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# **Multiethnolects in the British Media**

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## **1 Introduction**

This paper examines the representation of the multiethnolects Multicultural London English (MLE) and Multicultural Manchester English (MME) in the British media. It aims to explore both the attitudes towards these multiethnolects in the press, and the actual usages of them on social media, comparing the two in order to observe whether the former is accurate about the latter. Our chosen media outlets are online newspaper articles (including their comment sections), and the social media website Twitter. We had aimed to collect sixteen newspaper articles – eight which discussed MLE, and eight which discussed MME; however, our findings concur with our prediction in that all the articles that we gathered regarding the attitudes towards multiethnolects mainly concerned MLE, with only a few mentioning that multiethnolects are spoken in other urban areas such as Manchester. The only articles that Word Sketch did identify solely concerning language use in Manchester were not opinion pieces, but a discussion of research conducted by Multilingual Manchester. We also aimed to gather both an evenly distributed amount of left-wing and right-wing, tabloid and broadsheet articles; however, our research yielded seven right-wing articles: five tabloids from The Daily Mail and two broadsheets from The Telegraph; and nine left-wing articles: three tabloids from The Independent, and six broadsheets from The Guardian and The New Statesmen. Hence, this demonstrates that right-wing tabloid newspaper The Daily Mail has been the keenest to publicise on the matter; and left-wing broadsheet newspapers have publicised the most on the issue overall.

We gathered our data using Sketch Engine's text analysis software 'Word Sketch', which operates by searching and locating for the occurrence(s) of a chosen lexical item or collocation. This allowed us to gather 'Tweets' and articles with relevance to our research aims. The study begins with a quantitative analysis of the frequency of collocates and word combinations in newspaper articles, their respective comment sections as identified by Word Sketch. Secondly, it presents a qualitative analysis of the data – first, we conduct a thematic analysis of the newspaper articles in order to identify recurrent themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Then, it offers both a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the linguistic features of Tweets and their respective user's profile. Finally, it offers a discussion, which examines and compares our findings, highlighting that the attitudes towards multiethnolects in the media are not an accurate representation of how multiethnolects are utilised in reality.

## **2 Quantitative Analysis of Corpus Articles**

### **2.1 All Newspaper Outlets**

Using WordSketch, we generated frequencies of the 'key-words' featured throughout all of the compiled articles, and created frequency charts of this. Next, we created frequency charts of both left-wing and right-wing articles concerned with MLE and MME, respectively. We then made word clouds to provide a visual representation of the data.



2.1.2 Left-wing Media – MLE



Figure 3: Word cloud representing word frequencies in left-wing media - MLE

adjective (612 items | 1,538 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency
1 other	45	18 east	11	35 few	7
2 many	38	19 cockney	11	36 large	7
3 new	36	20 urban	10	37 next	7
4 such	36	21 cool	10	38 asian	7
5 white	33	22 same	10	39 rich	7
6 black	27	23 caribbean	9	40 likely	7
7 young	26	24 important	9	41 social	7
8 english	24	25 traditional	8	42 french	6
9 different	22	26 public	8	43 african-caribbean	6
10 linguistic	20	27 most	8	44 bare	6
11 more	20	28 working-class	8	45 least	6
12 jamaican	17	29 modern	8	46 private	6
13 good	14	30 able	8	47 certain	6
14 local	14	31 foreign	8	48 huge	6
15 ethnic	13	32 own	7	49 high	6
16 old	13	33 cultural	7	50 long	6
17 british	13	34 last	7		

Figure 4: Adjective frequencies in left-wing media - MLE

modifiers of "language"	verbs with "language" as object	verbs with "language" as subject
<b>other</b> from other languages and dialects	<b>use</b> language used	<b>slip</b> language is slipping
<b>new</b> new language	<b>translate</b> translating language	<b>accuse</b> accused by their language
<b>edgy</b> edgy street language	<b>shape</b> shaped language	<b>mean</b> language meant
<b>street</b> street language	<b>form</b> languages are actually formed	<b>be</b> language is
<b>cool</b> cool London language	<b>make</b> making sure the language	
<b>London</b> London language	<b>be</b> is the edgy street language	
<b>youth</b> youth language		

