Introduction and Aims

The UrbEn-ID project is a two-year ethnographic sociolinguistic study funded by the Leverhulme Trust running from July 2014–July 2016. The project explores the ways in which young people (YP) in an urban environment use language (including features of what might be called Multicultural Urban British English) to enact identities in their day to day lives. Having only recently finished collecting the data, this poster offers some preliminary thoughts.

Context

Three research sites: two Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) centres and one mainstream school.

The focus here is on the PRU centres – both cater for Yrs 10 and 11 (age 14-16) with approximately 12 students at any one time (29 discussed here). The centres follow a reduced curriculum with peripatetic subject teachers and permanent youth worker/coordination staff.

Participants. ‘Ethnicities’ are presented here due to their central role in existing studies into urban youth language.

Methods

Data collection

Linguistic ethnography. Two researchers visited each centre 1-2 times per week over the 2014/15 academic year, observing and taking part in what was happening. Speech data has come from: spontaneous interactions in and out of class; interviews/conversations between individuals or small groups of young people and one researcher; peer or self-recording by the young people, often while outside smoking; word lists.

Observational data was gathered via fieldnotes, audio recording by the young people, and using two shared researcher diaries.

Data analysis

Methods from:

- Variationist sociolinguistics (sociophonetic analysis)
- Interactional sociolinguistics (discourse analysis)

While the general Northern BrEang features remain, some specifically MCR features are more variable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Trad Eng</th>
<th>Youth Manc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of FOOT/STRUT split</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of TRAP/BATH split</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter 'H'</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark /θ/</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary findings

Multicultural Urban British English (MUBE)

One initial aim of the project was to explore the extent to which features of Multicultural London English (MLE) (eg Cheshire et al 2011, Fox 2015) could be found in Manchester, thus raising the possibility of a multi-city urban youth variety of English in the UK (MUBE) (Drummond 2013).

Taken as a group, the following comparisons can be made:

Preliminary conclusions

The fact that word initial th-stopping (especially in certain words) is used apparently entirely naturally by speakers of different ethnicities suggests this is not an ethnicity ting. In fact, despite their associations with non-white varieties of English and ‘non-Anglo’ speakers, we would argue that th-stopping and other MUBE features are not the primary agents of ethnicity work in this context. We suggest that ethnicity is being performed in other ways, through linguistic and social practices, and that for the boys at least, th-stopping might be indexing something altogether different.

Acknowledgments

We owe enormous thanks to the students, staff, and centres involved at the two PRU learning centres.

The project is funded by a Leverhulme Trust project grant RPG-2014-059

Rob Drummond, Manchester Metropolitan University