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Multicultural London English and its speakers: a corpus-informed discourse study of standard language ideology and social stereotypes

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ABSTRACT

The research presented here constitutes the first investigation of the standard language ideology (SLI) in Great Britain that takes account of a multiethnolect – namely Multicultural London English (MLE). A corpus-informed discourse study was conducted to explore representations of MLE and its speakers in two corpora: one containing data from non-MLE-speaking Londoners and one consisting of data from MLE speakers themselves. The data included in these corpora had been collected by means of an online questionnaire. The discourses in both corpora clearly reflected the SLI that prevails in the British context – but much stronger evidence of this was found in the non-MLE speakers' discourses. The non-MLE speakers were also found to hold much stronger, and very negative, social stereotypes of multiethnolect speakers. There was evidence of their use of iconisation and erasure in order to create linguistic (and social) differences between themselves and MLE speakers. Given the current political climate in Great Britain, it is hypothesised that the non-MLE speakers' negative views of the multiethnolect and its speakers helped them reaffirm their own prestige, which they perceived to be threatened. Notably, the MLE speakers themselves were not complicit in the negative stereotyping of their own group.

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Introduction

Most people live in 'standard language cultures' – that is, in communities where varieties can be classified by whether they are considered standard or non-standard (Milroy 2001).¹ This dichotomy is based on an ideology in which the correctness and legitimacy of the standard are taken for granted – an ideology that is taught in schools, promoted by the media, institutionalised by the corporate sector, and reinforced in many other areas of public life (Lippi-Green 2012). The resulting devaluation of non-standard varieties goes so far that in the popular mind, these are judged to be illegitimate (Milroy 2001). This hierarchisation of language varieties does not reflect any intrinsic values but is merely the product of a wider social stratification: the standard holds its status because it is spoken by a dominant social group, and the ideology surrounding it is based on the linguistic history of its community (Wiley and Lukes 2000). Nevertheless, the systematically-held beliefs that constitute this kind of ideology become naturalised to the extent that they are perceived as 'common sense' (Woolard 1998).

Milroy (2001, 536) stresses the tremendous power that lies in being able to appeal to common sense in debates about the rightness of standard forms and the wrongness of non-standard forms:

To call it ‘common sense’ implies that any debate on the matter is superfluous: everyone must surely know that the view expressed is the correct – responsible, decent, moral – view. Those who might disagree cannot be taken seriously: they are likely to be eccentric, irresponsible or, perhaps, dishonest.

The linkage of linguistic features (such as spelling and grammar) with non-linguistic features (such as a speaker’s social background or personality traits) is highly prevalent and illustrates that ideologies are never about language alone. Instead, they ‘envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group’ (Woolard 1998, 3). Woolard (1998, 16) thus describes ‘the diagnosis of peoplehood by the criterion of language’ as one of the fundamental tenets of language ideology. Since the standard is the variety that is ideologically associated with qualities that are conventionally valued, these linkages have important implications for the social world – including the promotion of the dominant group’s interests at the expense of all less powerful groups (Lippi-Green 2012). The standard therefore constitutes a crucial resource for socio-economic advancement, which results in a linguistic stratification that ‘subordinates those groups who do not command [it]’ (Kroskrity 2004, 509) – and the standard language ideology (henceforth: SLI) creates and maintains not only a linguistic but also a social hierarchy, which is perpetuated by the ‘hegemonic domination’ of the standard over all other, non-standard varieties (Silverstein 1996, 284). Consequently, the study of language ideology ‘enables an analytical unpacking of how speakers understand, view, and use language’ while taking into account crucial questions of identity construction as well as broader socio-economic and socio-political contexts (Cavanaugh 2011, 46).

Great Britain is a prime example of a standard language culture, and there has been a considerable amount of research into the SLI in the British context (see e.g. Milroy 2000 for a summary). However, this research deals with the traditional regional and social varieties of British English, and it either pre-dates or does not take account of the development of a relatively new typological language variety (Cheshire, Nortier, and Adger 2015), namely the so-called *multiethnolect*.

Multiethnolects are contact varieties that have, in recent decades, emerged in urban centres across Europe which have attracted large-scale immigration – including Birmingham (Fox, Khan, and Torgersen 2011), Manchester (Drummond 2016), and London (Fox 2015). They have their origins in mixed multiethnic and multilingual neighbourhoods where many first-generation immigrants do not speak the host society’s language at all, or they speak a non-native variety of it, and where speakers of the traditional local variety (for example, Cockney in London) are often in the minority. There is thus no consistent target variety for the children of many immigrants and for subsequent newcomers. In such communities, language change can take place as a generation of immigrant children acquires ‘combinations of language features from a rich “feature pool” of linguistic forms influenced by a wide variety of languages, dialects and learner varieties’ (Cheshire and Fox 2016, 288; see Mufwene 2001 for the notion of the *feature pool*). The following generations then acquire the resulting contact varieties from their peers and siblings, and even later generations also from their multiethnolect-speaking parents.

Multiethnolects are contact varieties in that their ‘lexicon and grammatical structures cannot all be traced back primarily to the same source language’ (Thomason 2001, 158), although it is assumed that they do have a base language – namely the dominant language of the local community. A defining characteristic of multiethnolects is that, regardless of the origins of the linguistic features they include, they are not restricted to any particular ethnic group: they are used by (usually monolingual) speakers from non-immigrant backgrounds as well as by their (usually multilingual) peers with immigration backgrounds (Cheshire, Nortier, and Adger 2015). While some speakers may, in certain situations, choose to use multiethnolects for the purpose of portraying a particular kind of identity, there are increasing indications that ‘these varieties have become the unmarked Labovian “vernacular” for many speakers’ (Cheshire et al. 2011, 153).² Yet, notably, in public discussions multiethnolects are ‘predominantly framed within a language ideology that excludes them from the

domain of “proper” or “correct” language’ – which is in line with ‘devaluating them as “faulty” speech rather than a legitimate language [variety], and thus ultimately supports a devaluation and Othering of [multiethnolect] speakers’ (Wiese and Rehbein 2016, 46).

To our knowledge, the only SLI research that systematically takes account of multiethnolects are Wiese’s (2014) work on Kiezdeutsch in Berlin, as well as Stroud’s (2004) and Milani’s (2010) studies of Rinkeby Svenska in Stockholm. Wiese (2014, 13) identifies four predominant topoi pertaining to Kiezdeutsch and its speakers:

- (1) ‘Broken language’ – Kiezdeutsch as a deficient version of German.
- (2) ‘Language decay’ – as a result, it threatens the integrity of German.
- (3) ‘Opting out’ – speakers refuse to integrate into the larger society.
- (4) ‘Social demolition’ – as a result, they threaten national cohesion.

