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# Attitudes towards Multicultural London English in Greater Manchester: how Mancunians approach Multicultural London English

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## Abstract

In the last few years a new variety of English has emerged in the city of London which is known as Multicultural London English (MLE) or 'Jafaican', due to a large number of its speakers coming from the Caribbean or Africa. This new sociolect has spread to other cities, like Manchester, in part thanks to two music genres, grime and drill, also emerged and developed in the British capital. Multicultural London English has, therefore, brought a number of innovative grammar, lexical, pragmatical and phonological features that are worthy of attention. This paper will then be particularly focused on the analysis of the different MLE features that can be found in grime and drill songs in the past two years and also studies the approach people in Greater Manchester have towards Multicultural London English. The results of this study will show if Multicultural London English has actually spread to speakers in other cities and if it is through grime and drill, they have acquired these features.

Key words: Multicultural London English, Jafaican, Greater Manchester, approach

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## 1. Introduction

During the late twentieth century, a wave of immigrants arrived to the big metropolitan British cities, including London, Liverpool, Birmingham or Greater Manchester among others. Thanks to these new cultures arriving at British land, a new variety of English emerged, that is Multicultural London English, also known as Jafaican. This new sociolect has spread to all these cities, being then a common trait in English speakers' language. The objective of this paper is to show how nationals of Greater Manchester have unconsciously acquired these MLE features, and that has been thanks in part to the new music genres grime and drill. In order to do this, a questionnaire has been made and sent to participants in Manchester in order to see how different backgrounds play a role in acquiring this new sociolect. Both how MLE has spread to the big cities and how these music genres have helped to it will be explained in the sections below.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Multicultural London English

Multicultural London English (MLE) is a multi-ethnic dialect, or a dialect spoken across different ethnicities (Goldbeck 2019, 5), whose origins are to be found in the arrival of a wave of immigrants to the big metropolitan British cities in the late twentieth century. This fact resulted in the emergence of a new variety of English in the city of London, a variety known as Multicultural London English or 'Jafaican', that is, fake Jamaican, due to the large number of speakers coming from the Caribbean or Africa. MLE shows a number of lexical and grammatical features (e.g. the use of the past tense of the verb *to be*, the presence of a new pronoun *man*, etc.) along with slang words (e.g. *beef*, *ends*, *fam*, etc.) and discourse markers (e.g. *rah*, *you get me*, *swear down*, etc.) which are very distinctive and therefore very different from other accents we can hear in the capital like Cockney accent or Received Pronunciation (RP) (Goldbeck 2018, 7).

The term 'Jafaican' was only coined in the early 2000s when the British media became aware of this new sociolect (Kerswill, 2014) and not long after that, the term appeared in the *Urban Dictionary*. Surprisingly enough, the definition for the term 'Jafaican' was provided a few years before the definition for Multicultural London English, as shown below.

Jafaican is a dialect of English becoming more common in London's West End, within the tradition boundaries of the Cockney dialect: within the sound of the Bow bells and

is slowly replacing Cockney. Jafaican is a mixture of English, Jamaican, West Indian and Indian language elements (*Urban Dictionary* 2006, s.v. *Jafaican*)

However, it was during the 1970s when Black British slang became widely visible and with it the popularity of Jamaican music. The introduction of these Caribbean features into the English language marked the beginning of the transition to what nowadays is known as MLE, “conveying the idea of ‘fake Jamaican”, because of [the] popular belief that it stems solely from immigrants of Jamaican and Caribbean descent.’ (Cheshire 2015, 4).

Multiethnolects, such as MLE, are increasingly becoming more common among youth communities in cities where various ethnicities congregate like London, Birmingham, Liverpool or Greater Manchester, as evidenced by the definition provided by the *Urban Dictionary* in 2012:

Multicultural London English is the cultural change in the English language due to influences from various cultures, such as Jamaican. Originated in London (due to be such a multicultural area) and quickly spreading to other areas of the United Kingdom (UK) through use and also through grime music. It is the first time English Language in the UK has been changed nationally by the teen age group. Usually areas had their own slang words, but MLE is quickly becoming the standard slang throughout the UK (*Urban Dictionary* 2012, s.v. *Multicultural London English (MLE)*).

