

Investigating the role of TV in accent change TH-fronting in Glaswegian

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Paper overview

This paper presents and discusses the results of the correlational study, taking TH-fronting as an example. The results show that several factors are involved, and that there are robust links with engagement with the popular London-based TV drama, *EastEnders*, alongside those pointing to opportunities for contact with speakers of Southern English. (The regressions are the same as those presented at NWAV34.)

But investigation of the informants' ability to imitate London English strongly suggests that if TV is involved in this change, conscious copying or imitation is unlikely to be the mechanism (as suggested earlier by Trudgill 1986).

JSS 21/12/07

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Investigating the role of TV in accent change

TH-fronting in Glaswegian

- Background – TV and language change
- The ‘problem’ of TH-fronting in the UK
- Why consider TV?
- The Glasgow media project
- TH-fronting in Glaswegian
 - and dialect contact?
 - and attitudes to UK urban accents?
 - and watching/engaging with TV?
- Discussion
- Coda

Background – TV and language change

traditional view of ‘variationist’/‘quantitative’ sociolinguistics

- watching TV may affect vocabulary
- but NOT core features of language, e.g. pronunciation, grammar
(e.g. Chambers, e.g. 1998, Trudgill, 1986)
- Language change primarily takes place through accommodation during face-to-face interaction

Background – TV and language change

- TV may
 - increase awareness of linguistic varieties
 - and/or affect attitudes towards other varieties

(e.g. Milroy and Milroy 1985)
- If core features of grammar are affected, this must be in some way voluntary, and/or involve imitation

(Trudgill 1986)

The 'problem' of TH-fronting in the UK

Certain consonant changes, typical of London accents (e.g. Cockney), are spreading rapidly across urban accents of British English, e.g.

TH-fronting, [f] for (th) in e.g. *think, tooth*

e.g. Foulkes and Docherty (1999), Kerswill (2003)

In some accents, e.g. Glaswegian, these features are found exclusively in working-class adolescents with relatively low social and geographical mobility (e.g. Stuart-Smith, 1999)



28 JUN 2000

Cockneys are killing off the Scots accent

6455
SOAP operas like *EastEnders* are the most likely culprits for the growing spread of Estuary English among Glaswegian teenagers, academics claimed yesterday.

Youngsters in the city are developing a 'southern drawl' at the expense of distinctive Scottish sounds such as the 'ch' in 'loch', according to the study by Glasgow University.

Researchers found pronunciations such as 'toof' for 'tooth' are becoming more common, while traditional Glasgow variations such as 'mulk' for 'milk' are in decline. They believe the influence of TV is to blame as many of the youngsters surveyed had little direct contact English people.

Gaswegians aged 13-14 were asked to read lists of words and talk in pairs before comparing the results with people aged 40-60. Dr Jane Stuart-Smith, of the Department of English Language, said: 'The finger of suspicion points to the media and programmes like *EastEnders*, which are rich in Cockney accents. 'Whatever the cause, it is certain that Glasgow's accent is changing.'

the media themselves are happy to blame

television

especially popular soap dramas set in London, such as *EastEnders*, apparently featuring Cockney dialect

and linguists?

about TH-fronting in Norwich - Trudgill (1986: 54):

probably a combination of factors working together

- less overt forms of dialect contact
- attitudes towards Cockney might play a role

and – Trudgill (1988: 44):

‘[the] sheer speed [of the change] may be due to a ‘softening-up’ process produced by the engendering of favourable attitudes through TV programmes’

Why consider TV? (1)

- TV is exceptionally prevalent
- Some TV programmes constitute social phenomena, e.g. the London-based soap *EastEnders* (1985-)
 - screened 4 times/week plus weekend omnibus
 - regularly attracted 18 million viewers/episode (i.e. almost one-third UK population)
 - viewing of key episodes have caused exceptional surges in electricity demand (e.g. National Grid 2001)
 - viewers can be highly engaged (e.g. Buckingham 1987)

Why consider TV? (2)

- Media are assumed to affect social behaviour (e.g. McQuail 2000: 424f), but
 - TV is assumed to be a contributory factor, along with other factors (Klapper 1960: 8)
 - Audience assumed to be active interpreters of media texts (e.g. Philo 1999)
- TV and para-social interaction (e.g. Abercrombie 1996)

Why consider TV? (3)

- linguists are starting to include TV:
 - ‘as part of the global sociolinguistic condition’
Androutsopoulos (2001: 4)
 - as possible cause of language change, in German
e.g. Lameli (2004), Muhr (2003)
 - in accounts of language variation
e.g. Br. Portuguese (Naro 1981, Naro and Scherre 1996);
Ur. Portuguese (Carvalho 2004).
- and to wonder about TV in TH-fronting
e.g. Williams and Kerswill (1999); Foulkes and Docherty (2000)

➤ but there is no evidence ...