She concludes that Kiezdeutsch is constructed as everything that Hochdeutsch – the standard dialect in Germany – is not: the standard and the multiethnolect are ideologised in a manner that ‘crucially builds on a contrast of linguistic and social identity’ (Wiese 2014, 20). The research on Rinkeby Svenska also shows the common construction of ‘the opposition between good “standard Swedish” and bad “multi-slang”’ (Milani 2010, 131) as well as the predominant representation of the multiethnolect as ‘deviant’ from standard Swedish (2010, 117). Again, there is strong evidence of Othering with regard to multiethnolect speakers. As Stroud (2004, 197) notes, ‘in modern states, where explicit racist discourse is not officially acceptable, discourses on language, and more specifically issues relating to [...] standard language ideology, are often used to create immigrant out-groups’.

Thus far, there has been no systematic SLI research that takes account of multiethnolects in Britain. In this paper, we therefore present a first case study, in which we focus on the multiethnolect spoken in England’s main metropolis – namely Multicultural London English (henceforth: MLE). Specifically, we discuss a corpus-informed discourse study that explores representations of MLE and its speakers. For this study, two corpora are compared: one consisting of data from non-MLE-speaking Londoners and one containing data from MLE speakers themselves. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of the extent to which Londoners of different linguistic backgrounds have internalised various aspects of the prevalent SLI and the corresponding social stereotypes.

We begin by providing a brief account of the SLI in Britain as well as the necessary background regarding MLE and its speakers. This is followed by an outline of the methodology we employed, and a discussion of our key findings as well as their implications for the social lives of MLE speakers.

The standard language ideology in Great Britain

The SLI prevalent in Britain today has its origins in the eighteenth century. At that time, a widespread consciousness of a relatively uniform, ‘correct’ English was established by means of codification; the codified form spread widely as a result of progress in technology and means of communication; and subsequent advances in literacy and mass education have ensured that the public continues to look at this codified form as the ‘model of correctness’ (Milroy and Milroy 1999, 29). The resulting standard dialect is simply referred to as Standard English (henceforth: SE), and Trudgill (1999, 118) describes its prevalence as follows:

it is the variety of English normally used in writing, especially printing; it is the variety associated with the education system [...], and is therefore the variety spoken by those who are often referred to as “educated people”; and it is the variety taught to non-native learners.

Its legitimacy is unquestioned and it is ideologised as a ‘neutral reference point’ for all descriptions of linguistic variation within British English (Milroy 2000, 82).

It is notable that SE is not inherently linked with one particular accent. There is a high-status accent known as Received Pronunciation (henceforth: RP), which is spoken natively by a small, privileged segment of the British population (Upton 2015). However, while all RP speakers use SE, the reverse is not the case: SE can be spoken with a range of different regional accents (Trudgill and Cheshire 1989) or even non-native accents. Nevertheless, in the public mind, SE and RP are often associated with each other (Ager 2003).

The most salient sociolinguistic characteristic of SE is that it is no longer a regional, but by now a purely social dialect: even though its earliest origins lie in the South-East of England, it has, over time, become established in all parts of the country. Moreover, just as the speakers who imposed their variety as the standard in the eighteenth century were ‘the social group with the highest degree of power, wealth and prestige’, those who now speak SE natively are also the ones at ‘the very top’ of the social scale (Trudgill 1999, 124).

While there is no previous research into the SLI in Britain that takes account of multiethnolects, we do know that there is a historical trend for urban varieties of British English to be devalued to the extreme: it has long been feared that they might ‘vulgarize and contaminate’ the standard, which therefore has to be ‘protected from their influence’ (Milroy 2001, 548). Varieties associated with particular ethnic groups also tend to be downgraded particularly strongly (Coupland and Bishop 2007) – which is in line with a more widespread trend to stigmatise varieties ‘linked to skin that isn’t white’ (Lippi-Green 2012, 253). These trends need to be borne in mind when considering our case study of MLE, the multiethnolect spoken in London.

Multicultural London English and its speakers

London has a long history as a destination for immigrants from overseas and newcomers from other parts of the British Isles. Many of the city’s neighbourhoods are thus characterised by considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity. Particularly in numerous East End neighbourhoods – that is, the areas where immigrants have traditionally tended to settle – native speakers of English have long constituted a minority (Cheshire and Fox 2009). It is in the extensive language and dialect contact in these parts of the city that MLE has its roots, which can be traced back as far as the 1980s (Cheshire et al. 2011). MLE is best defined as the variable output of a feature pool derived from various native varieties of English (namely the local Cockney dialect, other UK regional varieties of English, Standard English, as well as African, Caribbean, and Asian Englishes from those countries that have a British colonial past), different learner varieties of English, Jamaican Creole, and further languages other than English (Kerswill 2014).

In line with multiethnolects elsewhere, MLE has become the unselfconscious vernacular of speakers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, who ‘draw on and share at least a portion of the wide linguistic resources reflecting the ethnically mixed nature and multilingual backgrounds of their communities’ (Fox, Khan, and Torgersen 2011, 21). Yet, public opinion does not reflect this: MLE is ‘routinely heard as “black” by outsiders’ (Cheshire et al. 2011, 164).

There are further discrepancies between public perception and actual fact regarding the demographic profile of MLE speakers: in addition to hearing this multiethnolect ‘as black’, many seem to hold the stereotype of the typical speaker as a young, working-class male from East London (see e.g. *The Independent*, 5 November 2006). However, our research has revealed MLE to be spoken by individuals from a much wider range of backgrounds: it was found to be used not only by young Londoners but also by those well into their fifties, by women and men alike, by individuals whose occupations range from unskilled labour to higher managerial professions, and by people in almost all London boroughs (Kircher and Fox 2019).

Another pertinent discrepancy between social stereotype and reality relates to MLE speakers’ perceived inability to switch from their multiethnolect to a more standard variety in situations where this is required (Kerswill 2014). While previous research has shown that multiethnolect speakers

are in fact usually very capable of making such switches (Drummond 2016), the public concern regarding this issue nevertheless remains prevalent (Cheshire, Hall, and Adger 2017).

In the absence of SLI research in Britain that takes account of multiethnolects, Kerswill's (2014) analysis of media representations of MLE provides some relevant insights. He shows, for example, how the press often portrays MLE as a threat to British people and their cultural values, as well as using it to index inauthenticity, foreignness, and bad behaviour. These findings tie in with public discourses on multiethnolects elsewhere. In her overview of such discourses, Wiese (2014, 3) notes that there is frequent mention of 'a fear that [multiethnolects] pose a threat to the national language, to the education system, or to majority culture and society' – and she observes that speakers of multiethnolects are often 'associated with aggression'.

Based on the trends outlined thus far, the aims of our study are therefore the following: firstly, to investigate whether and to what extent discursive representations of MLE and its speakers reflect the SLI in Great Britain as well as the corresponding social stereotypes; and secondly, to find out whether there are pertinent differences between the discourses of non-MLE-speaking and MLE-speaking Londoners. As far as we are aware, ours is not only the first study to investigate the SLI in Britain while taking account of a multiethnolect, but it is also the first SLI research in any context that considers the discourses of multiethnolect speakers themselves.

