London /eɪ/ variants by social class, gender and age

Shinji Sato

1. Introduction
In London there is an accent continuum extending from RP to the broadest form of local accent (Wells 1982). The original aim of this project was to explore this social accent continuum along with age, gender, geographical and stylistic variation. Such an aim, however, is apparently too ambitious, and the plan had to be somewhat modified. As a result, this particular paper focuses on the study of one feature, out of many, of London accent; namely the diphthong shift, specially that of /eɪ/ (the FACE vowel in Wells' keywords). Hopefully further studies utilizing the data collected for this project will follow on other features of the accent in question, such as H dropping, TH fronting, Yod dropping/coalescence, L vocalization, T glottaling, Diphthong shifts, THOUGHT split, GOAT split etc. (Wells 1982).

1.2 Aim
The aim of this study is to investigate the distribution of the variants of /eɪ/ in London mainly from a sociolinguistic point of view. That is to say, finding out the differences of their distribution according to social class, gender and age. Stylistic variation is also taken into consideration.

1.3 Variants of London /eɪ/
London's regional accent is known to have an opener and more central first element for the FACE vowel (/əɪ/). The variants that Wells (1982:307) and Tollfree (1999:165) supply for this phoneme are listed below.

(1) Wells popular London broad Cockney
    [εɪ] or [ʌɪ] (= ɛɪ, əɪ) [æɪ aɪ]
In this study these variants are classified into two groups, namely the [εɪ]-type and the [ʌɪ]-type. They are labelled 'types' here as they may include more than one variety of phonetic qualities although square brackets are employed for their notation. The [εɪ]-type represents the variants which may be regarded as the standard type, and whose qualities approximate to that of RP. Here its first element may range from the position slightly below Cardinal 2, i.e. [ɛ], to Cardinal 3 [ɛ]. The [ʌɪ]-type, on the other hand, covers a range of non-standard variants whose first elements are much opener and may be centralized, such as [æɪ] [aɪ] and [ʊɪ]. The symbol [ʌ] is employed following Wells' style of notation. (Wells 1982:305-07) These types are, hereafter, simply referred to as [εɪ] or [ʌɪ] for the sake of convenience.

1.4 Data and methodology
Data for this study was collected during 2001–2002. 45 informants who were born and/or brought up in London (i.e. Greater London) were recorded. They represent two social classes (the middle class and the working class), male and female speakers and three age groups (Younger=teens ~ 30, Middle=31 ~ 55, Older=56 ~ ) as shown in Table 1. In deciding to which social class each informant belongs, the criterion employed here is their (or their parents') occupation: whether it is manual or non-manual. The majority of the recordings were made at the workplace of the informants and usually without prior arrangement.

The informants were first asked to recite numbers (1-10) and days of the week. Then a further thirty words were elicited by means of visual stimuli (photographs, pictures and numbers). These were meant to elicit, at least twice, all the English vowels and a number of consonants relevant to the accent under discussion. A minor change was made and several words were added later. A short conversation with the fieldworker often followed. The full word-list consists as follows:

ORIGINAL LIST
1. ONE 2. TWO 3. THREE 4. FOUR 5. FIVE 6. SIX 7. SEVEN
14. WEDNESDAY 15. THURSDAY 16. FRIDAY 17. SATURDAY 18. COW
25. OWL 26. MOLE 27. DOLPHIN 28. WHALE 29. BATTERY
30. TOILET 31. BOTTLE 32. BUTTON 33. WHEELCHAIR
34. ROCKINGHORSE 35. LIGHTHOUSE 36. CASTLE 37. BANANA
38. OLIVE OIL 39. ROLLING PIN 40. MOUTH 41. EAR 42. FEATHER
43. LEATHER JACKET 44. NEW YORK 45. FORTY FOUR
46. THIRTY POUNDS 47. EIGHTY POUNDS

WORDS ADDED LATER
54. GRAPES 55. RAINBOW 56. SNAKE 57. SNAIL 58. AIRPLANE
59. TRAIN 60. NAIL

The lexical items whose variants are analysed for this particular study are: 8. EIGHT, 28. WHALE, 47. EIGHTY POUNDS, 48. A(alphabet), 53. POTATOES.

