a stereotype that is maybe more appealing to a general audience.
- While Text B references (with large photographs) a well-known actor and a well-known musician, Text A refers to a comic sketch character, who is famous for being a white person trying to appropriate Black hip-hop culture. This image suggests the origins of MLE as English originating in ethnic minority communities, which is now influencing white English speakers’ English.

Task three

See the University of Lancaster’s website for further details of the research:

www.lancaster.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/multicultural/index.htm

1. The research demonstrated that white ‘Anglo’ speakers of MLE were more likely to use MLE if they had more ethnic minority contacts in their social networks. However, as MLE is linked in popular imagination to hip-hop and possibly sounds like American and Caribbean English to the untutored ear, it is likely that white English speakers from outside London are more likely to guess wrongly that MLE speakers from inner London must be Black or Asian Ethnic Minority speakers.