Methodology

'Ideology is variously discovered in *linguistic practice* itself; in *explicit* talk about language, that is, metalinguistic or metapragmatic discourse, and in the regimentation of language use through more *implicit* metapragmatics' (Woolard 1998, 9, emphasis added). For reasons of space, our case study focuses solely on explicit discursive representations of MLE and its speakers. Specifically, we conducted a corpus-informed discourse study in which we examined data from two corpora: one consisting of data obtained from MLE speakers and the other containing data from non-MLE speakers.

Data collection

The data for our corpora were collected with a questionnaire which was distributed online by means of snowball sampling – that is, a non-probability sampling technique where the initial participant sample recruited further participants amongst their acquaintances, and they amongst theirs, and so on. The initial sample consisted of our own contacts in London as well as social media groups and mailing lists for diverse community organisations. Data collection took place between October 2016 and July 2017. In total, the questionnaire was completed by 800 Londoners whose ages ranged from 18 to 86, including individuals of different genders, birthplaces, ethnic backgrounds, educational levels, and occupations. The participants also differed in terms of their mother tongues and their own varieties of English. The questionnaire aimed to find out about three interrelated issues: firstly, differences in the perceived salience of various features of MLE – which we discuss in Fox and Kircher ([in preparation](#)); secondly, attitudes towards MLE and the variables that affect them – which we cover in Kircher and Fox (2019); and thirdly, discursive representations of MLE and its speakers – which we focus on here.

Qualitative data pertaining to such discursive representations were elicited with the open-ended item 'Please explain in your own words what you think about MLE and its users. There are no right or wrong answers'. 735 participants responded to the open-ended questionnaire item, and it yielded data from 620 self-reported non-MLE speakers and 115 self-reported MLE speakers. These data were used to create the two corpora, which contain 16,933 and 4665 words respectively.

While the term *MLE* was originally coined by academics, it is now also used in mainstream media (see e.g. *The Guardian*, 6 February 2013) and has therefore attained a degree of familiarity among the

general public. Nevertheless, to ensure all participants knew what variety we were interested in, we provided this explanation at the beginning of our questionnaire:

This term [MLE] is used to describe the speech of young people in multiethnic areas of London regardless of the speaker's own ethnic background and their gender. A lot of young Londoners now use MLE instead of the Cockney dialect that is traditionally associated with London.

As we will discuss below, it is possible that this definition may have primed some aspects of the responses to our open-ended item – yet this is a risk we had to take in order to ensure that everyone was in fact commenting on the variety under investigation.

Self-reported data regarding linguistic behaviour do not always reflect reality accurately (Bourhis 1983). However, the only way we could have fully ascertained each participant's own variety would have been by means of an ethnographic study – which would have entailed different drawbacks (Wertheim 2003). On balance, dividing the participants' responses into the two corpora based on their self-reported variety was thus considered most appropriate.

It should also be noted that the aim of the open-ended item we focus on here was clearly recognisable, which might have led some respondents to give socially desirable answers (Baker 1992). Yet, due to the anonymity offered by online questionnaires like ours, the likelihood of this affecting the data in our corpora is comparatively low (Dewaele 2018).

Data analysis

We use the term *corpus* here in a broad sense, to mean 'a collection of texts [...] that can be analysed using a computer' (Brezina 2018, 15). While a corpus-linguistic analysis can very effectively reveal discursive patterns regarding language ideology in large amounts of data, it is 'not sufficient in explaining or interpreting the reasons why certain linguistic patterns were found [...] because this type of analysis does not take into account the social, political, historical and cultural context of the data under consideration' (Baker 2010, 141, emphasis added). We therefore employed a combination of quantitative corpus methods and qualitative data analysis – an approach frequently referred to as *corpus-assisted discourse analysis* (see e.g. Vessey 2016a; Jaworska and Themistocleous 2017). However, as corpora are usually very large bodies of texts and ours are rather small by comparison, we instead refer to our method as *corpus-informed discourse analysis* (see also e.g. Hyland 2009; Breeze and Olza 2017).

While there is no single methodology for how to 'do' corpus analysis (Hunston and Thompson 2006, 3), the most common procedures include the determination of highly frequent words and phrases – because these are 'understood to have a particular function within the society producing the texts'; and the analysis of collocations, that is, the words with which pertinent terms tend to co-occur – because 'isolated words are not understood to be meaningful on their own' (Vessey 2016a, 5).³

Making use of the Word List tool in the corpus linguistics programme AntConc, we therefore began by investigating frequencies in our MLE data, grouping frequent words and phrases together into semantic categories to establish meaningful trends. As our two corpora are quite different in size, we normalised all frequencies to facilitate comparisons.⁴ Subsequently, we employed AntConc's Concordances tool to examine the collocates of the most pertinent words, using the standard search window of five spaces to the left and to the right of the search term (Baker 2006). To establish that words were not merely co-occurring by chance, we considered their Mutual Information (henceforth: MI) scores. These use a logarithmic scale to express 'the ratio between the frequency of the collocation and the frequency of random co-occurrence of the two words in combination' (Gasblatsova, Brezina, and McEnery 2017, 163). We followed the common convention of taking MI scores of 3 or above as evidence of statistical significance (Vessey 2015). Additionally, we considered selected concordance lines – that is, lines which 'present an individual lexical item within its "co-text" across numerous texts' (Vessey 2016a, 6) – as well as larger discourse segments.

To provide a full picture of SLI and social stereotypes in relation to MLE and its speakers, an investigation of linguistic practices and implicit as well as explicit discursive representations would have been necessary. Moreover, the analysis of much larger, representative corpora would have been ideal. We therefore stress the exploratory nature of our study, and we make no claims regarding the generalisation of our results. Yet, limitations notwithstanding, the findings presented here provide meaningful insights into how discursive representations of MLE and its speakers reflect the British SLI and the corresponding social stereotypes.

Representations of standard language ideology and social stereotypes

Standard language ideology

One of the most immediate findings to emerge from the frequency data in our corpora is that the non-MLE-speaking Londoners used more negative than positive words and phrases to describe the multiethnolect (154 wptt and 92 wptt respectively) while the MLE speakers themselves used more positive than negative ones (86 wptt and 68 wptt respectively; see Figure 1).⁵ Overall, more negative descriptors were used.