This sociolect is predominantly spoken by young people belonging to the working class and is normally found in the inner-city areas of whichever city might be — Manchester, London, Liverpool, Birmingham. (Osmond 2017). However, the appearance of the music genres of grime and drill helped spread Multicultural London English to other types of audience (The Economist 2021). In the mid-2010s there was a worldwide growth of these music genres originated in the British capital, both of which are clear exponents of the MLE variety, as can be seen in the following examples:

- (1) Young boss, man's juggling gaffs (Digdat x Aitch, E8ht mile, 2020)
- (2) I'm tryna duppy man daily, rate me (OFM, Let man know, 2020)
- (3) My man's saying his name with vim but that name there don't ring a bell (Ghetts, Fire in the booth part 3, 2021)

This fact resulted in the elements of MLE spreading not only within the UK but also internationally. This, plus language contact and second language acquisition seem to be the reason why MLE has developed among youngsters (Cheshire et al. 2011). Some of these

youngsters speak a non-standard variety of English whose lexical items are sometimes really difficult for other English speakers to understand in different cities, such as Manchester, described in section 2.2.

### 2.2. Greater Manchester: Sociolinguistic situation

Greater Manchester, a metropolitan county of 493 square miles, located 163 miles north of London, is divided into ten metropolitan boroughs (see Figure 1 below) and some of them are characterized by having inhabitants from specific ethnicities (Manchester City Council 2011 Census).



Figure 1. Greater Manchester: metropolitan boroughs (source: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk)

For example, in Oldham we can find a lot of Asian people, being the majority of them Muslim, in Wigan predominates the white British ethnicity but it is closer to the city centre where we find the urban areas with Caribbean and African backgrounds, (see figures 2 and 3). Indeed, these are the origins of a high percentage of the population in Manchester areas such as Gorton, Levenshulme, Longsight, Moss Side or Moston (Manchester City Council 2011 Census).



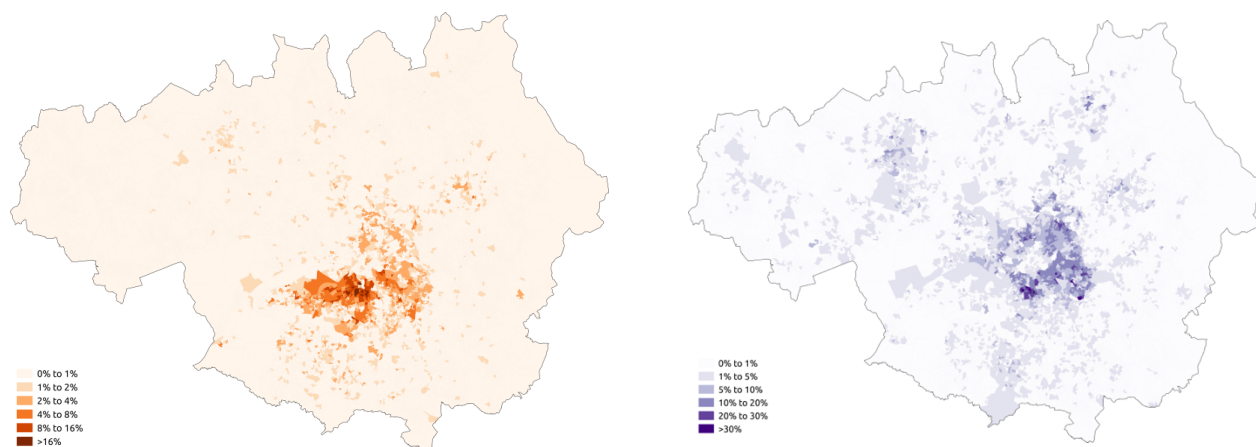


Figure 2: Black-Caribbean population in Greater Manchester, census 2011 (source: wikipedia)

Figure 3: Black-African population in Greater Manchester, census 2011 (source: wikipedia)

Young white people in these areas have adapted, either consciously or unconsciously, a range of MLE features to their speech. Some of these youngsters ‘openly displayed [an] adoption of black language and speech styles, [...] wishing to identify themselves unambiguously with black youth culture’ (Mailer 1957, 249) but Greater Manchester is so multicultural that this is not something people are surprised about (Manchester City Council 2011 Census). Thus, alongside traditional Manchester dialectal features such as H-dropping, TH-fronting and T-glottaling (Baranowski and Turton 2015), it is not uncommon to hear in this city expressions related to MLE, such as *free* instead of *three* and *bruvver* instead of *brother*.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Distribution of the study