The Glasgow media project

- three year project (2002-5)
- main research question:
Are the media a contributory factor in systemic language change under certain circumstances for certain individuals?
- specific research question:
Does TV play a role in the appearance of Cockney accent features in the speech of Glaswegian adolescents?

Scope of the project

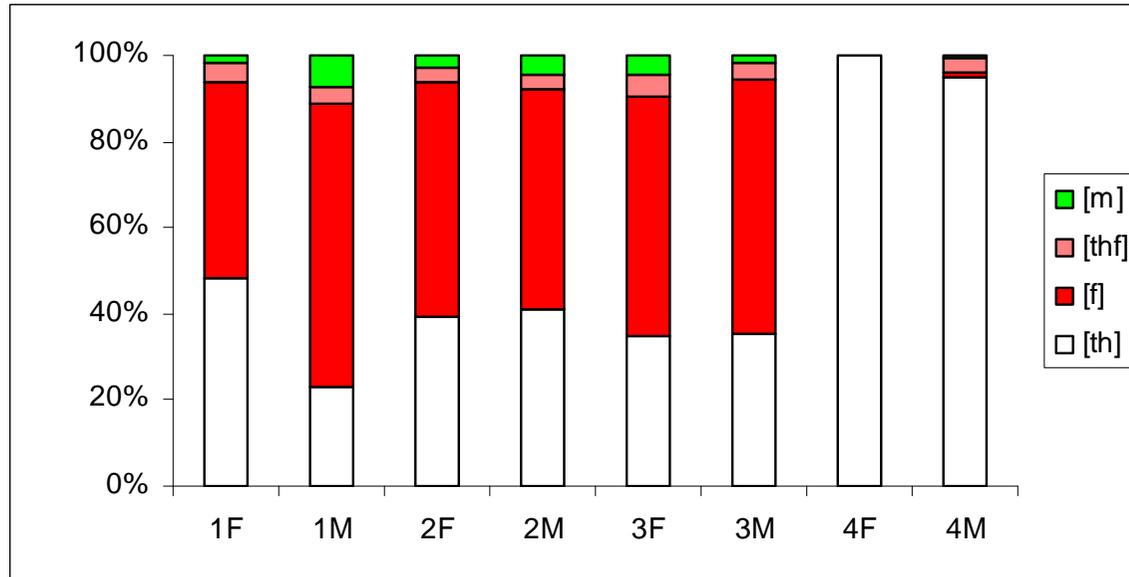
- sample
 - 36 adolescents; 12 adults (working-class)
 - longitudinal - tracks 2 age groups across 2 years
- methods
 - quantitative and qualitative
- data
 - speech: wordlist and spontaneous
 - questionnaire
 - informal interviews
 - diaries
 - television/language experiment (quiz show)

Questions for this paper: TH-fronting and TV

1. Is TH-fronting spreading in Glaswegian vernacular?
2. If so, is this related to:
 - a. contact with Cockney and/or other dialects of English?
 - b. attitudes to Cockney and/or other urban accents?
 - c. watching TV programmes set in London?
 - d. or these and more *together*?

TH-fronting in wordlists will be used as exemplar

1. TH-fronting is spreading in Glaswegian



n = 951

1 = 10-11 years

2 = 12-13 years

3 = 14-15 years

4 = 40-60 years

- adolescents use more [f] than adults
- we find more [f] in 2003 than in 1997

2a. There is some contact with dialects outside Glasgow (mainly mediated/passive)

Initial baseline criteria: informants born and raised in area
(2.8% born in England, 2001 Census)

Questionnaire and interview data revealed:

- most have a few relatives beyond Glasgow, whom they talk to more than they see (when the relatives visit them).
- most show a low degree of active mobility outside the city.
- majority have face-to-face contact with friends (and family) within Glasgow.