A closer investigation reveals that the frequently used negative descriptors can be divided into five semantic categories: MLE as *broken language* and as *language decay* (which correspond to Wiese's aforementioned categories of the same names in relation to Kiezdeutsch), MLE as a *secret code* (which corresponds to Wiese's aforementioned category of *opting out*), MLE as a *fake variety*, and MLE as an *obstacle to success and social mobility* (see Table 1).⁶ These descriptors show that representations of the multiethnolect were strongly affected by the SLI in Britain. For instance, representations of MLE as *broken language* included direct comparisons of the multiethnolect with SE (and RP) as well as descriptors such as 'wrong' and 'ungrammatical' – with the clear implication that SE was considered the correct, grammatical point of comparison. Moreover, the related category of MLE as *language decay* included representations of it as, for instance, 'corrosive' and 'eroding' – with the implication being that it was the standard that was being affected negatively by the

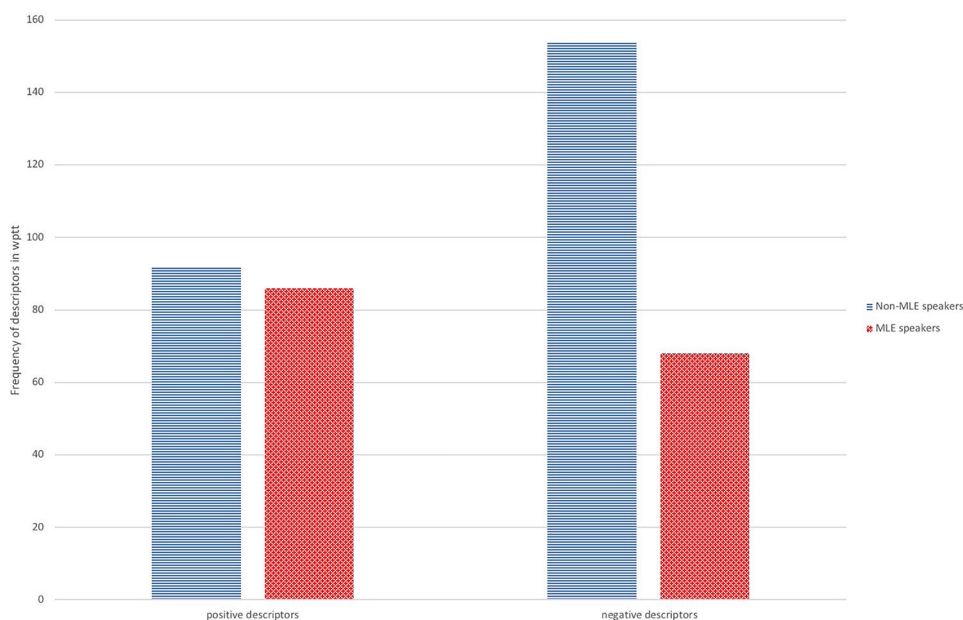


Figure 1. Relative frequencies of positive and negative descriptors of MLE.

Table 1. Frequencies of negative representations of MLE.

Category	Words in non-MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency	Words in MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency
MLE as broken language	[broken] English, [not the] standard, [should speak / learn the Queen's] English, [not good] English, [not sophisticated] English, [not posh] English, [unorthodox] English, [wrong] English, [not even] English, [not speaking] RP, [not] proper, [should speak] properly, [not] neutral, [should speak] formal [language], wrong, [not] correct, incorrect, [words said] incorrectly, [not using the language] correctly, [use of incorrect] grammar, [poor] grammar, [bad] grammar, [not conform] grammar, [lack of] grammar, grammatically, ungrammatical	109	64 wptt	non-standard, [not proper] English, [not normal] English, [may differ from traditional] English, [compared to] RP, [not] formal, [grammatically] incorrect, [terrible use of] grammar, [bad use of] grammar	12	26 wptt
MLE as language decay	slang, jargon, patois, vernacular, bastardisation, damage, restricted, lazy, laziness, sloppy, corrosive, eroding, ruin, devalues, contaminates	56	33 wptt	slang, lazy, destroys [the traditional English language]	10	21 wptt
MLE as a secret code / opting out	[used as a] code, [a sort of] code, [almost a] code, excluding, excludes, secret, private	13	8 wptt	–	0	0 wptt
MLE as a fake variety	false, artificial, made-up, pretend, affectation, cultivate, 'put-on' [way of speaking], Jafaking	10	6 wptt	–	0	0 wptt
MLE as an obstacle to success and social mobility	[should not be used in professional] situations, [unhelpful in more formal] situations, [not appropriate in all] situations, [not in an] interview, [would hold people back in] interviews, [not recommended for use in] work contexts, [not recommended for use in] work environments, [not good to speak MLE in the] workplace, [lacks professionalism in the] workplace, [affects employment, [can stunt] employment opportunities, [can hinder] professional success, [may have] job disadvantages, [don't think it helps in the] job market, [discriminated in the] job market, [a barrier in relation to] jobs, [a disadvantage when applying for] jobs, [stands in your way if applying for] jobs, [can harm people's] career prospects, [limits people's] career prospects, [limiting] life chances, [socially and economically] limiting, [a detriment to that person getting on in] life, hold (ing) [people back], bring(ing) [people down], [hard to get anywhere in] life	73	43 wptt	[should only be used in certain] situations [potentially avoid professional environments], [wouldn't advise use in] job interviews, [not a good way to present yourself in the] work place, [not how one should speak when] at work or in a professional environment, [may not be appropriate for a] job, [in terms of] employability [it would rank low], [can deter you from climbing the] socio-economic ladder, [puts you at a disadvantage in] life	9	19 wptt

multiethnolect. Representations of MLE as a *secret code* portrayed it as ‘excluding’ others – presumably standard speakers, or at least non-MLE speakers. Notably, only the discourses of non-MLE speakers contained descriptors pertaining to this category, suggesting that while they perceived MLE to be employed as a secret code, this was not an intention on the part of the multiethnolect speakers – or at least it was not a sufficiently important issue for them to mention it in response to our questionnaire item. Representations of MLE as a *fake variety* were also used exclusively by non-MLE speakers, indicating that while they saw it as a ‘put-on’ way of speaking, MLE speakers themselves did not. However, both corpora contained numerous references to the multiethnolect as an *obstacle to success and social mobility*, as ‘socially and economically limiting’. This appeared to be a strong concern among Londoners of all backgrounds, providing evidence of the gatekeeping function of the SLI by means of which social hegemonic order is created and maintained.⁷

Commonly used positive descriptors of MLE can be divided into two semantic categories: distinct representations of MLE as *normal* as well as a catch-all of other descriptors representing MLE as a *positive variety* (see Table 2). The former category included representations of the multiethnolect as ‘a natural evolution’ or even a ‘norm’, while the latter included words such as ‘innovative’ and ‘cool’. Notably, while the non-MLE speakers’ discourses contained higher relative frequencies in each of the negative categories, the MLE speakers used higher relative frequencies in both positive ones. The kinds of descriptors used by the MLE speakers to positively represent their multiethnolect indicate that they considered it to hold a considerable amount of covert prestige.

An examination of the lexical collocates of the term *MLE* supports our frequency findings. The term occurred 215 times (127 wptt) in the non-MLE speaker corpus and 80 times (171 wptt) in the MLE speaker corpus. In the discourses of non-MLE speakers, it collocated most strongly with terms relating to MLE as *broken language* (e.g. ‘[not] neutral’, MI: 5.3), *language decay* (e.g. ‘bastardisation’, MI: 6.3), a *secret code* (e.g. ‘[suspicious] behaviours’, MI: 7.3), and an *obstacle to success and social mobility* (e.g. ‘[fewer] opportunities’, MI: 4.7). MLE as a *fake variety* was the only negative semantic category that contained no statistically significant collocates. Notably, the non-MLE speakers’ discourses contained no significant collocates pertaining to the positive categories. By contrast, the MLE speakers’ discourses included only one significant collocate in a negative category, namely MLE as an *obstacle to success and social mobility* (i.e. its ‘[unsuitability in professional] environments’, MI: 4.6). Moreover, in the MLE speaker corpus, the term collocated with a descriptor that falls into the positive category representing MLE as *normal* (i.e. ‘norm’, MI: 5.9).

