

# **Syntactic variation and beyond**

Jenny Cheshire

## **1. Introduction**

Syntactic variation sometimes patterns in similar ways to phonological variation, with the frequencies of specific linguistic variants correlating with the large-scale social variables typically investigated in sociolinguistic research, such as a speaker's social class or gender. It may also pattern with smaller-scale, local social factors, again like phonological variation. Section 2 of this paper illustrates this second kind of sociolinguistic variation. It describes how the frequency with which some working class British adolescent boys use nonstandard morphological and syntactic features relates to the boys' participation in their local vernacular culture. We will also consider the linguistic variation from a more dynamic perspective, looking at how some of the boys use the socially symbolic meanings associated with the variable forms to convey their attitudes towards their schoolteachers.

With syntactic variation, these kinds of sociolinguistic patterns and uses are clearest in the case of variables where one variant is prescriptively defined as standard and the other as nonstandard, like the nine features described in Section 2. In these cases the standard and non-standard variants can be considered to have the same linguistic function: we will see, for example, that both the presence and absence of verbal *-s* marks present tense. There are other cases of syntactic variation, however, where the social embedding of the variation is more indirect. Unlike phonological variation, syntactic forms may have discourse functions that are equally well fulfilled by a wide range of linguistic forms, drawn not only from morphology and syntax but also from other components of language. In Section 4 I discuss an example of this

kind. It concerns, initially, variation between the different clause structures used to introduce a new entity into the discourse, a function usually considered to fall within the field of information management. We will see that in order to discover large-scale patterns of variation with social class and gender it was necessary to look beyond syntactic variation and analyse the full range of linguistic phenomena that speakers used to mark new discourse entities.

## **2. Variation and vernacular culture**

In the late 1970s I carried out a study of morphological and syntactic variation in the speech of adolescent friends, recorded by the method of long-term participant-observation in adventure playgrounds in Reading, England. Some of these speakers were subsequently recorded at school, by their teachers. The study is discussed in detail in Cheshire (1982). Here I briefly describe one aspect of the speech of 13 boys who took part in the research: the relationship between their use of nine non-standard morphological and syntactic variants, and the extent to which the boys participated in the local vernacular culture.<sup>1</sup> The boys were aged between 11 and 16.

Some aspects of the boys' behaviour fitted with the descriptions of delinquent sub-cultures that were available at that time (by, for example, Willmott 1966). The boys used to meet at the adventure playgrounds at times when they were supposed to be at school, and many of their activities centred around what Miller (1958) referred to as the 'cultural foci' of *trouble*, *excitement*, *toughness*, *fate*, *autonomy* and *smartness* (in the American English sense of 'outsmarting'). I identified six factors that appeared to be centrally important to the boys' peer group culture, in that they were frequent topics of conversation and were sources of prestige within the friendship groups, and I used these factors to construct a 'vernacular

culture index', in the same way that indices of socioeconomic class are commonly constructed.

Four of these factors directly reflected the cultural foci of 'trouble' and 'excitement': three directly, one more indirectly. The three that directly related to these foci were *skill at fighting, carrying a weapon* (such as a knife or a chain), and *participation in minor crime* (such as shop lifting, arson or vandalism). Though related, I treated these as separate indicators of adherence to the local vernacular culture, firstly because not all the boys took part in all these activities, and secondly because they did not all have the same degree of importance to the boys. For similar reasons I treated as a separate indicator the nature of the job the boys hoped to take when they left school. This was an important contributing factor to personal identity. Jobs that were acceptable to the peer group reflected 'trouble' and 'excitement', even if only indirectly. They included, for example, working as a slaughterer in an abattoir, or as a lorry driver, motor mechanic or soldier. Unacceptable jobs were mainly traditionally white-collar jobs involving working in a shop or an office. A fifth indicator was 'style': the extent to which dress and hairstyle were important to the boys. Many writers have stressed the importance of style as a symbolic value within adolescent subcultures (see, for example, Hebdige 1988; and, more recently, Eckert 2001). Finally, a measure of the extent to which the boys swore was included in the index, since this was an important symbol of 'belonging' for the boys (and the girls; see Cheshire 1982). Swearing, of course, is a linguistic feature, but for these speakers it involved only a few words that were not involved in the morphological or syntactic variation analysed here.