The data was analyzed aurally and transcribed using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet in its 1996 version.

Table 1 Informant profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working class (WC)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Older(56-)</th>
<th>Middle(31-55)</th>
<th>Younger(-30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle class (MC)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Older(56-)</th>
<th>Middle(31-55)</th>
<th>Younger(-30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. 5 Informants with two variants
In the following sections of this study the number and the percentage of the informants with a certain type of variant will be presented. In addition to the speakers who use the standard [eɪ] or the non-standard [ɛɪ] consistently, a certain number of speakers use
both types of variants. These speakers will be called 'dual variant speakers' here, and
this group will be referred to as 'dual' or 'both' in the graphs. Whether this is a case of
stylistic variation or these variants are in free variation will be discussed later.

1. 6 A note on the figures
As the size of the data collected for this survey is not large enough, nor is it particularly
well-balanced, it should be borne in mind that the figures presented in this study may
not necessarily represent the average distribution of variants found in London. Strictly
speaking, they have relevance only to the informants recorded for this study, although
they may reveal some more general tendencies.

2. Results
2. 1 The middle class vs. the working class: an overview
Figure 1 shows the proportion of the speakers who use either the standard [eɪ], the
non-standard [ʌɪ], or both. As is expected, of 13 MC speakers 12 use the standard
variant, including 2 who have the non-standard variant as well.
For WC speakers, the result is more complex. One of the interesting points is that
approximately 43.8% are dual variant speakers, 40.6% use [ʌɪ] consistently. The pro-
portion of those who use the standard variant consistently is 15.6%.

![Fig. 1 Distribution of speakers by social class (%)
(number in the bar = number of speakers)](chart.png)
2. 2 The middle class
2. 2. 1 The middle class by gender
All the female MC speakers in this sample use only the standard variant. As for the male MC speakers, only one speaker uses the non-standard variant consistently. The rest, that is, 6 out of 7 have the standard variant, including 2 who use the non-standard form as well.

![Fig. 2 Distribution of MC speakers by gender](image)

2. 2. 2 The middle class by age
The size of the sample is not large enough, nor is it well-balanced to make an accurate statistical analysis. However, both of the two dual variant speakers belong to the younger group, and the single non-standard variant speaker belongs to the middle one.

![Fig. 3 Distribution of MC speakers by age](image)
2. 2. 3 Discussion

With regard to the middle class findings, difference according to gender is observed. First of all, the findings here are in accord with the preceding sociolinguistic studies in that female speakers prefer the mainstream unmarked variants. Secondly, presuming that the speakers with the non-standard variant, either as a consistent [Λ1] speaker or as a dual variant speaker, come from a working class background, three male speakers belonging to this category might be said to have retained their original variant. As for the female speakers, no such traces are found, although it is possible that some of them might have had [Λ1] originally.

Three male speakers with [Λ1] may indicate the influx from the working class. It may be argued that with such speakers, at least partly, accent change in a certain section of the middle class is brought about. And this may be one instance of the factors which contribute to the making of so-called 'Estuary English' if one takes it to mean a standard type of accent with some elements of the non-standard accent in the southeast of England.

2. 3 The working class
2. 3. 1 The working class by gender

50% of the female WC speakers use both variants. As a result, although only 12.5% (2 out of 16) of this group constantly use the standard form, 62.5% (10 out of 16) have [ɛt] at least as an option. The proportion of the female WC speakers who use only the non-standard variant is 37.5%.

For the male WC speakers, the percentage of dual variant speakers is lower than that of their female counterparts. The proportion of WC men using only the non-standard variant is slightly higher than that of WC women.
2.3.2 The working class by age

With regard to the middle age group, 67% (12 out of 18) are dual variant speakers. For the other age groups, the majority use the non-standard variant consistently. No dual variant speakers are found, either male or female, in the younger group.