The present study is an investigation of attitudes towards Multicultural London English in the metropolitan county of Greater Manchester. The main aims are summarized in the following research questions: (1) is MLE used and known across different social groups in Greater Manchester? (RQ1), and (2) what are the factors that may account for variation in the knowledge and use of this variety, taking into account extra- and intra- linguistic variables as shown below (RQ2). For this reason, the methodology adopted consists of two different steps. Step 1 involved collecting a number of lexical, grammatical and pragmatic features of MLE, by analyzing 50 grime and drill songs released in the last two years. This 50-song list was created trying to include artists from different backgrounds, as seen in Table 1.

Artist	Race	Sex	City	Number of songs included in the dataset
Ill Blue	Black	Male	London	1
Digdat	Black	Male	London	2
OFB	Black	Male	London	1
Skept	Black	Male	London	4
JME	Black	Male	London	2
AM	Black	Male	London	1
Russ Millions	Black	Male	London	2
Tion Wayne	Black	Male	London	1
Giggs	Black	Male	London	3
D Power Diesle	Black	Male	London	1
D double E	Black	Male	London	1
Ghetts	Black	Male	London	3
Central Cee	Mixed race	Male	London	1
Digga D	Black	Male	London	2
AJ Tracy	Black	Male	London	2
Jordan	White	Male	Manchester	1
Slowthai	Mixed race (mother from Barbados)	Male	Northampton	1
Frisco	Black	Male	London	2
Dsavv	Black	Male	London	1
Akz	Black	Male	London	1
Tankz	Black	Male	London	1
A1 x J1	Black	Male	London/Kent	1
Comfy	Black	Male	London	1
Aitch	White	Male	Manchester	3
ArrDee	White	Male	Brighton	2
Bugzy Malone	Black	Male	Manchester	3
Chipmunk	Black	Male	London	2
Stormzy	Black	Male	London	3
Darkoo	Black (born in Nigeria)	Female	London	1

Table 1: Source of the songs that compose the dataset

As Table 1 shows, even though most of these artists are black males coming from London like Skepta, Russ Millions or Giggs, other rappers like Aitch (white male from Manchester), ArrDee (white male from Brighton), Bugzy Malone (black male from Manchester) or Silky (white male from London) have been included. This heterogeneity allows me to compile a list of MLE features which are generally used by different singers, and not taking the risk of focusing on a single singer's idiolect.

### 3.2. Examples used in the study

After a careful reading of the 50 songs included in the dataset, a selection of the most frequently used features of MLE was made including grammar features, vocabulary and discourse markers.<sup>1</sup> This selection includes the following 15 typical MLE features:

- (4) Trust me *fam*, don't spoil it! (lexical)
- (5) Should've *dashed* her long time (lexical)
- (6) This *beef* is far from over (lexical)
- (7) And when I'm in my *ends* I'm a block star (lexical)
- (8) I know exactly who I'm tryna go back to my *yard* with (lexical)
- (9) You *was* at the top but you slipped off (grammatical)
- (10) *Man* got money and moved area (grammatical)
- (11) But that *don't* mean I don't take you serious (grammatical)
- (12) You know that *ain't* really wise (grammatical)
- (13) *Why* am I calling God *for*? (grammatical)
- (14) *Wagwan?* (pragmatic)
- (15) *Rahhh!* That's a madness! (pragmatic)
- (16) Don't test me man, *swear down!* (pragmatic)
- (17) Oii them man are safe, *get me!* (pragmatic)
- (18) *Oh my days!* You man must be trippin'! (pragmatic)

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<sup>1</sup> MLE is also heavily characterized by phonological features but due to these unprecedented times, the questionnaire could not be done face-to-face and these were left out of the current analysis

There is a lot change in meaning in MLE lexical features. There are many words that already exist but have a completely different meaning in MLE such as *beef* ‘argument’, *yard* ‘house’ or *ends* ‘neighbourhood’. In terms of grammatical features, there is a lot of innovation. ‘The reason for the origin of all these innovations could be the idea of making language easier, simpler, trying to stay away from complex structures (Palacios, 2011). Those grammar innovations that will be here described are the following: the presence of the new pronoun *man*, the use of the past tense of the verb *to be*, the use of the negation *ain’t* and the use of *don’t* in the third person.