2a. TH-fronting is linked with dialect contact

TH-fronting is linked positively with

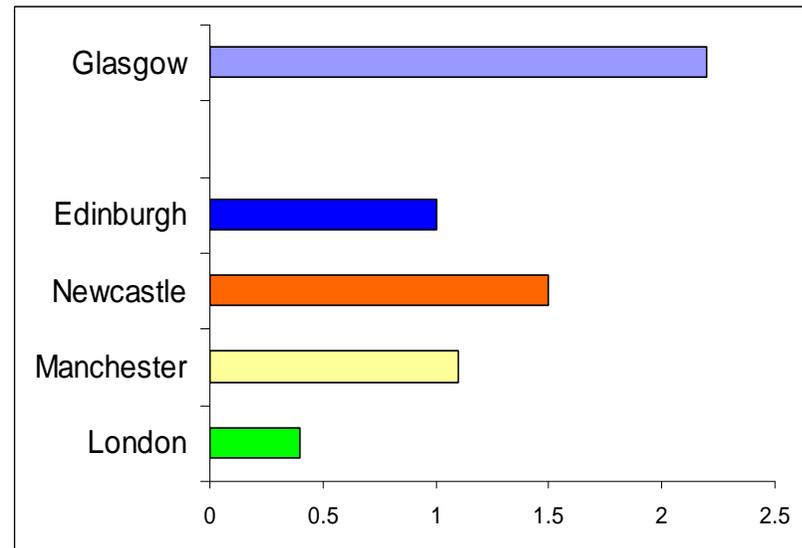
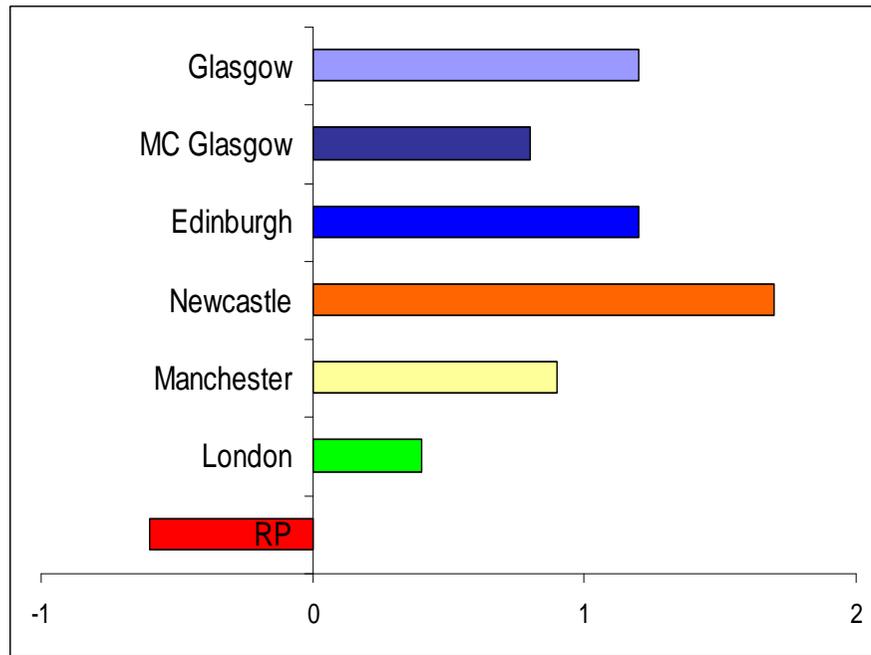
- having relatives in the South of England

(only 8% variance explained)

2b. Attitudes to UK urban accents

- speech samples of 7 accents
 - female speakers same age
 - reading same passage
 - beginning of questionnaire
 - also checked identification of accents
- ‘mental image’ of 8 urban accents (cf Preston 1999)
 - ‘what do you think of the accents in *London*?’
 - end of questionnaire

2b. Glaswegian adolescents like Cockney, but less than other UK urban accents



Speech samples

mental image

average responses for all informants

(scale: less positive more positive)

2b. TH-fronting is linked with attitudes to accents

TH-fronting is linked positively with

- liking the Cockney speech sample
- and liking the Manchester speech sample

- but negatively with liking an Edinburgh accent ('posh')

(only 12% variance explained)

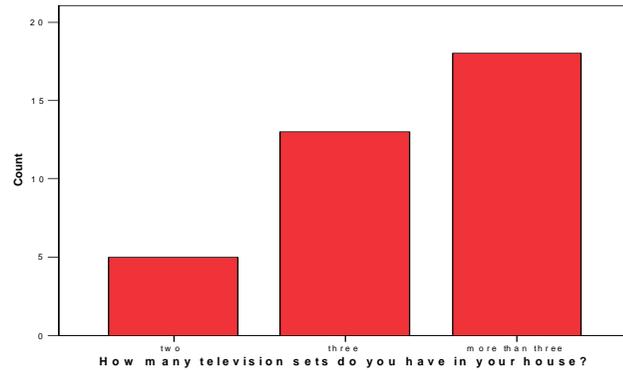
but

viz Trudgill's notion of 'softening up'