The selected concordance lines from the two corpora illustrate the points above (see Figures 2 and 3). Furthermore, they show that some non-MLE speakers made a concerted effort not to speak the multiethnolect themselves, that some tried to prevent their children from using it, and that some even thought official authorities should eradicate it from society as a whole. The concordance lines from some of the MLE speakers, on the other hand, demonstrate an awareness of language

Table 2. Frequencies of positive representations of MLE.

Category	Words in non-MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency	Words in MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency
MLE as normal	norm, normal [London accent], normal [London speech], normal [thing in London], natural [evolution], natural [progression], normal [(although not desirable) development], [it’s] mainstream	14	8 wptt	norm, normal [not wrong or right], normal [way to communicate], natural [evolution], natural [way of speaking]	8	17 wptt
MLE as a positive variety	good, cool, interesting, important, friendly, fascinating, fun, nice, innovative, relaxed, endearing, rich	78	46 wptt	good, fine, cool, important, friendly, nice, innovative, inventive, relaxed, comfortable, enjoyable, accessible, rich, aesthetic	32	69 wptt

are not just bilingual, but multi-lingual these days. London speech replacing Cockney. I'm no fan of MLE and see no reason for new London dialect(s). I do not come in contact with people speaking MLE now, the continuum between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers - the distinction becomes quite blurred. I hate MLE and think it is a sign of cultural degradation of the United Kingdom. I mean this, not in any racist sense - the words that I didn't understand on Urban Dictionary! I prefer to use the correct grammar and see MLE as a bastardisation of the British Language. I really dislike the way it sounds, which probably is because I am old to come from migrant/immigrant families. As the son of migrants myself I taught myself to NOT speak MLE as I do not think it is good English. It is a colloquial speech variant of English, which in my opinion is a waste of it; to sound cool. It's not a language, it's nothing. It's grammatically incorrect. I really dislike MLE I am always correcting my children. Some is just a lazy form from the USA. It's a language famous among teenagers there is the possibility of its user's being discriminated against in the job market. I think this because MLE is not the English that all people use or understand, and they could believe that the use of MLE is somehow only allows people to express very simple things. To express complicated ideas people need to rural more sophisticated and ridiculous and deliberate attempt to differentiate ethnic groups and to raise barriers to integration. MLE should be clamped down upon through the education system and other state delivery agencies. It is a linguistic style which sounds brain dead and unnecessarily offensive and intimidating. I personally do not like it at all. MLE shows me someone's gaps in knowledge of English language. I meet all kinds of people with this and it stops using it places of work as well. MLE tends to get stronger after consumption of alcohol. The MLE would not reside well in a working environment. Young Londoners use the MLE language because they want to fit in with

Figure 2. Selected concordance lines of MLE from the non-MLE speaker corpus.

speakers as they aren't as used to hearing it spoken, but in my opinion speaking MLE doesn't make you any worse than someone who speaks with a Northern accent or a situation. Should be treated like a second language, coin standard English being the first. MLE is a linguistically rich variety/dialect of English, perhaps emerging from a pool of other non-stan MLE is OK amongst friends but not a good way to present yourself in the work place. MLE is a staple of growing up in most of London. It has negative perceptions though 'not formal' it can go both ways. - Users are just kids who grew up in high populated London areas. MLE is an evolution of the language. The English language, like any other, is constantly changing and to my career and connect with people who are not familiar or comfortable with MLE. I think MLE is generally perceived negatively by most professional organisations [banks, law firms, publishing MLE and speaking professionally when in a professional environment. For example speaking MLE is OK amongst friends but not a good way to present yourself in the work place. It of their cultures, and certain words also reflect the times they live in. The linguistic flux of MLE is representative of an evolving global London. Yes, decoding words can sometimes be a little taxing on the English language that has drawn a lot of its influence from Jamaican Patois. MLE is simply a normal way to communicate and is typically associated with people from a certain social ords of many different language/dialect origins (e.g. Bredrin, pussyhole). I think MLE is today's equivalent of the Cockney dialect that was spoken in the East End of this language amongst friends only. As an MLE speaker who has a lot of contact with other MLE users, I think it doesn't say a lot about its user. Many very different people!

Figure 3. Selected concordance lines of MLE from the MLE speaker corpus.

change as an inevitable global phenomenon – and, possibly as a consequence of this awareness, some MLE speakers represented the multiethnolect to be as natural a variety of English as any other.

Overall, the representations of MLE were thus found to clearly reflect the SLI that prevails in the British context – but to rather different extents, with the non-MLE-speaking Londoners showing much stronger evidence of an undifferentiated internalisation and acceptance of the SLI than the MLE speakers themselves.⁸

Social stereotypes

As 'the diagnosis of peoplehood by the criterion of language' is one of the fundamental tenets of language ideology (Woolard 1998, 16), we also aimed to find out about the extent to which Londoners' representations regarding speakers of MLE reflected the social stereotypes that go hand in hand with the SLI in Great Britain.

Our first goal was to find out to what extent the discourses in our corpora reflected the stereotype of the typical speaker as a black, young, working-class male from East London. The findings show that both corpora contained numerous representations of MLE speakers' demographic characteristics – that is, *ethnicity and migration background* (e.g. 'ethnic minorities'), *age* (e.g. 'teenagers'), *class* (e.g. 'working class'), *gender* (i.e. 'especially male users'), and *location* (e.g. 'East End of London') (see Table 3). However, these findings need to be interpreted with caution because it is possible that the aforementioned definition of MLE at the beginning of our questionnaire may have primed the participants. As noted above, we defined MLE as 'the speech of young people in multiethnic areas of London regardless of the speaker's own ethnic background and their gender'. The common representation of MLE speakers as young, the numerous references to speakers living in certain areas of London, and the paucity of representations relating to speakers' gender could all have been influenced by this definition. It is notable, however, that social class membership seemed to be firmly associated with MLE speakers despite the fact that it was not included in our definition of MLE. Moreover, speakers' ethnicities and migration backgrounds were mentioned on numerous occasions even though the definition explicitly stated that MLE is used by individuals regardless of their ethnic background. This could be seen to suggest that ethnicity and migration background as well as social class constituted particularly salient aspects of our participants' stereotypes regarding MLE speakers. However, further research is necessary to ascertain this, and to investigate the differential salience of the aforementioned other demographic characteristics.