The identification of these features allowed me to proceed to the second step in the methodology, namely the creation of a questionnaire which helps me answer the two research questions mentioned above.

### 3.3 Questionnaire

An online questionnaire<sup>2</sup> was used to gather data from 75 anonymous people from Greater Manchester, 25 participants per each age group (16-30, 31-40, and 41+). The first questions of the questionnaire included the following extra-linguistic factors:

- Participant’s nationality: This is considered a relevant factor because people’s background might be crucial in order to speak using MLE features or not
- Gender: Three options were provided in the questionnaire: male, female and other, because it is an inclusive questionnaire and gender might play an important role in whether one uses more MLE than others
- Age: The questionnaire was divided into three groups of age as there might be a big difference in knowledge about MLE features between younger and older people
- Occupation: This questionnaire also wants to show if someone being employed or unemployed makes a difference in terms of using MLE features or not
- Level of education: Same thing as with occupation, someone with more or less level of education might be more inclined towards using MLE features or not
- First language: The fact that the participant’s first language is not English might affect their exposure to this sociolect’s features

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<sup>2</sup> <https://forms.gle/ZVCcmt1eauU7e2MT8>

- Knowledge of grime and drill music: Since these music genres are full of MLE features, someone who listens to this kind of music might be more prone to use this sociolect

After these initial questions, participants were provided with the 15 samples of MLE taken from a dataset and listed above as (3-18), and they were asked the following questions which allowed me to assess the different degrees of knowledge and use of MLE across social groups:

- Have you ever heard the expression X before?: This question was asked in order to know if the participant is familiar with this MLE feature
- How often have you heard it?: The frequency in which someone has heard that particular expression before shows if it is an isolated case or if it is common for the participant
- Do you understand the meaning of X?: The fact that the participant has heard that specific MLE expression before does not mean they know the meaning of it. The answers available were yes, no and I think so but I am not too sure.
- What do you think is the meaning of X in the previous example?: In order to avoid someone pretending they know X expression when they do not (having answered previously that they know the meaning), a few answers were given and the participant had to choose the one they thought was the right one.
- Have you ever used this expression before?: This question is important to understand the attitudes towards MLE of people living in Greater Manchester. The participants might have heard these expressions before but might not use them.
- If yes, who have you used it with?: In case the participants had used these expressions before, the environment in which they use it might vary. It is interesting to see if these expressions are used in a more formal or informal scenario.
- If you use this expression, how often do you use it?: The participants might use these expressions in a specific context, therefore the number of times they say them might vary.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. General results

For the first part of the questionnaire, we can gather, as seen in the charts shown below, that more than half of the participants were female, a lot of the participants worked in hospitality even though there was a variety of different sectors and most of the participants held a university degree.