The behaviour of each boy was scored separately for each of the six indicators and displayed on a Guttman scale. The coefficient of reproducibility was

0.97, confirming that the data were scalable. I then divided the boys into four groups on the basis of their total score, with group 1 consisting of the boys who, according to the vernacular culture index, conformed most closely to the norms of their vernacular culture, while the boys in group 4 took virtually no part in the vernacular culture. Groups 2 and 3 were intermediate in their adherence to the vernacular culture, with group 2 conforming more closely than group 3.

I analysed the frequency with which each of the four groups of boys used the nine non-standard morphological and syntactic features listed in (1) to (9) below, and illustrated in (1a) to (9b). The examples all come from the playground recordings. Each of the features has a corresponding standard English equivalent, as shown in the invented examples (1b) to (9b). It is important to note that the standard and non-standard forms have the same referential meaning and the same grammatical function: for example, *go* and *goes* in (1) both refer to the same activity and both indicate first person plural and present tense.

(1) verbal –s:

(1a) we goes shopping on Saturdays

(1b) we go shopping on Saturdays

(2) *has*

(2a) we has a little fire, keeps us warm

(2b) we have a little fire, keeps us warm

(3) past forms of BE

(3a) you was outside

(3b) you were outside

(4) multiple negation

(4a) I'm not going nowhere

(4b) I'm not going anywhere

(5) *never* with preterite verb forms

(5a) I never done it, it was him

(5b) I didn't do it, it was him

(6) relative *what*

(6a) there's a knob what you turn

(6b) there's a knob which/that you turn

(7) auxiliary DO

(7a) how much do he want for it?

(7b) how much does he want for it?

(8) past tense of COME

(8a) I come down here yesterday

(8b) I came down here yesterday

(9) *ain't* (with all persons, for past HAVE and past BE (auxiliary and copula))

(9a) I ain't got any, I ain't going, she ain't a teacher

(9b) I haven't got any, I'm not going, she isn't a teacher

Table 1 shows the frequency with which the groups used the non-standard forms. In the Table the linguistic features are arranged into three classes, reflecting the extent to which the features correlate with adherence to vernacular culture. Class A contains four features whose frequency is very finely linked to the boys' vernacular culture index. The most sensitive indicator is non-standard verbal –s, which occurs very frequently in the speech of the boys in group 1 (those who conform most strongly to the vernacular culture norms) and progressively less frequently in the speech of groups 2, 3, and 4. This linguistic feature, then, functions as a powerful indicator of vernacular loyalty.

#### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The two linguistic features in class B also function as indicators of vernacular loyalty, but they are less sensitive indicators than those in class A. There is significant variation only between speakers in group 1 and group 4: in other words, between the boys who conform most closely to the norms of the vernacular culture and those who conform least closely. This type of sociolinguistic variation is not unusual: Policansky (1980), for example, reports similar variation in the expression of subject-verb concord in Belfast English, where there is significant variation only in the speech of individuals at the extreme ends of a social network scale. When groups 2 and 3 are merged, a regular pattern of variation with adherence to the vernacular culture emerges for class B forms, as Table 2 shows. These features do function as indicators

of vernacular loyalty, then, but they are less sensitive indicators than those in class A, with patterns seen only for broad groupings of speakers.

#### TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Features in class C, on the other hand, do not correlate with the vernacular culture index: for the most part, the figures form a completely irregular pattern. Interestingly, each of these linguistic features is involved in other, more complex kinds of sociolinguistic variation, and perhaps this explains why they do not function as straightforward indicators of vernacular loyalty. Forms of auxiliary DO are undergoing linguistic change away from an earlier dialect form towards the standard English system, such that the present tense forms of auxiliary and main verb DO are no longer distinct. Some forms of *ain't* function as a direct marker of a vernacular norm (Cheshire 1982). Nonstandard *come* functions as a marker of vernacular loyalty for adolescent girls in these friendship groups, but for boys it is an invariant form: none of the boys ever uses the standard variant *came*, irrespective of the extent to which he conforms to the vernacular culture.

### **3. Variation and style**

Only eight of the thirteen boys were recorded at school, since four boys had recently left, and one was so unpopular with his teacher that she refused to spend extra time with him. Jeff and Alec were recorded by their teacher during class discussions where they each had a lot to say. The other school recordings were made by a teacher, talking to two or three of the boys together. Again, full details of this part of the research can be found in Cheshire (1982).