Irrespective of this, it is noteworthy that the non-MLE speakers displayed higher relative frequencies of demographic descriptors in all categories than the MLE speakers themselves did (except

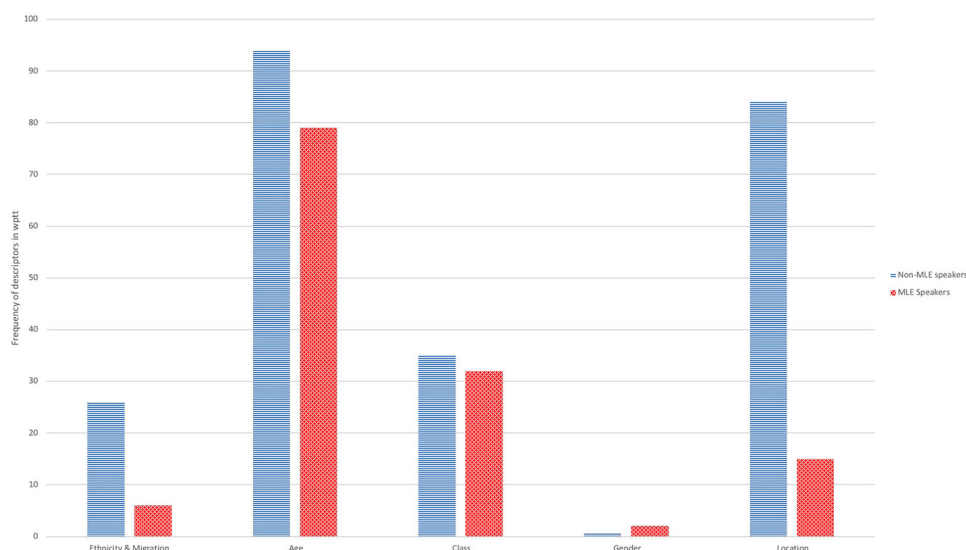


Figure 4. Relative frequencies of representations regarding MLE speakers' demographic profiles.

gender, where the total frequencies were in fact the same) (see Figure 4). This can be interpreted as evidence that the non-MLE speakers held stronger social stereotypes.

An examination of the lexical collocates of the terms *SPEAKER* and *USER* supports this notion. The terms occurred 81 times (49 wptt) in the non-MLE speaker corpus and 26 times (56 wptt) in the MLE speaker corpus. In the discourses of non-MLE speakers, they collocated most strongly with descriptors relating to *age* (e.g. 'younger', MI: 5.5), *class* (e.g. 'socioeconomic', MI: 8.6), and *location* (e.g. '[gang] areas', MI: 4.6). By contrast, the MLE speakers' discourses only included one significant collocate regarding a demographic characteristic, namely *ethnicity* (i.e. '[cross] ethnic [groups]', MI: 5.3) – and this actually reveals an awareness that the multiethnolect is not exclusive to any one ethnic group.

The following quotes illustrate our findings well. One non-MLE speaker responded to our questionnaire item by saying:

First impression is that they are from East London, first or second generation immigrants, often Bengali or Pakistani, or African. They usually working class, parents may not speak English, often bilingual.

By contrast, one MLE speaker said:

As an MLE speaker who has a lot of contact with other MLE users, I think it doesn't say a lot about its user. Many different people I know (age, gender, class) speak in this manner.

Overall, it thus seems that while the MLE speakers recognised the heterogeneity of their own group, the non-MLE speakers did so to a much lesser extent – which serves as an explanation for the stronger social stereotypes they were found to hold (see e.g. Rothbart, Dawes, and Park 1984).

This also applies to the other negative stereotypical characteristics that were attributed to MLE speakers. The most commonly used descriptors can be divided into three semantic categories: MLE speakers' *aggression* (which corresponds to Wiese's aforementioned category of *social demolition*), their *lack of education and intelligence*, and their perceived *inability to switch to the standard* (see Table 4). The frequency findings suggest that the non-MLE speakers were much more preoccupied by these perceived characteristics than the MLE speakers themselves. Moreover, a closer look at the MLE speakers' data in the form of selected concordance lines shows that while they did use some descriptors pertaining to these semantic categories, it was in contexts where they were in fact refuting

Table 3. Frequencies of representations regarding MLE speakers' demographic profiles.

Category	Words in the non-MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency	Words in the MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency
MLE speakers' ethnicity and migration background	multi-ethnic [backgrounds], ethnic [backgrounds], ethnic [minorities], racial [minorities], mixed-race [communities], British-Black [language], British-Black [English], [the same thing as] AAVE [in the USA], black [African Caribbean backgrounds], Caribbean and Indian [backgrounds], non-British [background], African, Caribbean, Jamaican, immigrants, immigration, [2nd or 3rd] generation [children and teens], foreign, foreigner	44	26 wptt	ethnic, [children born to immigrants and grandchildren of] immigrants	3	6 wptt
MLE speakers' age	young, younger, youth, kids, teens, teenagers, adolescents, age, generational	160	94 wptt	young, younger, youth, kids, teen, teenaged, teenagers, age, generation	37	79 wptt
MLE speakers' social class	[working] class, [lower] class, [lack of] class, [lower] SES, socioeconomic, poor(er), [not used by] richer [young Londoners], [socially and economically] disadvantaged [backgrounds], [socially and economically] disadvantaged [groups]	60	35 wptt	[working] class, [lower socio-economic] class, poor [and middle income children], [not someone who comes from a privileged] background, [not someone who comes from an upper class] background, [not someone who comes from an upper-middle class] background	15	32 wptt
MLE speakers' gender	[especially] male [users]	1	0.6 wptt	[young] men [who know the streets well]	1	2 wptt
MLE speakers' location	[East] London, [East End of] London, [South-East] London, [South] London, [inner] London, inner-city [upbringing], inner-city [environment], inner-borough [council estate], [rough] neighbourhood(s), [developing] neighbourhood(s), [typical Black] neighbourhood(s), [multiethnic] areas, [multicultural] areas, [gang] areas, [impoverished] areas, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Brixton	143	84 wptt	[East End of] London, [South East] London, [inner] London [boroughs], [inner-city] areas, [deprived] areas, [highly populated] areas, [racially diverse] areas	7	15 wptt

Table 4. Frequencies of negative representations of MLE speakers.

Category	Words in the non-MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency	Words in the MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency
MLE speakers' aggression / social demolition	aggression, aggressive, threatening, violent, gang(s), gangster, criminal(s), rough, anti-social [people], anti-establishment	37	22 wptt	aggressive, violent, rough	3	6 wptt
MLE speakers' lack of education and intelligence	uneducated, [poorly] educated, [less] educated, [not] educated, [not well] educated, [not very] educated, [poor] education, [lack of] education, [lower level] education, [state school] education, [lower level of] educational [attainment], ignorant, stupid, [lower level of] intelligence, [lack of] intelligence	80	47 wptt	uneducated, [not] educated	3	6 wptt
MLE speakers' inability to switch to the standard	switch, modify, adapt, moderate, moderating, slip(ping) [in/into and out of it]	16	9 wptt	switch, [code] switch(ing), code-switch (ing)	5	11 wptt

social stereotypes by saying that others perceive them to be 'aggressive', that MLE users aren't 'uneducated', and that for them, it is very normal to 'code switch in given situations' (see Figure 5).