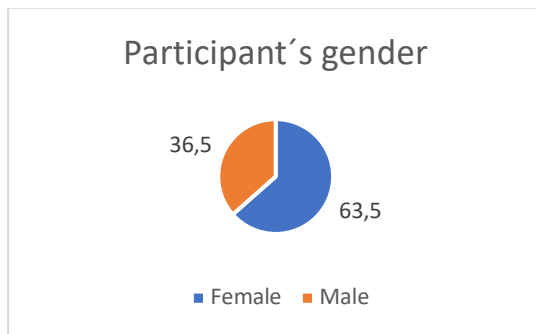


Figure 4: Participants' gender

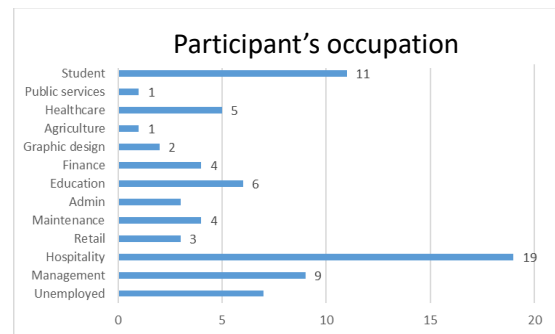


Figure 5: Participants' occupation

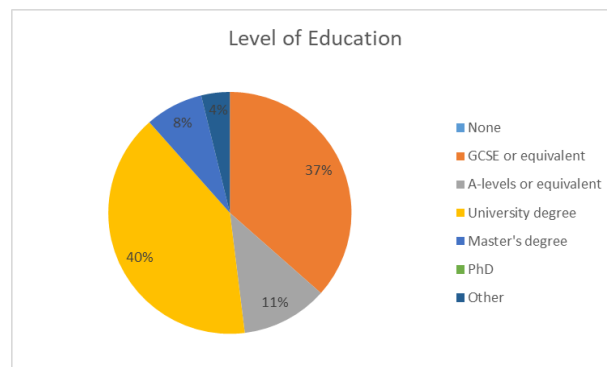


Figure 6: Participants' level of education

Continuing with the first part of the questionnaire, results show that more than the half of participants were British, although there were participants with a Black Caribbean background whose answers might be relevant for the study, and English seems to be the first language for the majority of them. For that 35% of participants whose first language was not English, Spanish is their first language as shown below.

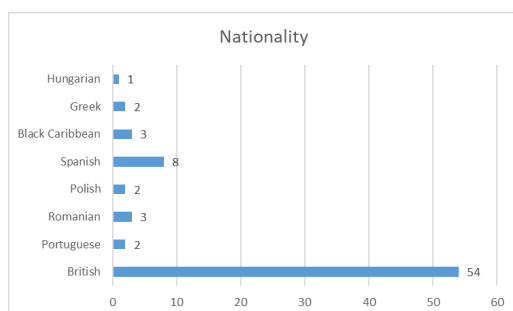


Figure 7: Participants' nationality

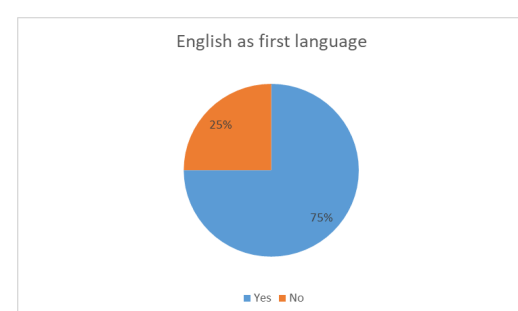


Figure 8: Percentage of English as participants' first language

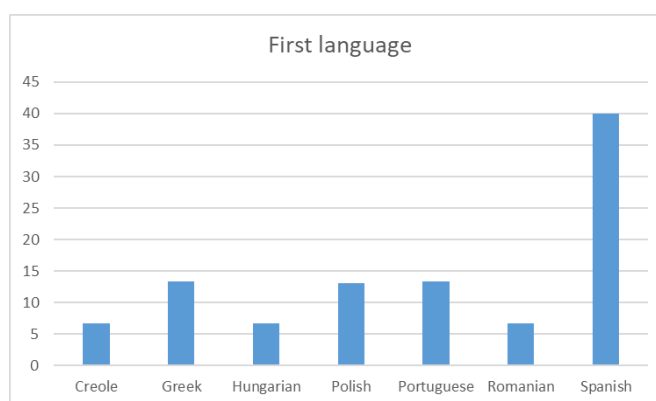


Figure 9: Participants' first language for those who English is not L1

And last but not least in this first part of the questionnaire, only a 13,5% of the participants claimed to have listened to the genres of grime and drill. Participants who have listened to these music genres gave some examples of artists who they know or listen to, which includes Aitch, Bugzy Malone, Giggs, Skepta, Digga D and other artists that were selected in this study in order to get examples from their songs.

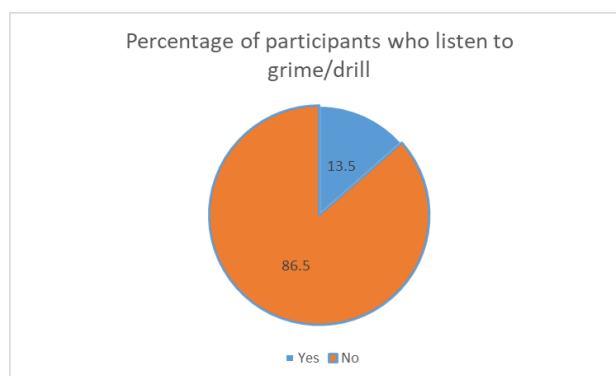


Figure 10: Percentage of participants who listen to grime/drill

For the second part of the questionnaire, we dive into more specific questions regarding lexical, grammatical and pragmatic features of MLE. In general terms, participants had heard the expressions selected for the study. The only two exceptions in which the 'no' percentage was higher than the 'yes' are for the expressions *dash* and *why for*. In terms of how frequently participants have heard these expressions before, it seems that they have heard most of the expressions 'very frequently' except *dash* and *why for* once again, that seem to be higher in percentage in the 'never' having heard these expressions before.