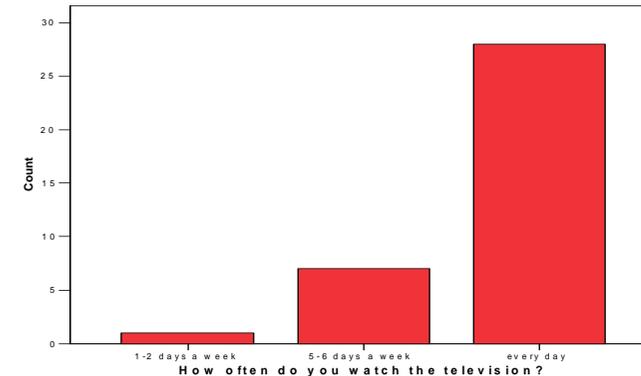
we find no evidence that watching popular programmes set in London is linked to liking Cockney accents more;

in fact, multiple regression analysis shows a negative link between liking the Cockney speech sample and watching *EastEnders*.

2c. Glaswegian adolescents have medium exposure to TV

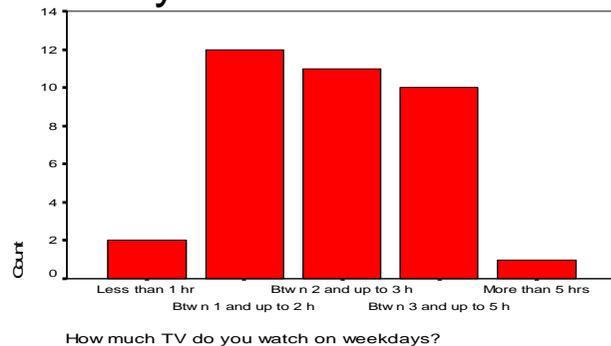


many have 3 or more TV sets



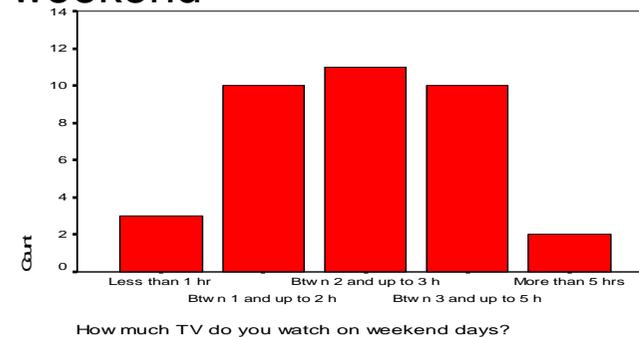
most watch TV every day

weekday

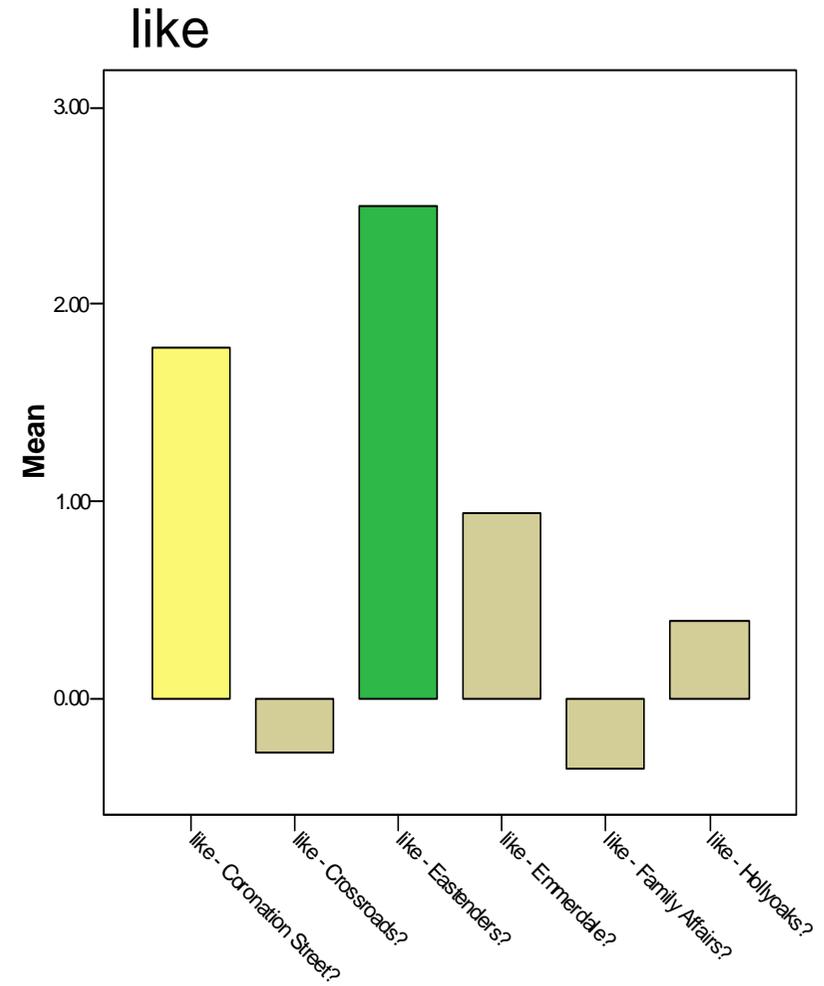
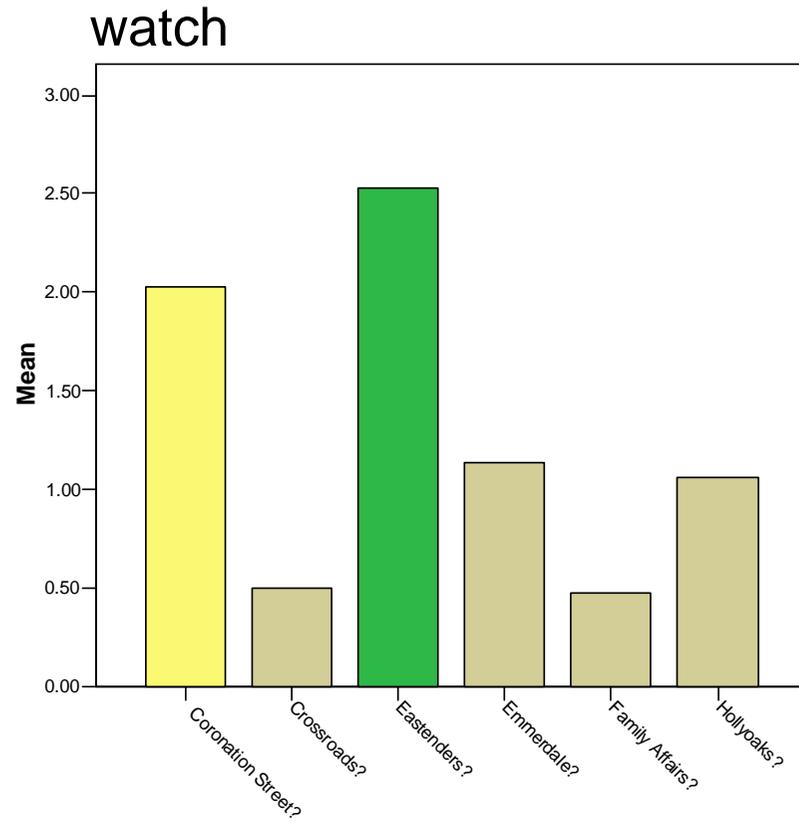


self-reported TV exposure of between 1 to 5 hours a day (av. 3hrs)

weekend



2c. They watch and like most the London-based soap, *EastEnders*



2c. TH-fronting is linked with TV factors

TH-fronting is linked positively with

- giving *EastEnders* as favourite programme
- criticizing soap characters
- liking *EastEnders* (also *The Bill*, London police drama)

but negatively with

- general exposure to TV; watching Scottish, Northern, and US-based dramas
- reported talking about TV whilst watching TV
- Talking about TV programmes in the conversations