Table 3 compares the frequency indices of the non-standard variants in the playground recordings and the school recordings, analysing the tokens for all eight speakers together. Those features that are sensitive indicators of vernacular loyalty (class A) all occur less often in the boys' school speech than in their playground speech (although for *was* the difference in frequency is very low). Nonstandard *never*, in class B, also occurs less often in the school recordings, although non-standard *what*, another class B form, occurs slightly more often in the school recordings than in the playground. The class C features, similarly, pattern irregularly: non-standard *come* remains invariant while *ain't* as HAVE and as copula BE increases in frequency in the school recordings (nonstandard *do* did not occur in the school recordings, and *ain't* as an auxiliary occurred infrequently).

#### TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

In Labov's (1970) framework, the linguistic variables in class A could be seen as markers, exhibiting both social and stylistic variation. Nonstandard *never* might also be considered a marker, in these terms. Within the same framework, nonstandard *what* could be considered an indicator, showing social but not stylistic variation. This classification, however, relies on the group frequency figures. Although there are many practical advantages to analysing groups of speakers rather than individual speakers – especially in cases such as this where the school recordings were sometimes short, yielding only small numbers of tokens – it is revealing to also compare the linguistic behaviour of individuals. Consider, for example, Table 4, which shows the frequency of use of verbal *-s*, a variable that occurred frequently in both sets of recordings.

## TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Table 6 reveals some striking individual variation in the use of non-standard verbal *-s* in the two speech styles. Nobby, a group 1 speaker, uses the non-standard form only slightly less often at school than in the playground, whereas the other group 1 speakers (Tommy and Pete) use the form much less frequently when they are at school. Jeff, a group 2 speaker, does not use the nonstandard variant at all in his school recording, although the other group 2 speakers (Rob and Nicky) continue to use the non-standard variant, albeit less frequently than in the playground recordings. Alec, like Jeff, does not use the non-standard form at school; in contrast, Benny's use of the non-standard form increases at school, and by a quite substantial amount.

Some insight into these patterns of individual variation comes from considering the situations in which the school recordings were made. Benny, Rob and Nobby were recorded together, by their teacher. The teacher was asking about them about what they liked to do outside school, and the boys were telling him about a disco they were trying to organise. The teacher was making valiant efforts to understand what the boys were telling him, but was clearly unfamiliar with the kind of amplifying equipment and the general situation that the boys were discussing. It is relevant that Benny and Nobby both hated school and in the playground recordings they had made many derisory remarks about their teachers. Benny had just returned to school after an absence of a whole term, and Nobby currently attended school only intermittently. Rob, on the other hand, had a strict father and he did not dare to miss school as often as his friends did.

In the circumstances I have just outlined, speech accommodation theory (Giles et al. 1991; Giles this volume) can help us understand the boys' different patterns of use of non-standard verbal *-s*. The teachers all use only standard English variants. Rob knows the teacher, attends school fairly regularly and, we can assume, accepts the constraints of the school situation. As a result his speech converges towards the teacher's, and he uses fewer non-standard variants than he does outside school. Nobby, on the other hand, hates school and dislikes the teacher. As a result he asserts his allegiance to the peer group culture rather than to the school, by refusing to acknowledge the situational constraints and to accommodate to the teacher's way of speaking. The frequency with which he uses the non-standard form, therefore, does not change (or rather, changes only slightly). Benny, who has only just returned to school, asserts his independence and hostility to the school by using more non-standard forms than he does usually. This is a very clear example of speech divergence. As we saw in the previous section, Benny is not closely involved in the peer group culture, and this is reflected in his playground speech by a relatively low use of non-standard verbal *-s* forms. When he wants to assert his independence from the school culture, however, he exploits the resources of the language system and chooses to use the non-standard form more frequently than he does normally.

Speech accommodation theory can also account for the behaviour of the other boys in this small study. Tommy, Pete and Ricky were recorded together, by a teacher that they knew well, and liked. The teacher had taken them on camping and fishing weekend expeditions, with other boys from their class. The conversation that the teacher recorded began with some talk about one of these weekends and then moved on to discuss racing cars and motorbikes, topics that interested both the teacher and the boys. Speech accommodation theory predicts that in this situation the

linguistic behaviour of the boys would converge towards that of the teacher (and vice-versa, of course, but we do not have the information needed to comment on the teacher's changing speech patterns). This is precisely what happens – all three boys use the non-standard form less often here than they do in the playground recordings. The fact that they continue to use some non-standard forms, however, allows them to still express their allegiance to the vernacular peer group culture.