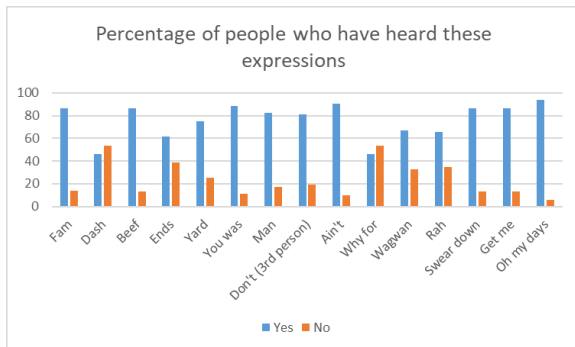


Figure 11: Percentage of participants who had listened to the MLE expressions before

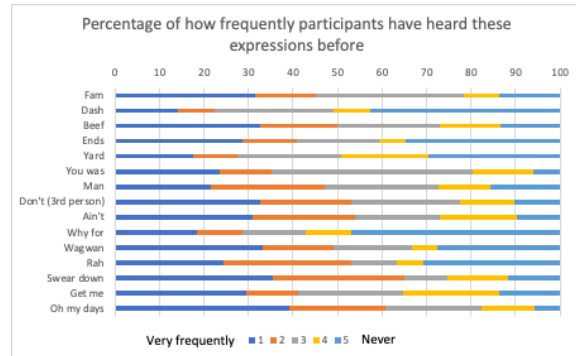


Figure 12: Percentage of how often participants have heard these expressions before

As a consequence of participants having heard at some point the majority of the selected MLE expressions for the study, the percentage of participants who knew their meaning is very high compared to those who did not, except for *dash*, which once again seems to be the most unknown expression. Following up, participants were asked to choose what they thought was the meaning of these expressions by giving them four different choices and the majority of them got the meaning right, including *dash* that seems to be the conflictive one among the participants.

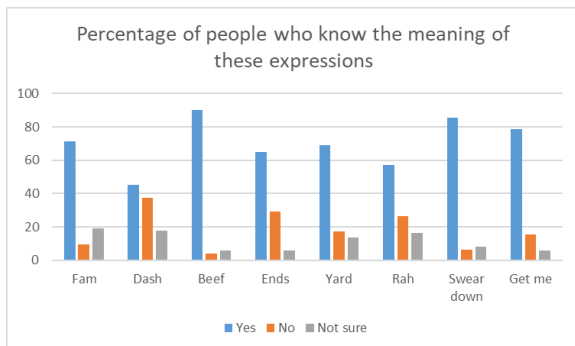


Figure 13: Percentage of participants who know the meaning of the selected MLE expressions

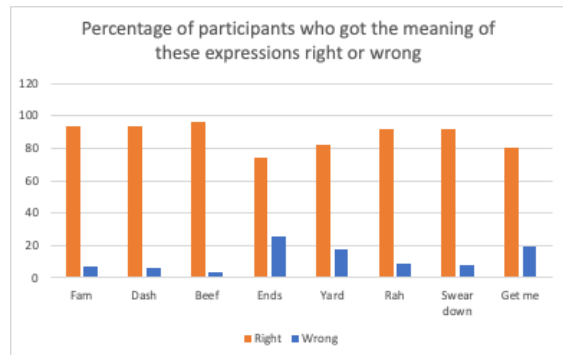


Figure 14: Percentage of participants who got the meaning right and wrong

Participants then were asked if they had used these expressions before, having a really wide mix of answers, and if they had used them before, they were asked who they had used them with, with 'friends' being the most common answer and 'older people' being the least chosen one. In regards to how frequently participants had used these MLE expressions, it seems that 'very rarely' was the most common answer for most of the examples.