Figure 5: Collocates of the lemma "language" in left-wing, MLE articles

The left-wing media appears to present a positive stance towards MLE: Figure 5 shows that the verbs used to modify 'language' are focused on how the variation has become what it is today, illustrated by the verbs 'shape', 'make', and 'form'. Additionally, Figure 5 features positive adjectives like 'new', 'good', and 'cool'. However, Figure 3 demonstrates that there is still an emphasis on racial qualities such as 'black', 'Jamaican' and 'Caribbean'; thus, whilst MLE is presented as positive, it still remains racialised.

2.1.3 Right-wing Media – MLE



Figure 6: Word cloud representing word frequencies in MLE right-wing media

modifiers of "language"	nouns modified by "language"	verbs with "language" as object
<b>formal</b> Formal language	<b>trend</b> language trends	<b>reflect</b> reflecting the language
<b>other</b> other languages		<b>infiltrate</b> infiltrating the English language
<b>jokey</b> jokey language		<b>pick</b> language is often picked
<b>indecipherable</b> indecipherable language		<b>speak</b> languages spoken
<b>second</b> second language		<b>be</b> are 64 languages
<b>new</b> new language		
<b>English</b> English language		

Figure 7: Collocates the lemma "language" in right-wing – MLE.

**adjective** (330 items | 632 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency
1 new	20	14 british	5	27 few	4	40 east	3
2 such	19	15 old	5	28 second	4	41 private	3
3 white	14	16 cockney	5	29 wealthy	4	42 low	3
4 english	13	17 good	5	30 traditional	3	43 like	3
5 many	13	18 next	5	31 inner	3	44 middle-class	3
6 young	12	19 urban	5	32 true	3	45 significant	3
7 other	12	20 working-class	4	33 sick	3	46 appalling	3
8 more	9	21 same	4	34 due	3	47 recent	3
9 local	9	22 important	4	35 big	3	48 regional	3
10 linguistic	7	23 certain	4	36 african	3	49 particular	3
11 jamaican	7	24 cool	4	37 major	3	50 hybrid	3
12 own	6	25 long	4	38 migrant	3		
13 ethnic	6	26 foreign	4	39 last	3		

Figure 8: Adjective frequency chart for right-wing media – MLE



meticulous detail, rather than that of the articles concerning MLE. Hence, the articles concerning MME present its emergence as a natural linguistic occurrence, and lack overt opinions surrounding class.

## 2.2 Quantitative Analysis of Comments

We have compiled the corpus for the articles’ comment sections into four subsections: all media comments; left-wing media comments – MLE; right-wing media comments – MLE; and MME comments – all outlets.

All Comments:



Figure 11: Word cloud of language in all comment sections

### adjective (262 items | 523 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	
1	good	17	14	such	5	27	hard	4
2	more	15	15	linguistic	5	28	important	4
3	english	14	16	last	5	29	wrong	4
4	own	11	17	certain	5	30	standard	4
5	many	10	18	cool	5	31	jamaican	4
6	white	9	19	different	5	32	local	4
7	british	9	20	bad	5	33	muslim	4
8	other	8	21	foreign	4	34	bilingual	3
9	same	8	22	cultural	4	35	recent	3
10	sure	7	23	american	4	36	regional	3
11	most	7	24	old	4	37	particular	3
12	native	6	25	proper	4	38	fantastic	3
13	young	6	26	black	4	39	least	3
						40	private	3
						41	long	3
						42	modern	3
						43	mancunian	3
						44	ignorant	3
						45	funny	3
						46	wonderful	3
						47	great	3
						48	single	3
						49	low	3
						50	little	3