Jeff and Alec behave differently from the other boys, as we saw, in using only standard forms in their school recordings. This is especially surprising in the case of Jeff, who as a group 2 member (like Rob and Nicky) conforms quite closely to the norms of the vernacular culture. However, both recordings were made in a classroom discussion with about 20 other students and their teacher, at different times and by different teachers. Both Jeff and Alec participated a great deal in the discussions, partly, perhaps, because their teachers had purposely chosen topics on which they were known to have strong views (smoking and football hooliganism in Jeff's case, and truancy in Alec's case), or because the teacher encouraged them to take part because he knew their speech was being investigated. It is possible that the overall formality of a public classroom discussion over-rode the option of displaying linguistically the boys' allegiance to the vernacular peer group culture. Alternatively, the fact that no other members of the friendship group were present may have made the boys more susceptible to the pressures of the school norms.

In any event, it is clear that a simple analysis of stylistic variation in terms of the overall formality or informality of the situation cannot fully account for the linguistic variation observed here. It is better to think in terms of situational constraints on exploiting the resources of the linguistic system. Nonstandard verbal –s is a strong indicator of loyalty to the vernacular culture, and in some cases this

symbolic function over-rides other situational constraints on linguistic variation (as in the speech of Nobby and Benny). In other cases (as with Jeff and Alec in a classroom discussion) the situational constraints exclude the possibility of using the form in this way. It is also clear that in order to understand how speakers exploit sociolinguistic variation we need to look beyond group scores to consider how individual speakers use the resources of their linguistic system to signal a range of different interactional meanings.

#### **4. Syntactic variation and beyond**

So far I have discussed social variation between morphological and syntactic forms in cases where it was straightforward to identify the function of the forms. Nonstandard *was* and standard *were*, for example, both indicated past tense for the verb BE: no other linguistic forms available to the adolescent speakers could express this grammatical function. We will now consider a less straightforward example of sociolinguistic variation involving syntactic forms. In this case the analysis began by focussing on two variant syntactic forms used to introduce new information into the discourse. We will see, however, that these were not the only forms that speakers used for this function, and that the analysis had to expand to take account of the other linguistic forms serving the same function.

The data come from a research project based on interviews with 14–15 year olds in three English towns: Reading, Hull and Milton Keynes (Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams 1999). In each town we recorded 32 adolescents aged 14–15, of whom 16 attended a school in a middle-class area and 16 attended a school in a more working-class area (with ‘class’ defined broadly in each case, in terms of the

residential area and parents' occupation). In each school the fieldworker<sup>2</sup> recorded 8 female and 8 male adolescents. Thus a total of 96 speakers took part in the project.

Full details of the analysis can be found in Cheshire (2005); here I give a brief and necessarily simplified account. I was interested initially in the variation between existential *there* constructions such as (10a), taken from one of the interviews, and canonical subject-verb clauses, as in the invented (10b):

(10a) there's a car in the village square . it's parked near the bus shelter

(10b) a car's in the village square . it's parked near the bus shelter.

In the interviews the most frequent function of the existential *there* constructions was to introduce a discourse-new item: in other words, a noun phrase referring to an entity that had not been mentioned before and that could not be inferred from something else that had been said. In (10a) and (10b), for example, *a car* is a discourse-new item: neither the adolescent nor the fieldworker had mentioned a car before. Discourse-new items contrast with both discourse-old items and inferable items. *It* in (10a) and (10b) is a discourse-old item, referring to *car*, which has just been mentioned. *The bus shelter*, on the other hand, is an inferable item: the speaker presumably assumes that the fieldworker knows the village square (which is near to the school where the recording was made) and that she can infer that *bus shelter* refers to the shelter that is in the village square (this account of discourse-old and discourse-new items is a simplified version of Prince's 1981 framework). I identified all the clauses where speakers introduced discourse-new items, with the intention of distinguishing those that occurred in an existential *there* construction and those that occurred in a canonical subject-verb construction. It soon became clear,

however, that the adolescents used a very wide range of linguistic forms to mark the noun phrases that introduced a discourse-new item, and that these should therefore be included in the analysis alongside the existential *there* constructions and the canonical clause constructions. The forms included other marked clause constructions, such as left dislocation, possessive HAVE (GOT) constructions and *it* constructions, as in (11)–(13).

