REF2021

Institution: Queen Mary University of London

Unit of Assessment: 26A Modern Languages and Linguistics

Title of case study: Teach Real English!: State-of-the-art Materials for Teaching English Language

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed:
Prof Devyani Sharma	Professor of Sociolinguistics	2007-present
Prof Jenny Cheshire	Professor of Linguistics	1996-present
Prof Erez Levon	Professor of Sociolinguistics	2010-present

Period when the impact occurred: 2017–2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact

Accurate teaching of contemporary spoken English in schools improves societal understanding of dialects and challenges language-based discrimination. A-Level teachers report an urgent need for expert guidance and up-to-date content for teaching contemporary English Language. Since 2013, world-leading Queen Mary University of London research on British and World Englishes has been converted into classroom content for all GCE A-Level, GCSE, and EAL/TESOL teachers. This has been delivered via the web-based *Teach Real English!* teaching materials. AQA Board examiners and teachers around the UK have incorporated the new content into the national AQA/GCE English Language curriculum, teacher training, and in-class practice across the UK and internationally.

2. Underpinning research

Queen Mary sociolinguists, Professors Sharma, Cheshire, and Levon, have played a leading role in the study of ongoing change in spoken English. This work has fundamentally expanded our knowledge of London English, World Englishes, and attitudes to spoken English. It has enabled teachers to satisfy core themes required by the AQA and other subject boards on cultural diversity, structural variation, and historical change in their teaching of contemporary spoken English.

London English: Cheshire, Sharma, and Levon have led the study of contemporary English across all social classes in London. Cheshire's ESRC-funded team conducted the first ever large-scale sociolinguistic study of London. They documented the birth of a new dialect, Multicultural London English (MLE), showing that it arose in young multi-ethnic peer groups in working-class East London, displacing Cockney and spreading to traditional white working-class groups [3.1]. MLE stands as one of the foremost recent discoveries in dialectology and the phrase has entered public discourse. Sharma's ESRC-funded team showed that a lower-middle-class, more mono-ethnic community just west of the birthplace of MLE developed an entirely different accent, British Asian English. To understand why, she pioneered new methods for studying accent repertoire, social network, speech style, and inter-generational language change [3.2]. Levon's research on middle/upper-class speech showed that the whole system of vowels is lowering yet maintaining class distinctions, and updated public beliefs by challenging the stereotype that young middle-class women use more 'uptalk' (rising intonation) than men [3.3]. His work has pioneered an intersectional approach in sociolinguistics [3.4].

World Englishes: Sharma's 20-year body of research on new English dialects worldwide compares Indian, Singaporean, African-American, Creole, and second-language English varieties [3.5]. As with her London research, this work has comprehensively documented the structure of World Englishes but also, crucially, why they come about—the basis of considerable public misinformation and prejudice.

Attitudes to English: To investigate the social impact of negative attitudes to new and old accents, Levon and Sharma's ESRC-funded team conducted the first ever nationwide study of British attitudes to class, regional, and ethnic voices and their impact on professional recruiting [3.6].

Using novel experimental methods, they found that a long-standing hierarchy of accent prestige affects judgements of professional competence. The project is developing anti-bias training with HR teams and law firms (www.accentbiasbritain.org).

Peer esteem for this research is reflected in Cheshire, Sharma, and Levon holding recent editorships at *Language in Society* and *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, the top two sociolinguistics journals. The research has attracted major national and international coverage, e.g. Sharma: *The Telegraph*, BBC Radio 4, BBC World Service, Levon: *The Independent*, *Financial Times*, Cheshire: *Economist*, CNN. The team are exceptionally well placed to lead this comprehensive update of spoken English Language in the national curriculum. Sharma led the creation of this suite of classroom materials. In addition to core content based on the research of three core scholars, Sharma integrated impact into the Queen Mary department's research by encouraging other members of staff to add research-based content relating to attitudes in the media, fake news, attitudes to changing grammar, and digital media.

3. References to the research

[3.1] Cheshire, J., Kerswill, P., Fox, S., & Torgersen, E. (2011). Contact, the feature pool and the speech community: The emergence of Multicultural London English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *15*(2), 151-196. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2011.00478.x

[3.2] Sharma, D. (2011). Style repertoire and social change in British Asian English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *15*(4), 464-492. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2011.00503.x

[3.3] Levon, E. (2016). Gender, interaction and intonational variation: The discourse functions of High Rising Terminals in London. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *20*(2), 133-163. doi.org/10.1111/josl.12182

[3.4] Levon, E. (2015). Integrating intersectionality in language, gender, and sexuality research. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *9*(7), 295-308. doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12147

[3.5] Sharma, D. (2009). Typological diversity in new Englishes. *English World-Wide*, *30*(2), 170-195. doi.org/10.1075/eww.30.2.04sha

[3.6] Sharma, D., Levon, E., Watt, D., Ye, Y., & Cardoso, A. (2019). Methods for the study of accent bias and access to elite professions. *Journal of Language and Discrimination*, *3*(2), 150-172. dx.doi.org/10.1558/jld.39979

Evidence of quality from peer-reviewed funding:

[EQR.3.1] Cheshire [PI] (2011). From sociolinguistic research to English language teaching [RES-189-25-0181]. *ESRC*. GBP120,237.

[EQR.3.1] Cheshire [PI] (2007-2010). Multicultural London English: the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety [RES-062-23-0814]. *ESRC*. GBP721,495.

[EQR.3.1] Cheshire [Co-I]. (2014-2020). Advancing the European Multilingual Experience [613465]. *European Commission*. Framework 7 AThEME project. EUR5,000,000.