Again, the lexical collocates of the terms *SPEAKER* and *USER* support our frequency findings: in the discourses of non-MLE speakers, the terms collocated strongly with expressions relating to MLE speakers' *aggression* (e.g. 'rough', MI: 6.3), *lack of education and intelligence* (e.g. 'uneducated', MI: 5.6), and their perceived *inability to switch to the standard* (e.g. '[unable to] adjust', MI: 7.6). By contrast, the MLE speakers' discourses included no significant collocates that indicated representations of these negative characteristics.

One very well-reflected comment by a non-MLE speaker serves to illustrate the issues discussed above:

[MLE speakers do not value] received grammar or pronunciation (quite the opposite, amongst some it is a badge of rejection of what these things represent to those who have not benefitted from the power structures at large in this country) while it [MLE] also marks the speaker as coming from multi-ethnic urban areas. As such it inevitably elicits prejudices around poor education, lower class, even lacking moral values, making poor life choices, coming from troubled background/families etc. from non-MLE speakers, particularly those with little close contact with MLE speakers, who hear it.

This description as well as the aforementioned findings indicate a phenomenon typical of standard language cultures – namely that, at least among the non-MLE speakers, the linguistic devaluation of MLE itself was strongly connected to a social devaluation of its speakers. However, the non-MLE speaker's description contrasts strongly with an example of how one of the MLE speakers themselves described multiethnolect users:

They are people with the same aspirations, worries, varying opinions and beliefs as everyone else, they aren't a monolithic group. I feel that people without a direct experience of growing up in inner city areas often judge them for the language they use, and possibly don't notice the subtle differences between people's usage of

It has negative connotations for other people who are not aware, for example, they may find it most relatable. I think it is a dialect that deserves more respect, and is often perceived as negative judgements towards people who speak MLE include not being well-educated, lazy, thuggish, people are happy define words you don't know. And contrary to popular belief, a lot of MLE's users aren't it is another means of self-identity. I believe its users are equally as ambitious (or not), a lot of people think it's for 'roadmen' and 'chavs' but as long as they can not determine the status of one's intelligence or intellect as it is very normal to gos less. They're people like everyone else. I speak MLE with mates, but we can all

violent but I feel MLE just becomes the norm when you've grown up in London. However, I feel and "uneducated" but for me no one dialect is better than another, and MLE speakers (often from aggressive . Need to be given opportunity to expand on language skills. Having grown up in London my entire uneducated . They know how to use language appropriately. They're just not afraid to play. Lots of educated and sociable as anybody else. As it is my own personal dialect, I am proud of it codeswitch (which most of them can) It doesn't matter, it's only amongst friends. I think it code switch in given situations. love it I think MLE is some kind of smarter than other as they switch back and our personality remains the same no matter how we speak. I use it so I

Figure 5. Selected concordance lines of negative descriptors from the MLE speaker corpus.

Table 5. Frequencies of representations regarding MLE speakers' group memberships and social identities.

Category	Words in the non-MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency	Words in the MLE speaker corpus	Total frequency	Relative frequency
MLE speakers' group memberships and social identities	[social] group(s), [friendship] group(s), [peer] group(s), [ethnic] group(s), [age] group(s), [socio-economic] group(s), [cultural] group(s), [London] culture, [black] culture, [pop] culture, [working class] culture, [gang] culture, [youth] culture, [young] culture, [young] Londoners, [East] Londoners, [East and South] Londoners, [communicate with their] peers, [identify with their] peers, [be included by their] peers, [gain status among their] peers, [fit(ting) in with their] peers, [fit(ting) in with their] friends, [blend into their] peer group, [feel connected to their] heritage, [searching for] identity, [shared] identity, [sense of] identity, [badge of] identity, [part of] identity, [group] identity, [social] identity, [a sense of] belonging, [an integral part of socio-cultural] belonging	195	115 wptt	[social] group(s), [peer] group(s), [youth] culture, [popular] culture, [working class] culture, [London] culture, [symbol of their] identity [as a Londoner], [young] Londoners, Londoners, [connected to my] peers, [to] fit in [with others], [a way of] fitting in, [to] blend in [at school or in a youth community], [a way of] connecting [and recognising someone as being of a similar background or being a friendly and open person], [a fluid and shared] identity [and belonging to a social group], [symbol of] identity, [sense of] identity, [youth] identity, [gives a sense of] belonging [and togetherness]	44	94 wptt

to define. Grassroot. I think MLE is a very strong way of constructing once dynamic and fluid **identity** and belonging to a social group of people. Every time I am away from London and I form of slang, and in many ways is innovative and to many is a symbol of their **identity** as a Londoner surrounded, and proud to be surrounded by people from around the world. I also language, almost like evolution just like with cockney taking over from estuary. A sense of **identity** , but also a way of connecting and recognising someone as being of a similar background, or being I think it's an accessible language that has helped young ppl in London strengthen their **identity** especially in deprived areas. If you, as an adult can speak it, you are respected by the you are respected by the young people who speak it on a daily basis. It is an **identity** for young people in London, perhaps those not from upper/upper-middle class background (as those who compared to RP but even compared to Estuary/Cockney. I think it is another means of self- **identity** . I believe its users are equally as ambitious (or not), educated and sociable as anybody else. their peers as well as people who share their heritage. It's a symbol of one's **identity** . MLE has become a norm for young people. Everyone has their own way of interpreting influence on the country on the whole through popular culture. It's the culture of youth **identity** . MLE is definitely a basolect because of it's association with the "urban" community. In terms of

Figure 6. Selected concordance lines of IDENTITY from the MLE speaker corpus.

language. I feel an incredible amount of pride in the sheer linguistic inventiveness of young Londoners as evidenced in music, spoken word and creative writing, and it's influence on the country on the whole through popular culture.

Again, we thus find evidence of the MLE speakers perceiving their own group as much more heterogeneous. Here, as well as in the two previous comments, contact with MLE speakers – or rather, lack thereof – serves as an explanation for the aforementioned, commonly held stereotypes.⁹ Moreover, this MLE speaker's comment indicates an awareness of numerous positive aspects of their multiethnolect.

In our corpora, the only positive descriptors that occurred noticeably often pertained to the semantic category of MLE speakers' *group memberships and social identities* (see Table 5). Both corpora included relevant descriptors (e.g. 'fitting in', 'symbol of identity') and again, the lexical collocates of the terms *SPEAKER* and *USER* support our frequency findings: in the discourses of both non-MLE speakers and MLE speakers, the terms collocate strongly with relevant descriptors (e.g. 'identity', MI: 3.7 and 5.6 respectively). The – initially rather surprising – finding that the non-MLE speakers' discourses contained higher relative frequencies of such descriptors makes sense once the data are examined more closely: selected concordance lines show that the MLE speakers used such descriptors in a seemingly genuine manner (see Figure 6) while, by contrast, many non-MLE speakers viewed the link between multiethnolect and group membership as a negative one, somehow connecting it with their view of MLE as fake. This comment serves as an illustration:

it's a made-up accent that feels artificial, and as though young people have trained themselves to speak that way to fit in with their peers.