Figure 12: Adjective frequency chart for all comment sections







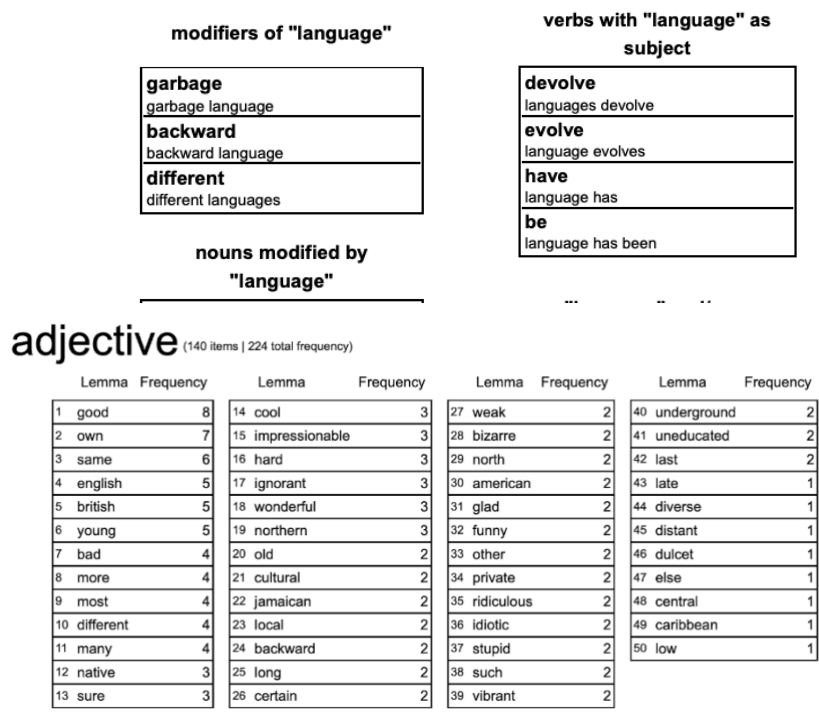


Figure 18: Adjective frequency chart for right-wing media comment sections - MLE

Figure 18 shows an abundance of negative language: for example, the lemmas ‘bad’, ‘backward’ ‘bizarre’, ‘idiotic’, and ‘ridiculous’ occur frequently in the text. In addition, Figure 17 illustrates the terms ‘garbage’ and ‘backwards’ as modifiers of ‘language’. These figures demonstrate a covertly negative attitude held towards MLE by commenters on right-wing media, reflecting the negative representation of the dialect within right-wing articles.

### 2.3 MME comments

The MME comment section corpus demonstrate similar patterns to those found in the MME article corpus: the language in Figure 21 is mainly descriptive – for example, the terms ‘diverse’ and ‘bilingual’. The adjectives tend to be positive, illustrated by ‘fantastic’, ‘good’, and ‘important’; hence, the reception towards MME is notably positive in comparison to that of the comments from both right-wing and left-wing outlets.



### 3 Qualitative Analysis of Articles

In conducting thematic analysis, we found four key themes across all the articles and their comment sections, which are listed below. All the quotes used were pulled directly. Our data indicates that right-wing outlets and their commenters tend to take on a more prescriptivist view of multiethnolects, whereas left-wing outlets tend to take on a more descriptivist view. Prescriptivism being the belief that a particular language variety is linguistically superior to others, and that language change is a ruination of language; descriptivism being the belief that all language varieties are equally valid, and that language change is a natural occurrence.