(11) Hayley: and then who my uncle's married to she comes from Somerset

(12) AW: so who do you live with then who's in your family?

→ Sally: my mum and my dad and my three sisters and we've got my sister's friend staying with us since Christmas

(13) Jerry: it's like too many people are going into business

These clause structures all allow speakers to position the discourse-new entities at the end of the clause rather than the beginning, a strategy that helps interlocutors to process the utterance (Prince 1981:228).

Another way of marking discourse-new items was to use a linguistic form that explicitly creates interspeaker involvement. These forms included pragmatic particles such as *and stuff*, *sort of* and *like*, as in (14). The particles are often considered to signal an assumption of common ground between speaker and hearer, and in this way they can signal that the hearer has to use this shared knowledge to identify a new discourse referent. Other forms that functioned in this way included high rising tones and indefinite *this*, as in (15).



Non-restrictive relative clauses served a similar function, allowing speakers to add extra information to the noun phrase as the discourse proceeds. Thus in (17) *who's my nan's sister* expands *my aunt Lucy*.

(17) Carol:     in my family I've got my mum my dad my nan and then my aunt Lucy  
                  who's my nan's sister

I also needed to include in the analysis a range of features that are sometimes considered to be dysfluencies. They included repetition, hesitation, false starts and filled and unfilled pauses. Some researchers suggest that dysfluencies always show that speakers are having difficulty producing their speech (see, for example, Arnold et al. 2000: 47), but the difficulty can have many causes including accessing from the mental lexicon a noun that has not been previously mentioned. The fact that the speaker lingers over the production of the noun phrase can function as a clue to the interlocutor, indicating that the speaker is about to produce new information (Geluykens 1992). Repetition used before a discourse-new entity in this way is illustrated in (18).

(18) Sally is talking about her brother.

Sally: he lives with his with his girlfriend

Finally, there was a miscellaneous group of discourse-new items marked in diverse ways that included explicit efforts at lexical retrieval, as in (19), and multiple strategies, as in (20), where Andrew introduces the discourse-new entity *Australian teenage band* using an existential *there* construction and *like*, with repetition of the construction and a brief pause before the repeat.

(19) AW: and what do you want to be when you leave school?

Jeff: either a doctor or a computer s.s.scientist well you know make computers programming erm computer programming that's it

(20) Andrew: well there's this . there is like an Australian teenage band at the moment that play that kind of music

There were no consistent patterns of gender or social class variation in the use of any of these different categories of discourse-new markers, nor in any of the individual syntactic constructions, pragmatic particles or dysfluencies that were used to mark discourse-new items. However, in all three towns there was a highly significant gender and social class distribution in the use of 'bare' NPs. An example of a 'bare' NP is *instruction sheets* in (21).

(21) Sam is talking about his stick insects.

Sam: they bred so fast we had to sell them with instruction sheets at the summer fair

As many as 410 discourse-new items (42.27%) were introduced in canonical clauses in this way, without any explicit linguistic marking. Working-class female adolescents used the highest proportion of bare NPs, and middle-class male adolescents the lowest proportion. The effect of gender was particularly striking for the middle class groups in all three towns, as Figure 1 shows. It was weaker, though still significant, for the working class groups, as seen in Figure 2.

FIGURE 6.1 ABOUT HERE

FIGURE 6.2 ABOUT HERE

The gender distribution can be seen very clearly when the scores for individual speakers are compared. Figure 3, for example, shows the percentage of bare NPs used by the middle class adolescents in Reading. Although there was much individual variation in the use of the different forms that could mark discourse entities as new, with some speakers using, say, more pragmatic particles and others using more syntactic constructions (and others using all of the forms mentioned above) every female speaker used bare NPs at least once – mostly more than once – and most used bare NPs more frequently than any of the discourse-new markers. In contrast, only three of the middle class boys used bare NPs, and the frequency with which they used them was uniformly low.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The fact that the same gender and social class patterns occur in three separate regions of England is compelling evidence of a previously unsuspected tendency for male adolescent speakers, especially the middle class boys, to mark discourse-new items in their talk.

Thus variation between existential clauses and canonical clauses did not of itself have a role in distinguishing gender or social class groups. It did, however, form part of a complex of strategies harnessed by speakers to accomplish a specific discourse function (marking discourse-new entities). When the full complex of forms was taken into account it became possible to see sociolinguistic patterning within the data analysed here.