2.3.3 Discussion

One of the striking characteristics of the working class findings is the large proportion of dual variant speakers, accounting for approximately 43.8% of all the informants of this class. The fact that approximately 60% of them (dual variant speakers approxi-
mately 43.8%, consistent [e1] speakers approximately 15.6%) have the standard variant is also of interest. These figures go even higher in the middle age group of this class (dual variant speakers approximately 66.7%, consistent [e1] speakers approximately 11.1%; total 77.8%).

It is not certain whether dual variant speakers are displaying stylistic variation. The subject seems to be problematic and it will be discussed in the following section. Notwithstanding, the fact that nearly 60% of the WC informants in this survey use the standard [e1], at least as an option, must be the reflection of the change in the structure of society. However, as the preceding studies of this kind seem to be unavailable, this paper is not able to confirm whether or not these figures have been increasing.

2.4 Dual variant speakers in detail
For this section, in addition to the lexical items mentioned before, the tokens of two words 'USA' and 'REINDEER' are added and taken into consideration. These may be regarded as equivalents of list words, as the speakers uttered them as such (e.g. 'USA' for 44. NEW YORK, and 'REINDEER' for 24. DEER).

As figure 6 indicates, dual variant speakers account for 36% of all the speakers collected for this survey, irrelevant of class, gender or age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[e1]</th>
<th>[A1]</th>
<th>dual</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4.1 Dual variant speakers by class, gender and age

The proportion of dual variant speakers in each social class is markedly different as we have noted before (See Figure 1). For the middle class, it is 15.4% (2 out of 13); for the working class the figure is much higher, accounting for 43.8% (14 out of 32).

As represented in Figure 7, male and female have the same proportion. With respect to age, however, that is not the case, the vast majority belonging to the middle age group.

![Fig. 7 Dual variant speakers by gender and age](image)

2.4.2 Discussion

The question here is whether these speakers are displaying stylistic variation, or whether these variants are in free variation, occurring at random. My hypothesis when collecting data and encountering these speakers was that presuming they come from a working class background, regardless of their present profession, they had naturally acquired the non-standard variant first; then through education and other means they came to recognize the differences between the standard and the non-standard variants, and use one or the other as they feel appropriate according to the situation etc.. In fact, at least on two occasions during the fieldwork, I noticed that the speakers used the standard variant at the beginning of the interview, probably sensing a rather formal atmosphere, and afterwards they became more relaxed and started to use the non-standard variant which was probably their norm.

However, on examining the distribution of the tokens of each lexical item, it turned
out that the situation was not so simple (See Appendix). Those two speakers seem to be the only ones who correspond to the hypothesis above. And the sample includes five speakers who use the non-standard variant almost consistently (3 tokens out of four, or 4 out of 5 are [ʌ1]), but a single [e1] occurs in each speaker. For 3 of them, it is for ‘WHALE.’ This might be related to pre-L (velarized or vocalized) environment. Nevertheless, it would be sensible to refrain from drawing hasty conclusions from the limited size of the data available here. These figures may also be related to such factors as how frequently those words are used, how familiar the speakers are with them and so on. A survey with a larger size of data is necessary for such inferences.

Still it might be possible to suggest that among Londoners, at least for a certain number of speakers, these two variants might be in a state of free variation, probably because the speakers are constantly exposed to both variants, as it may be the case with the speakers of other accents under similar circumstances.

3. Concluding remarks
As it is mentioned in Introduction, this paper limits itself to the study of the distribution of London /e1/ variants. Perhaps the most interesting of all its findings may be the high proportion of dual variant speakers. As to the pattern of distribution of the tokens of each lexical item, this survey has not been able to provide satisfactory insight, due to the limited size of its data. It may be possible, however, to throw some light on the subject when the data pertaining to other phonemes such as /æ1/, /ɑʊ/ etc. is analysed and utilised.
Appendix

Distribution of the tokens (dual valiant speakers only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>EIGHT</th>
<th>EIGHTY</th>
<th>WHALE</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>POTATO</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>REINDEER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