#### 3.1 Theme 1: *Multiethnolects are 'Taking Over'*

Our findings align with Kircher and Fox's (2019) in that the media's attitudes towards multiethnolects tend to be negative, as they were seen to be *'taking over'* other dialects of English. Right-wing outlets, notably tabloids, had a tendency to prey on people's fears of change: The Daily Mail's (2006) headline reads *'Jafaican' is wiping out inner-city English accents*, and later states that *'slowly but surely, it is infiltrating the English language'*. The Daily Mail (2013) states that MLE is *'infecting children like some linguistic superbug' and is a 'ruination of language'*. Additionally, another article from The Daily Mail (2013) states *'Cockney rhyming slang is being driven out by a new language sweeping across the country.'*; and its comment section suggests that fear has successfully been instilled, with one user commenting *'Isn't it a wonderful feeling? Living in your country but it doesn't even feel like Britain?'*, and another stating *'There have been no Cockneys in London for years, if you did visit most of the area's of the capital of our nation you would here every language other than English.'* Left-wing tabloids also appeared to play into the fear of change (albeit, taking a more nuanced view than their right-wing counterparts) with The Independent (2012) stating that MLE is *'causing the virtual disappearance among London teenagers of speech patterns dating back to the Victorian period and before.'* On the other hand, left-wing broadsheets proved more open to change, demonstrated by The New Statesman (2017) writing *'English has always evolved and changed with the growth of immigrant communities'*, and The New Statesman (2011) declaring that *'It would be wrong to describe this new English dialect as "Jafaican". There's nothing fake about it'*.

#### 3.2 Theme 2: *Multiethnolects are Racialised*

Several articles and their comment sections associated the usage of multiethnolects with ethnic-minority groups, a notion which Drummond (2017, pp. 658) stated is a *'fundamental misunderstanding'* of the dialect. Right-wing outlets tended to directly racialise multiethnolects: in reference to children speaking MLE on a London school bus, The Daily Mail (2013) reads *'the destination (...) might as well read 'Kingston, Jamaica' rather than Kingston upon Thames, as hundreds of (school) children (...) head home, bickering in an indecipherable language'*. Another article discussing MLE from The Daily Mail (2016) received a comment stating *'half the immigrant population (cannot) be bothered to speak or even learn English'*.

The Telegraph (2008) article praises Manchester Academy's ban on the use of multiethnolects at school, and later states *'80 per cent of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds'*, implying that there is a link between the latter and the usage of the former. In contrast, left-wing outlets tended to attempt to dismantle racialisation: The New Statesman states *'There is arguably a racist overtone to (...) alleging that the spread of slang with African-Caribbean origins is the downfall of modern civilisation.'* This aligns with Bird and Dardenne (2009), who note that the media have a tendency of creating and blaming a *'racial other'*.

### **3.3 Theme 3: Multiethnolect Users are Unintelligent**

Both left-wing and right-wing, tabloids and broadsheets, expressed that multiethnolect speakers tend to be perceived as unintelligent – regardless of whether the outlet itself agreed with this sentiment. This finding again concurs with Kircher and Fox (2019) in that attitudes towards multiethnolects are a reflection of the attitudes held towards their speakers and social identifiers such as their education. The Daily Mail (2013) writes that multiethnolect speakers *'are in danger of literally talking themselves into unemployment in later life'*, which invited comments such as *'One reason so many of today's youth are unemployed... Ask yourselves, would you employ a dimwit who cannot speak properly'*, and *'It only highlights a very low intelligence and esteem level'*. Another article from The Daily Mail (2016), concerning language change and multiethnolects, received comments such as *'So in 50 years the British accent will be "uneducated idiot"'* and *'The uneducated will continue to mangle words while the educated will enunciate clearly as ever.'* The Telegraph (2008) discusses Manchester Academy's ban on 'youth slang', of which pupils must use *'formal language (...) at all times in communications with adults'*, stating that the imposition of this rule saw *'exam results soar'*; on a similar note, the New Statesman (2017) refers to MLE as *'the bane of every teacher's existence'*, despite it being a left-wing outlet. In contrast, however, The Guardian (2013) criticise the fact that multiethnolects are deemed as unintelligent, stating that the trend of *'Comedians and writers who attended exclusive private schools and top universities (...) mocking those who they see as lacking intelligence (...) (by) copying a Caribbean patois'* is a classist stereotype.