The next step, of course, is to consider the implications of this kind of social variation and to try to explain why it may exist. It is possible that it relates to historical and cultural factors that have given rise to different discourse styles for working class and middle class groups, and for male and female speakers. There is a large research literature suggesting that male speakers are more concerned with the referential content of their talk and female speakers with the affective meaning (see, for example, Holmes 1995), and this may account for the higher frequency with which the boys in our study marked their discourse-new items. In other words, they may have paid more attention than the female speakers to the information status of the entities they introduced into their discourse. There is also a research literature on social class differences that indicates that middle class speakers may have an independent, speaker-oriented speech style, leading them to make their own opinions and viewpoints explicit, whereas working-class speakers take a more collaborative, addressee-oriented approach to talk, allowing their interlocutors more opportunities to infer meanings and to draw their own conclusions (see, for example, Macaulay 2005).

To some extent this may be the legacy of the more frequent participation of the middle classes in formal public settings where it is necessary to construct explicit meanings.

These interpretations are, of course, open to question: what is important is to note that the social variation that was found in this analysis calls for a different kind of interpretation than the variation discussed in Sections 2 and 3 of the paper.

## 5. Conclusion

Syntax is central to the construction of discourse. This means that when we are analysing sociolinguistic aspects of syntactic variation we need to take account not only of grammatical functions (such as tense marking) but also discourse functions (such as the marking of new information) that may be fulfilled by lexical, phonetic and other linguistic forms and strategies, as well as syntactic forms. With grammatical functions it is often possible to analyse syntactic variation in terms of a simple alternation of variants, as shown in Sections 2 and 3 of this paper. Even here, however, it is worth considering what we may be overlooking by taking a variationist approach to the analysis. In Section 2, for example, I considered *ain't* as a simple variant of different forms of BE *not* and HAVE *not*. It is possible, however, that *ain't* is a more emphatic form of negation than *isn't*, say, or *haven't*, in which case it would be instructive to consider whether individuals who use *ain't* frequently have a different interactional style from speakers who use it more rarely. A similar point can be made about the use of negative concord.

When the syntactic form in which we are interested serves a specific discourse function, we may be forced to look beyond syntax to identify the full range of forms that can be used for the same discourse function, as we saw in Section 4. If a

broad analysis of this type then uncovers sociolinguistic variation this may suggest that different social groups have different interactional styles, as we saw, again, in Section 4. Thus the analysis of syntactic variation provides us with a range of intriguing and complex perspectives on how speakers use language to create social meanings and social life.

**Notes**

1. Perhaps it is necessary to stress that the speech of the girls is not considered here purely for reasons of space, not because it is less interesting or important.
2. The interviewers were Ann Williams and Paul Kerswill. 'AW' in the illustrative extracts that follow stands for Ann Williams, who was the main interviewer. Obviously the analysis could not have been done without the work of Ann and Paul, and I would like to thank them for this, as well as for their helpful comments on Cheshire (2005).

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Table 1. Adherence to vernacular culture and frequency of nonstandard forms

		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Class A	verbal -s	77.36	54.03	36.57	21.21
	<i>has</i>	66.67	50.00	41.65	(33.33)
	past forms of BE	90.32	89.74	83.33	75.00
	multiple negation	100.00	85.71	83.33	71.43
Class B	<i>never</i> with preterite verb forms	64.71	41.67	45.45	37.50
	relative <i>what</i>	92.31	7.69	33.33	0.00
Class C	auxiliary DO	58.33	37.50	83.33	-
	past COME	100.00	100.00	100.00	(100.00)
	<i>ain't</i> = HAVE	78.26	64.52	80.00	(100.00)
	<i>ain't</i> = BE	58.82	72.22	80.00	(100.00)
	<i>ain't</i> = copula	100.00	76.19	56.52	75.00

Note: Bracketed figures indicate that the number of occurrences of the feature is low and that the indices may not, therefore, be reliable. Following Labov (1970), less than 5 occurrences was considered too low for reliability.