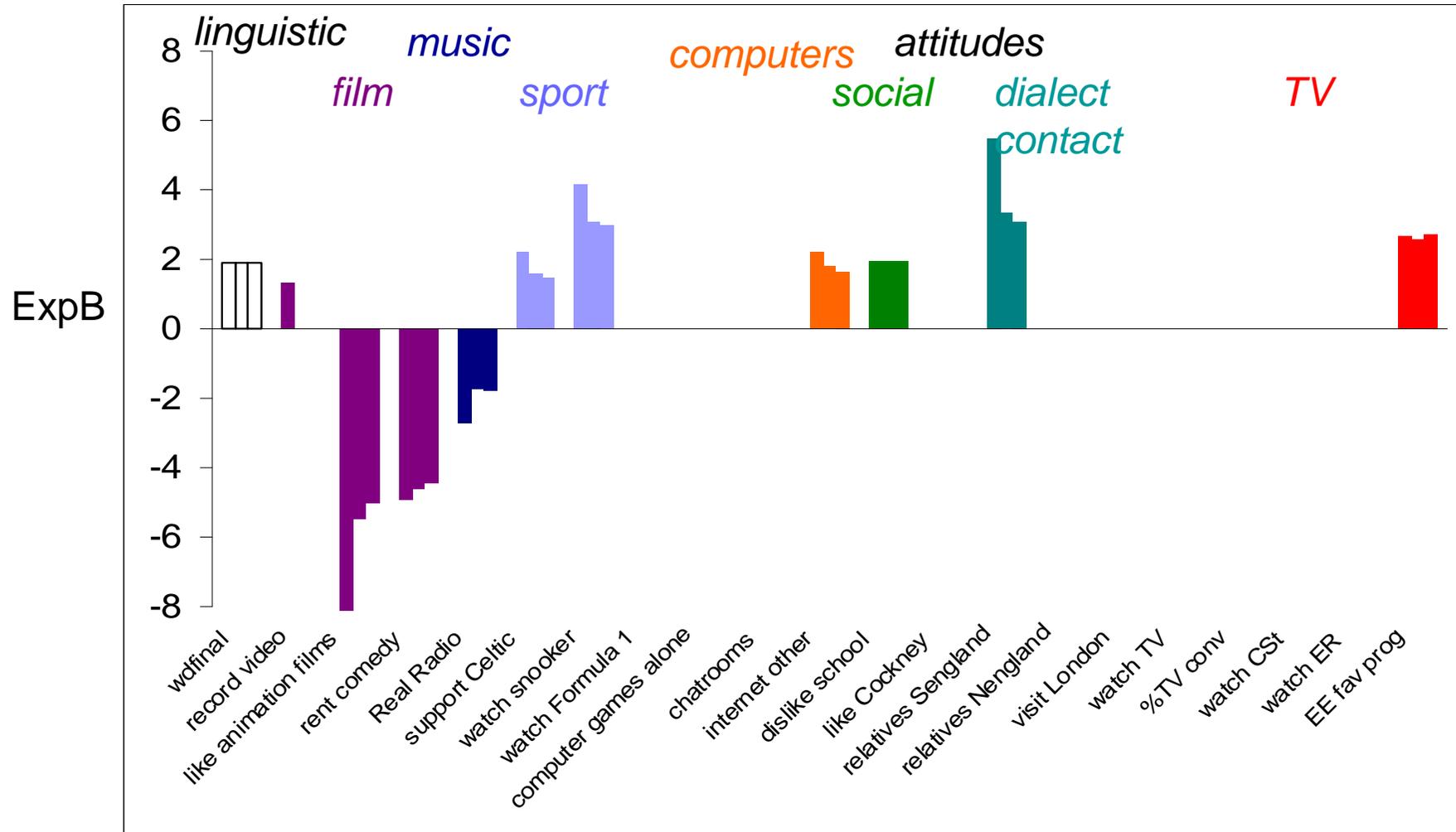
(only around 5% variance explained)

2d. TH-fronting – a broader view

In fact, our statistical model was designed to consider a *range* of ‘social’ factors *together*.

- dialect contact
 - attitudes to accents
 - TV
- and
- social practices/identities
 - music (incl. radio)
 - computers (incl. internet)
 - film (incl. video/DVD)
 - sport
 - age
 - gender
 - (and linguistic: word position)

2d. 'combined' regressions example: TH-fronting in wordlists



Reg 1: $n=756$; $r^2=.377$; Reg 2: $n=756$; $r^2=.358$; Reg 3: $n=756$; $r^2=.354$