### **3.4 Theme 4: Multiethnolects are associated with criminals**

We found that many articles referred to multiethnolect users as criminals, aligning with Bird and Dardenne's (2009) notion of the storytelling approach utilised by the media, which plays on the consumer's pre-existing prejudices. A Daily Mail (2013) article surrounding MLE received the comment *'Hearing English youth speaking with a Jamaican gangsta accent is idiotic and laughable'*, and another saying *'"Gangsta" rap and lifestyle are a plague on all civilized nations.'* To our surprise, left-wing articles also played into the criminalisation of multiethnolect speakers: The Independent (2016) reads *'...the greeting braap! [is] picked up and used by innocent teens who may not have realised that it imitates the sound of an automatic firearm.'* Furthermore, The Guardian (2019) describes MLE as a *'cryptolect'*, stating

it was designed to conceal lexis for weapons and violence as discreet, adding that it is an example of ‘hypersynonymy’, in that there are a multitude of words for such things. This links to Kircher and Fox’s (2019) notion that one’s attitude to a language is a reflection of their attitude towards its speaker, based on class, ethnicity, and other social characteristics.

#### 4 Analysis of Twitter Corpus

Here we have compiled both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis of the data gathered from Twitter. Firstly, we present frequency charts of the ‘key-words’ found, as applied to nouns, adjectives, and verbs, respectively.

### verb (54 items | 103 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency
1 be	22	14 feed	1	27 tell	1	40 scam	1
2 do	11	15 express	1	28 cry	1	41 see	1
3 have	10	16 code	1	29 mop	1	42 set	1
4 speak	3	17 associate	1	30 need	1	43 shred	1
5 make	3	18 represent	1	31 pore	1	44 stick	1
6 sound	2	19 ruin	1	32 punch	1	45 listen	1
7 look	2	20 fight	1	33 reach	1	46 decipher	1
8 replace	2	21 get	1	34 react	1	47 use	1
9 feel	2	22 go	1	35 realise	1	48 vaccinate	1
10 wear	2	23 communicate	1	36 hear	1	49 win	1
11 cause	1	24 come	1	37 imagine	1	50 mash	1
12 mix	1	25 #ruined	1	38 decide	1		
13 exist	1	26 gonna	1	39 become	1		

Figure 22: Verb frequency chart

### adjective (55 items | 67 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency
1 black	5	14 conservative	1	27 next	1	40 senior	1
2 young	4	15 criminal	1	28 laughable	1	41 sick	1
3 cockney	2	16 crucial	1	29 innit	1	42 social	1
4 english	2	17 ridiculous	1	30 @lojammusic	1	43 south	1
5 old	2	18 gyal	1	31 own	1	44 top	1
6 big	2	19 fascinating	1	32 peng	1	45 tough	1
7 new	2	20 base	1	33 popular	1	46 unprovoked	1
8 @wordminded	1	21 @al	1	34 posh	1	47 mad	1
9 amazing	1	22 #mle	1	35 primary	1	48 left	1
10 25thendo	1	23 hilarious	1	36 private	1	49 wid	1
11 asian	1	24 incorrigible	1	37 random	1	50 working-class	1
12 caribbean	1	25 basic	1	38 sad	1		
13 original	1	26 urban	1	39 safe	1		

Figure 23: Adjective frequency chart

## noun (183 items | 259 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency	Lemma	Frequency
1 london	8	18 mother	2	35 bmt	2
2 peng	7	19 #drill	2	36 bruh	1
3 multicultural	6	20 londoner	2	37 @nicjay	1
4 english	6	21 capital	2	38 @nataliefoskett	1
5 innit	5	22 culture	2	39 cheers	1
6 mle	5	23 city	2	40 @reubensbonhomie	1
7 ting	4	24 #slang	2	41 @nylahuda	1
8 slang	4	25 accent	2	42 @adambienkov	1
9 manchester	4	26 mask	2	43 cleaning	1
10 #mle	4	27 #grime	2	44 @ruhelk	1
11 girl	4	28 kid	2	45 @rmayrhoo	1
12 man	4	29 rah	2	46 @scclarkcymru	1
13 #language	3	30 contempt	2	47 @skippybe	1
14 word	3	31 #culture	2	48 @ambvrrr	1
15 people	3	32 school	2	49 @albunshaft1985	1
16 #london	3	33 wap	2	50 @abhsila	1
17 baccy	2	34 way	2		