Table 2. Frequency indices for Group B forms in the speech of group 1, groups 2/3, and group 4

	Group 1	Groups 2 and 3	Group 4
<i>never</i> with preterite verb forms	64.71	43.00	37.50
Relative <i>what</i>	92.31	18.00	0.00

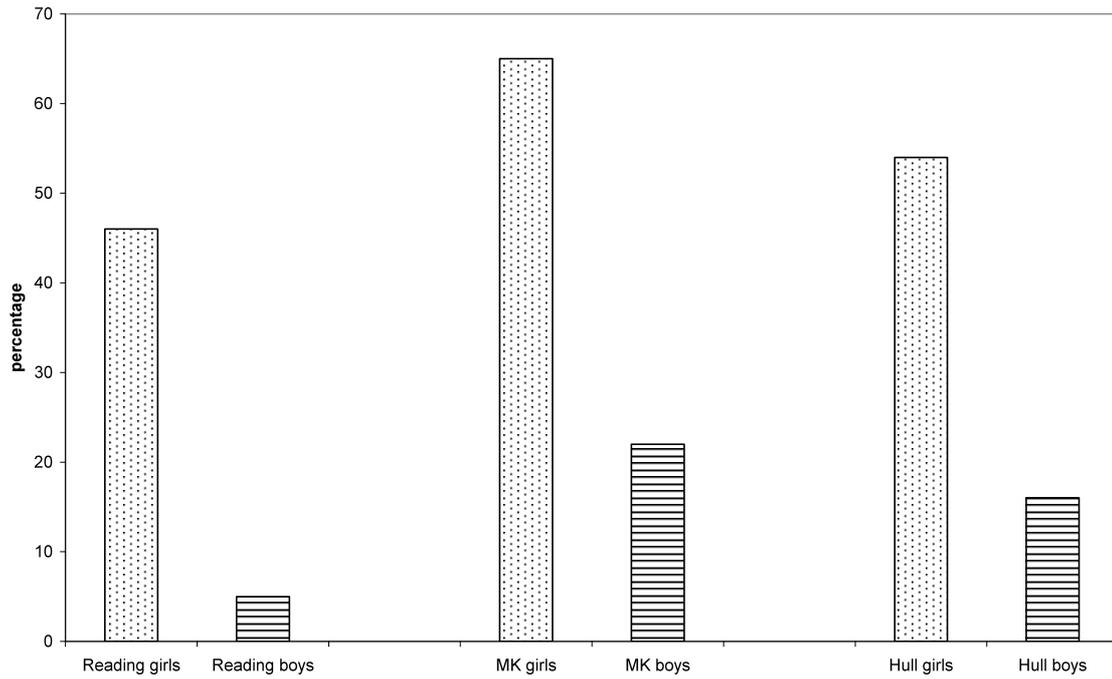
Table 3. Stylistic variation in the frequency of nonstandard forms

		playground	school
Class A	verbal <i>-s</i>	57.03	31.49
	<i>has</i>	46.43	35.71
	past forms of BE	91.67	88.57
	multiple negation	90.70	66.67
Class B	<i>never</i> with preterite verb forms	49.21	15.38
	relative <i>what</i>	50.00	54.66
Class C	Auxiliary DO	-	-
	past COME	100.00	100.00
	<i>ain't</i> = HAVE	93.02	100.00
	<i>ain't</i> = copula	74.47	77.78

Table 4. Nonstandard verbal -s in the playground and at school

	playground	school
Nobby	81.00	77.78
Tommy	70.83	34.62
Pete	71.43	54.55
Jeff	45.00	0.00
Rob	45.71	33.33
Nicky	57.14	31.75
Benny	31.58	54.17
Alec	38.46	0.00

Figure 6.1. Percentage of discourse-new forms that are marked: middle class groups