Summary

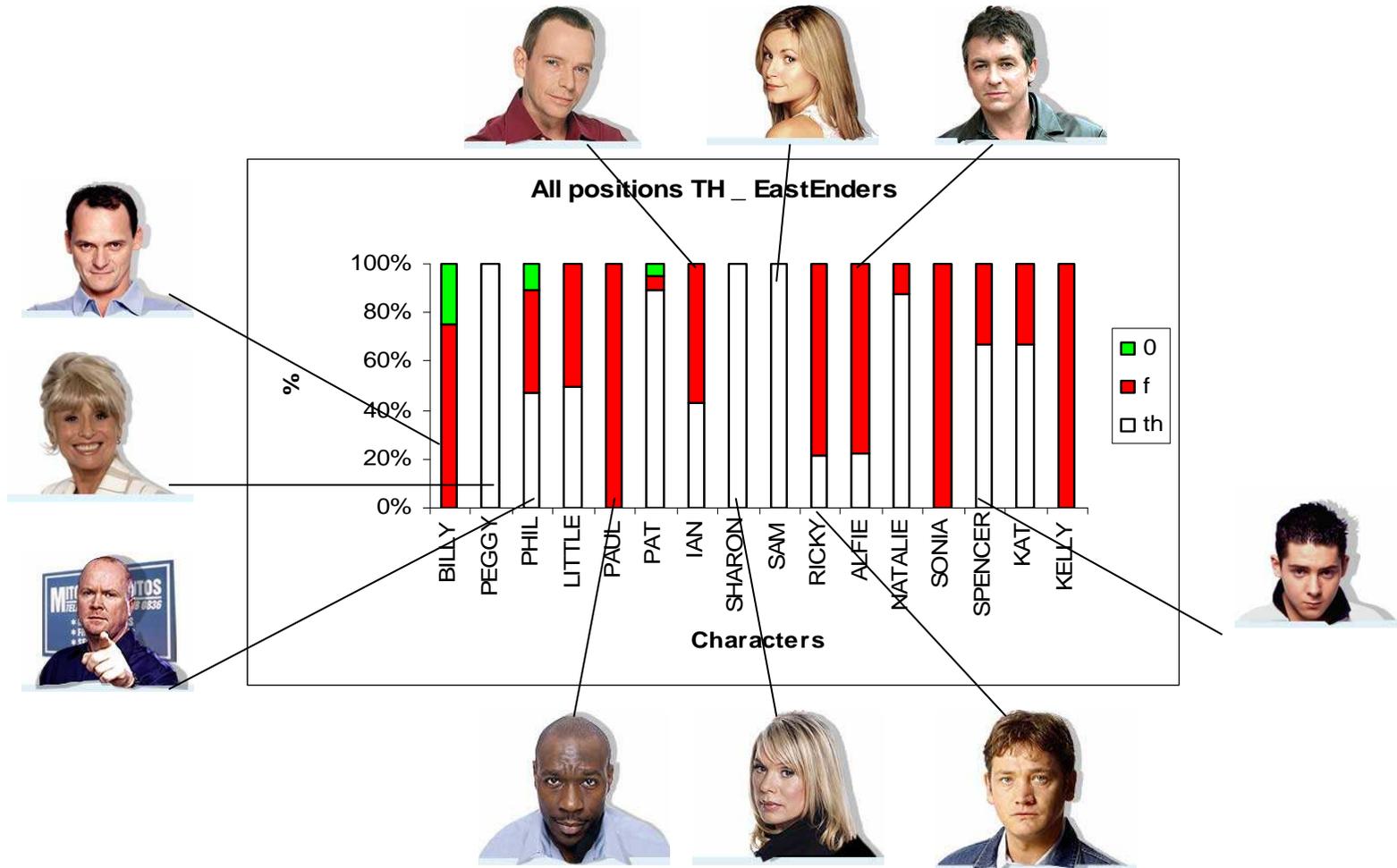
- TH-fronting is spreading in Glaswegian vernacular
- separate (within-category) analysis shows links with
 - contact with Southern English
 - liking Cockney
 - watching/engaging with TV
- combined analysis shows (as we might expect)
 - **several** factors linked with TH-fronting
 - **engagement** with TV (*EastEnders*) is robust **alongside** dialect contact
 - attitudinal factors weaker than other factors

Discussion: TH-fronting and TV

- engagement with (rather than exposure to) London-based programmes, especially *EastEnders*, is linked with TH-fronting in Glaswegian
- so, factors associated with TV should be included in our accounts of TH-fronting
- but these belong with other factors (e.g. dialect contact, social practices) as a set of interrelated contributory factor groups involved in this sound change
- whether we wish to infer causality to the links with TV – in the same way that quantitative sociolinguists would not hesitate to do with e.g. social practice or dialect contact variables – is unclear at this stage

Coda – could this be happening through imitation of ‘media-Cockney’?