Figure 23: Noun frequency chart

One of the most prevalent features observed in the newspaper analysis was a tendency to associate MLE and MME with specific racial and cultural backgrounds, with the adjectives ‘black’ and ‘white’ appearing most prominently in this regard. There is a choice to present the ethnolects in this manner, assigning particular modes of speech to particular racial identities. The Twitter data collected gives weight to both sides of this argument. Examining adjective frequency in the corpora highlights ‘black’ to be the descriptor most in use, followed fairly closely by ‘cockney’, and ‘English’; leading one to deduce that there is certainly differentiation in the groups relevant to this discussion. The mention of ‘black’ and ‘English’, not allowing for the obvious cross section of the two identities, aligns with the division presented by the media. However, the data we gathered in studying the users’ profiles – i.e. their age, race, sex, and so on – challenges the media’s agenda. Adjective ‘peng’ and auxiliary verb/pronoun ‘innit’ were amongst the highest frequency across the corpora and were present in tweets made by people from a variety of backgrounds, as the following two examples show:

*(@User1): “Manchester people, peng lineup @ Mint Lounge this coming Wednesday”*

*(@User2): “The way I’m gonna dress up and do my makeup and just look PENG unprovoked after my exam’s done yeah”*

The former, located in Manchester, was tweeted by a user who presented as a white man with an English background. The latter stated their location as London, and was tweeted by an adolescent girl of Arabic background. The difference between these two examples is reinforced when looking at an example of a renowned multiethnolect phrase: the oft-quoted ‘rah where’s my baccy’, a satirical expression that has become synonymous with privately-educated, white, teenage girls – coined ‘rah girls’ – and the identities they enact. This aligns with Lee (2016) who highlights the phenomena of ‘glocal identities’, in which individuals project a cosmopolitan identity in their linguistic choices. This feature disseminated into the



language of people from across the country, as this example located in West Yorkshire (a region close to that inhabited by MME speakers) shows:

*(@User3): "There's literally a 'rah where's my baccy' girl next to me rn, also not wearing a mask, do I punch her?"*

In addition, this example from Leeds, West Yorkshire:

*(@User4): "rah where's my baccy private school girls GO HOME!"*

Lee (2016) notes that computer-mediated communication (CMC) allows users to use select language in the construction of their identity. In the above examples, there is a dual recognition of the types of people who use the language; the 'rah' girls themselves, and the people who consciously adopt the phrase as cynicism. Lee (2016) also adds that use of such phrases is possibly used to direct the communication to a particular group. Both of these observations have been documented in some of the media we studied. Collocation analysis of right-wing media presented a trend of verbs that negatively modified the language in the object position, specifically through verbs such as *'infiltrate'* or *'pick'*; the context behind this phrase can be interpreted as an example of a feature (in this case *'baccy'*, a contraction of *'tobacco'*) from one demographic directly entering the lexicon of another, different group.

The general age bracket associated with these girls - predominantly of secondary school-university age - also calls into question whether there has been a generational shift to coincide with the shift, or expansion, of MLE vocabulary across ethnic groups. The advent of social media platforms *such as* Twitter or, even more recently the phenomenon that has been Tik Tok, has led to an 'opening up' of language across younger generations in a way.

## **5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the data from both our quantitative and qualitative research show consistent themes regarding primary users and representations of multiethnolects. We expected to see a more prominent contrast between left-wing and right-wing language due to their differences in values; however, as mentioned in 2.0 and 3.0, both agendas push very similar representations. Both outlets represent MLE as central to ethnic minority groups, criminal activity and youth culture. However, as demonstrated in 4.0, this is not an accurate representation – individuals of all backgrounds utilise multiethnolects. During the analysis we encountered difficulties collecting representations of MME in the media. Previous work highlights the significance of attitudes to MME (Drummond, 2017) but there is a clear gap in the research looking into this multiethnolect.

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