The non-MLE speakers thus did not – or at least, did not all – fully appreciate the importance of the multiethnolect as an important aspect of MLE speakers' peer group membership and social identity.¹⁰

Conclusion

Overall, comparing the discourses of non-MLE speakers with those of MLE speakers themselves has allowed us to gain a rather nuanced understanding of the extent to which Londoners of different backgrounds have internalised various aspects of the prevalent SLI and the corresponding social stereotypes. We discovered several key differences. Firstly, while the representations of MLE in our data clearly reflected the SLI that prevails in the British context, they did so to very different extents – with the non-MLE-speaking Londoners showing much stronger evidence of an undifferentiated internalisation and acceptance of the SLI than the MLE speakers themselves. Secondly, with regard to the demographic profile of multiethnolect speakers, the non-MLE-speaking Londoners also held much stronger social stereotypes. Moreover, only the discourses of non-MLE speakers included actual negative representations of multiethnolect speakers' stereotypical characteristics, while only the discourses of the MLE speakers themselves contained genuine-seeming representations pertaining to positive aspects of the multiethnolect. In combination with the differential strengths of the social stereotypes, this indicates that the non-MLE speakers did not recognise the heterogeneity of multiethnolect users as a group, and they viewed them as overwhelmingly negative. This was not the case for the MLE speakers themselves.

At least among the non-MLE speakers, our findings thus show evidence of two key semiotic processes by means of which ideological representations of linguistic differences were constructed – namely iconisation and erasure. The process of *iconisation* entails a transformation of the relationship between a language variety and the social images with which it is linked: ‘Linguistic features that index social groups [...] appear to be iconic representations of them, as if [the variety] somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence’ (Irvine and Gal 2000, 37). The essentialisation of the social group as homogeneous is an important part of this – and for the non-MLE speakers, this certainly appeared to be the case with regard to MLE and multiethnolect speakers as a group. The complementary process of *erasure* renders certain facets of the sociolinguistic reality invisible: ‘Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away. [...] Because a linguistic ideology is a totalizing vision, elements that do not fit its interpretive structure [...] must either be ignored or transformed’ (Irvine and Gal 2000, 38). For the non-MLE speakers, their lacking acknowledgment of MLE as an important factor in multiethnolect speakers’ social identity serves as evidence of this.

The discursive creation of linguistic difference that is achieved through iconisation and erasure constitutes a fundamental aspect of the SLI. Crucially, the SLI and the corresponding social stereotypes can have severe consequences for multiethnolect speakers because such a ‘misrecognition or revalorization of the indexical character of language may make discrimination on linguistic grounds publicly acceptable where the corresponding [discrimination based on non-linguistic traits] is not’ (Woolard 1998, 19). The MLE speakers’ numerous references to the multiethnolect as a potential obstacle to their social mobility and success in life indicate that they were acutely aware of this.

It is critical to bear in mind that language ideologies often ‘become symbolic battlegrounds on which broader debates about race, state and nation are played out’ (Blackledge 2006, 25) – and as noted above, the SLI in any context serves to create and maintain social hegemonic order. In the current political climate in Great Britain, with all its debates about immigration and the ways in which ethnocultural diversification supposedly affects British culture and values, it therefore seems probable that the non-MLE speakers’ negative views of MLE and its users helped them ‘to reaffirm a prestige that they perceive as threatened by multiethnic urban communities’ (Wiese 2014, 20). Like the rejection of Kiezdeutsch in Germany, the negative views in the British context seem to reflect ‘a proxy racism [...]: a projection of ethnic and xenophobic demarcations and exclusions onto the linguistic plane’ (Wiese 2014, 20).

Yet, just as power shifts, ideologies can shift: ‘The exercise of domination by one group over another is fragile, relying as it does on the compliance of the less powerful group’ (Blackledge 2006, 25). By means of our methodology, we were able to investigate not only the discourses of the dominant group, as is usually the case in SLI research, but also those of the less powerful group – and this has allowed us to reveal that our MLE-speaking participants displayed a certain lack of compliance. If further research revealed that our findings can be generalised, they would thus constitute cause for cautious optimism. However, as this still needs to be ascertained, for now we conclude with the words of Lippi-Green (2012, 334), who stresses that in order to bring about an ideological shift, our goal should be ‘to make people aware of the process of language subordination. To draw their attention to misinformation, to expose false reasoning and empty promises to hard questions’.

Notes

1. While this might not apply to some societies, it is certainly the case for North America (see e.g. Milroy 2000), most European nation states (see e.g. Hüning, Vogl, and Moliner 2012), and numerous other contexts. The articles in this special issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* serve as excellent examples to illustrate the widespread nature and diversity of ‘standard language cultures’.
2. It should be noted that the term *multiethnolect* is not unproblematic (see e.g. Wiese 2013). Some researchers prefer other labels, such as *contemporary urban vernacular* (see e.g. Rampton 2011). We use *multiethnolect*

here with due caution, in line with other researchers who have investigated the variety we focus on here – that is, Multicultural London English (see e.g. Cheshire et al. 2011; Kerswill 2014).

3. Another common procedure is the investigation of keywords – that is, words which are unusually frequent when one's own corpus is compared to a larger reference corpus (see e.g. Vessey 2016b). However, for reasons of space, this procedure was not employed here.
4. We followed the tradition of analysing smaller corpora in terms of frequencies per ten thousand words (see e.g. Bondi and Sezzi 2016).
5. As noted above, relative frequencies are provided in words per ten thousand (wptt).
6. In all tables, the descriptors that fall into each category are comprehensive. Where the numbers of descriptors do not match the total frequencies, this is because one or more of the descriptors occurred multiple times.
7. For the non-MLE speakers, this concern primarily seemed to tie in with their stereotype regarding multiethnolect speakers' inability to switch to a more standard variety when required (despite the fact that, as noted above, this concern is unfounded). By contrast, for the MLE speakers themselves, the concern appeared to be linked with another topos that emerged from our data – namely the discrimination they experienced as a result of being multiethnolect speakers. Regrettably, for reasons of space, we cannot discuss this topos in detail.
8. The finding that the MLE speakers did not denigrate their variety as strongly as other Londoners did is in line with the results of the aforementioned attitudinal data from our questionnaire, which revealed MLE speakers to hold significantly more positive attitudes towards the multiethnolect than speakers of other varieties (Kircher and Fox 2019).
9. This is also in line with the results of the aforementioned attitudinal data from our questionnaire, which revealed amount of contact to be a key determinant of positive attitudes towards MLE (Kircher and Fox 2019).
10. Another topos that emerged from the non-MLE speakers' discourses is the Othering of MLE speakers, who were commonly depicted as an out-group – e.g. by means of representing them as 'second generation immigrants' instead of 'second generation Brits'. As noted above, this topos was also found to be pertinent in discourses regarding Kiezdeutsch (Wiese 2014) and Rinkeby Svenska (Stroud 2004). Regrettably, for reasons of space, we cannot discuss this topos in detail.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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