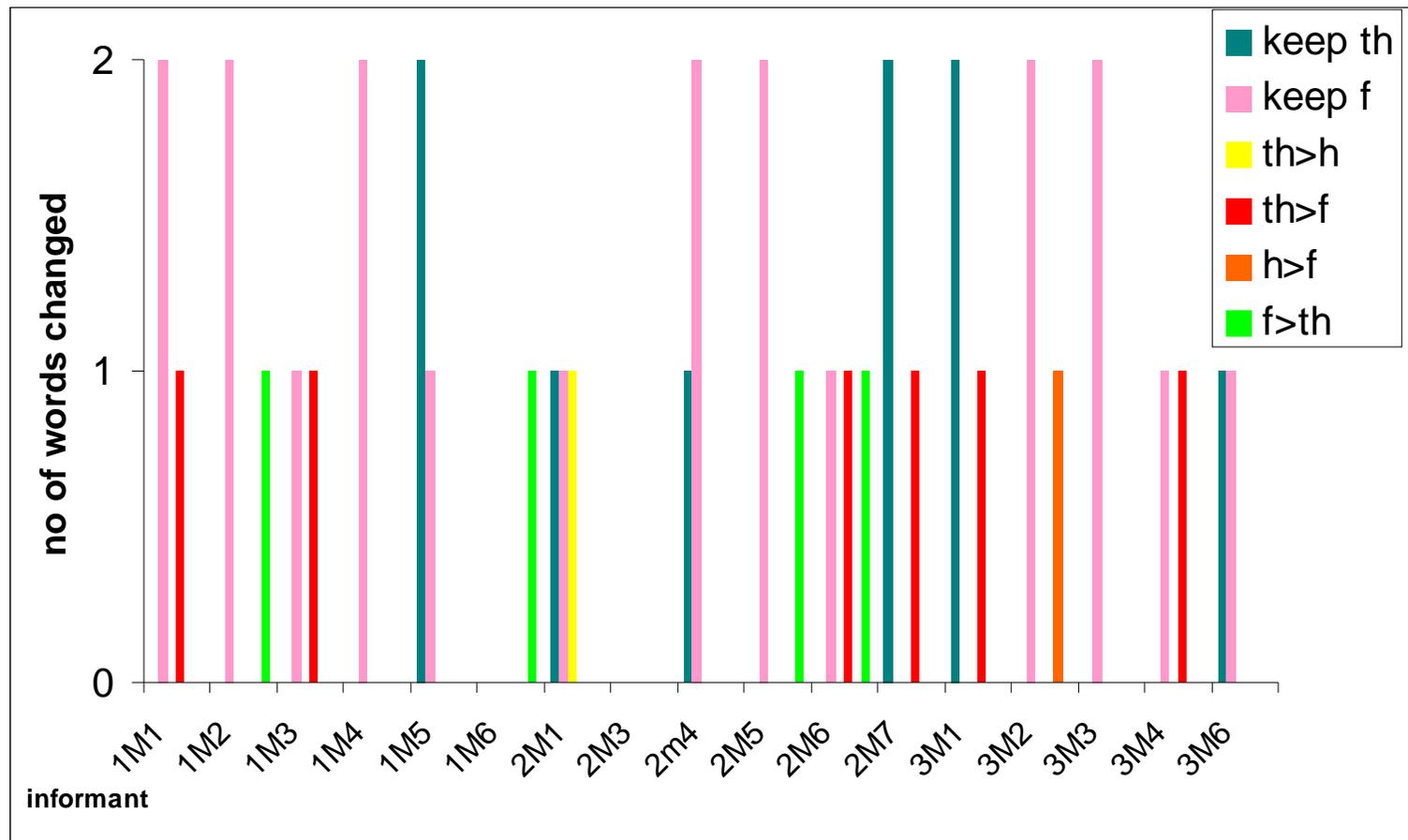
TH-fronting occurs in 'media-Cockney', e.g. *EastEnders*, but is variable



Informal imitation task

- imitation task given as part of informal interview
- informants shown a set of picture cards
- asked to pronounce words first in their own accent
- then in the accent of a leading actor from *EastEnders*
- results presented for boys only

Results for 'imitation' of 'media-Cockney' (th)



([h] is used for (th) in spontaneous speech in Glaswegian vernacular)

Coda

- imitation is probably **not** involved
- other results to be explored ...
 - patterns for other variables
 - results from other tasks in project
 - individual case studies
 - qualitative data from discourse

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