[EQR.3.2] Sharma [PI]. (2008-2010). Dialect Development and Style in a Diasporic Community [RES-062-23-0604]. *ESRC*. GBP342,340.

[EQR.3.6] Levon [PI]. (2017-2020). Accent Bias and Fair Access in Britain [ES/P007767/1]. *ESRC*. GBP471,042.

4. Details of the impact

Research on British and World Englishes has resulted in three key areas of impact: curriculum content reform, teacher training, and student understanding.

Sharma and Cheshire first consulted 45 teachers (10/2017, KS3/GCSE/A-Level/ESOL). Cheshire had previously created materials on one theme (Multicultural London English, REF2014 ICS); teachers requested expanded content in this accessible format. They cited an urgent need to build technical expertise, meet exam board requirements to be research-led, and equip students with updated knowledge and skills. To maximise relevance to subject specifications, Sharma consulted

a UK-wide advisory panel (18 teachers, senior examiners, lead moderator of AQA English Language) and identified six core curriculum domains.

Sharma then created Teach Real English! (www.teachrealenglish.org) as an interactive resource for teachers to update their A-level English Language content, all based on Queen Mary's sociolinguistics research: (i) 30 Teaching Units with audio recordings, transcripts, state-of-the-art analysis based on underpinning research, and classroom guidance: (ii) Linguistics Research Digest: 217 easy-to-read summaries of relevant recent academic articles; (iii) 17 guided Language Investigation projects for students; and (iv) technical Glossary. A-Level English Language teachers and students are primary beneficiaries. GCSE/EFL/EAL teachers and the general public are secondary beneficiaries.

Shaping GCE A-Level English Language curricula and teacher training

The national AQA English Language lead moderator and trainers have used this research to update national curricula and AQA-led teacher training courses [5.4]. They describe the research as 'instrumental in helping to update the A-Level English Language curriculum' [5.4], 'crucial in moving the A-Level English Language curriculum forward' and supporting 'fundamental changes in the types of social concepts, theories, and language use teachers and students focus on in class' [5.4].

The research team provided training via 18 teacher workshops and talks [5.1, UK-wide attendance by >100 schools], 5 articles in professional publications [5.2], and sustained social media contact with hundreds of GCE/GCSE teachers [5.7]. This has led to very high, sustained website traffic: 779,442 visitors (1/8/2013-30/8/2020), avg. 10,689/month [5.3]. The most frequently accessed Teaching Units cover Queen Mary research on ethnic minority speech, social class, and regularity of language change, equipping teachers and students with technical understanding and combating misrepresentations of dialect superiority.

Feedback provided by 52 teachers [5.5] confirms changes in both understanding ('more up-to-date concepts and ideas (AO2 in exam board parlance)') and practice ('specific examples to analyse in the form of transcripts (AO1 skills)'). Examiners and teachers actively promote the content via AQA textbooks [5.6], professional magazines [5.2], and Social Media [5.7], e.g. 'what a great resource […] to add to my teaching library' and 'looking forward to teaching this [resource]'.

Influencing GCE A-level English Language student understanding

Official AQA reports embed this research in curriculum and report student uptake [5.8]. The lead moderator of AQA English Language states:
> '[e]xaminers have reported seeing the influence of these interventions in the work produced by students in recent exam responses… the national AQA report for 7702/2 specifically mentions Teach Real English! content that has appeared in students' answers ('More successful students… discussed the repertoire analysis by Devyani Sharma') It is rare to see resources like this have such a rapid impact on student work' [5.4].

Surveyed students report uptake, e.g. 'extremely useful, as it gave me a range of data and information for me to use in exam questions' [5.5]. Teachers report benefits for students in understanding ('it increases their chances of getting good grades as they are exploring new and different ideas… begins to prepare them for university') and awareness ('vital for getting them to see that people's everyday speech was a valid subject for analysis and not 'wrong' or 'ungrammatical.' [5.5]). Students acquire content via in-class teaching, textbooks [5.6], school websites [5.9], and talks at student/school events [5.1]. Teachers routinely direct students to the materials ('Year 13 mock revision – accent and dialect and language and occupation combined. SO useful!!' [5.7]) and engage students in media coverage of the research [5.7 p.4,9].

Impacting on EFL/ESL/EAL teaching content and delivery

The National Association for English as an Auxiliary Language (NALDIC formerly known as) requested an article on the resources for their EAL journal [5.2], in order to address 'addresses areas that have typically been underrepresented, certainly in NALDIC's output' [5.4]. EAL teachers attending workshops echoed this need, reflecting on their use of the materials:

> 'particularly for my C1/C2 students the actual focus on different accents and differing styles (hedging and discourse markers) helps them achieve native or near-native ability' [5.5].

The website sees high traffic [5.3] from international EAL/ELT organisations/teachers, e.g. 'fantastic Spoken London English resources with recordings, transcripts, and discussion points. Great for teaching pron! by researchers' (Poland) [5.7].

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5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] [Events] Teacher training workshops and teacher-focused public talks [Corroborator 1]

[5.2] [Articles] invited by professional teachers' journals and magazines [Corroborator 2]

[5.3] [Data] Google Analytics and site traffic data

[5.4] [Testimonials] evidencing uses in AQA A-Level English training and curriculum [Corroborator 3]

[5.5] [Feedback] A-Level teacher and student feedback forms and testimonials [Corroborator 4]

[5.6] [Textbooks] Examples of textbooks published since 2014 that recommend *Teach Real English!* resources

[5.7] [Media] Examples of social media commentary

[5.8] [Reports] Official AQA documentation (e.g. annual examination reports and schemes of work) that mentions underpinning research and resources

[5.9] [Websites] Selection of school websites that recommend *Teach Real English!* resources