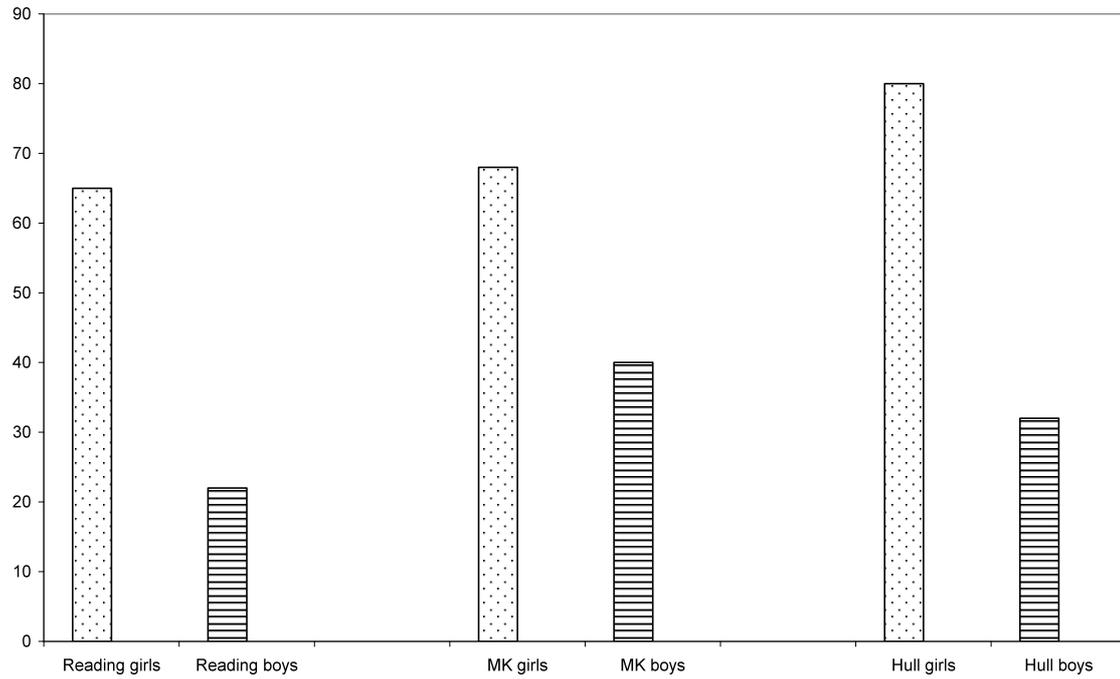


**Reading chi square value 27.2833, df=1, p < 0.001**

**MK chi square value 16.1644, df=1, p < 0.001**

**Hull chi square value 31.1918, df=1, p < 0.001S**

Figure 6.2. Percentage marked discourse-new forms: working class groups

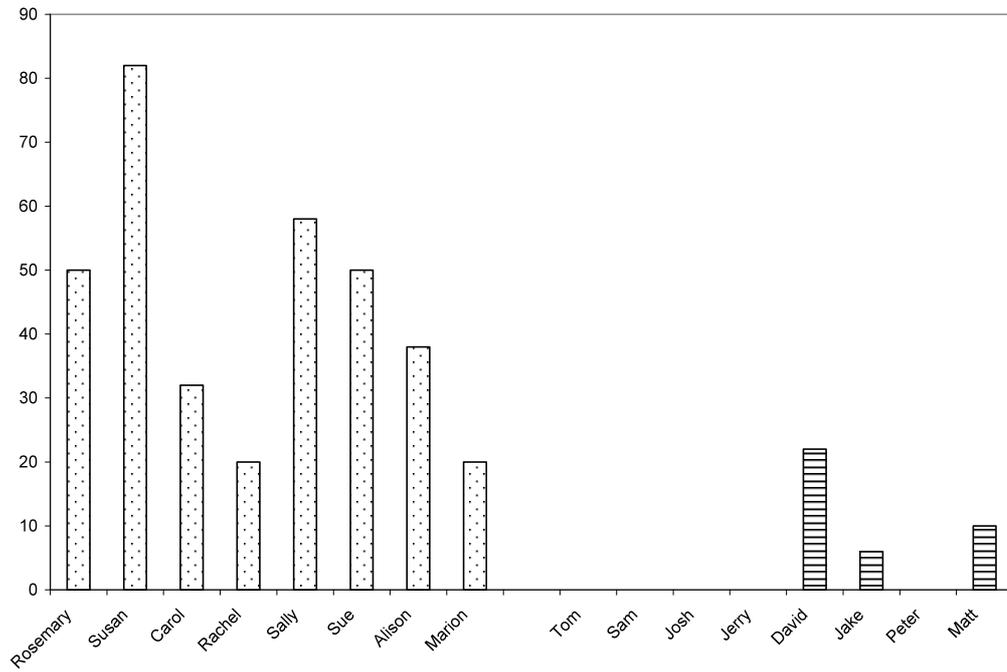


**Reading chi square value 34.9280, df = 1, p < 0.001**

**Milton Keynes chi square value 7.8232, df = 1, p < 0.01**

**Hull chi square value 11.0653, df = 1, p < 0.001**

Figure 6.3. Individual speakers' marking of discourse-new forms: Reading middle class group



**Dotted bars represent percentage of bare NPs used by girls; striped bars represent percentage of bare NPs used by boys.**