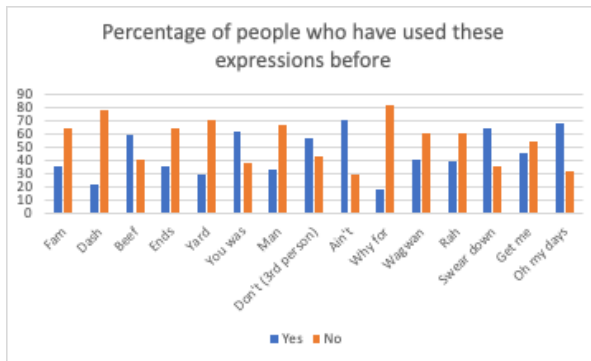


Figure 15: Percentage of participants who had used the selected MLE expressions before

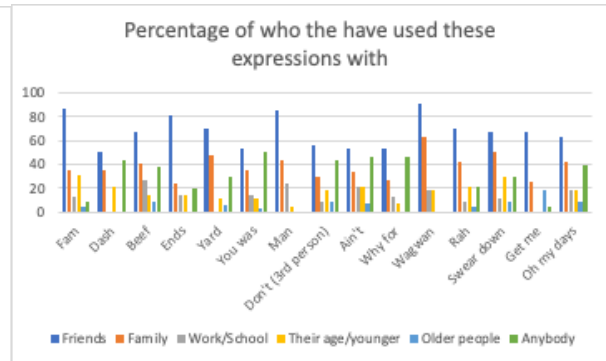


Figure 16: Percentage of participants who have used these expressions with

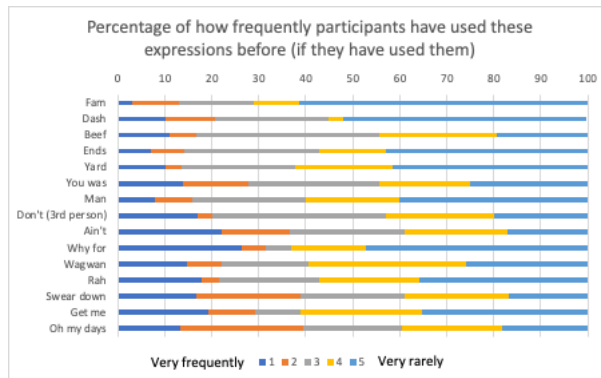


Figure 17: Percentage of how frequently participants have used these expressions before

## 4.1. In-depth results

### 4.2.1. Results for lexical MLE features

For the example ‘Trust me *fam*, don’t spoil it’, nearly 87% of the people had heard this expression before and nearly 36% of these people use this expression as well. The people who use the expression ‘fam’ normally use it with family and friends, but the frequency is really low compared to the frequency in which they have heard this term before. The 71% of the participants said they know the meaning of it, however, nearly the 93% of them got the meaning right, which indicates that the meaning of this term is somehow predictable.

For the example ‘Should’ve *dashed* her long time’ only the 46.2% of the people had heard this expression before and 21.2% of these people use this expression as well. Half of the people who uses the expression ‘to dash’ do this with family and friends and the other half uses this with anybody. The frequency in which the majority of the participants use this term is minimum and the same thing happens with how often people have heard this term before, which is more than half of the participants. 45% of the participants said they know the meaning of it, however, nearly the 94% of them got the meaning right.

For the example ‘This *beef* is far from over’ nearly 87% of the people had heard this expression before and nearly 60% of these people use this expression as well. This term seems to be used in different contexts: both family and friends, work/school and anybody in general. The frequency for the usage of this term is quite mixed. It goes from people using it very frequent to barely use it, therefore there is not a regular pattern. 90% of the participants said they know the meaning of it and 96% of participants chose the right meaning, which shows that this MLE slang word is more common than the previous ones and it is more accepted.

For the example ‘And when I’m in my *ends* I’m a block star’, 61.5% of the people had heard this expression before and just the 35% of these people have used it too. The majority of people who use the expression *ends* normally use it with family and friends and the frequency tends to be rather low. Nearly 65% of the participants said they know the meaning of it, however, nearly the 75% of them got the meaning right, which indicates that the meaning of this term is somehow predictable.

For the example ‘I know exactly who I’m tryna go back to my *yard* with’, 75% of the people participating in the questionnaire had heard this expression before, however only 28.8% of these people have used it as well. The people who use the expression *yard* normally use it both with friends and family and anybody in general but the frequency in which they use this is extremely low. However, the frequency in which people have heard this term before is quite mixed. Although more than half of the participants have barely heard this, the other half goes from very frequently to not so frequently. The 69.2% of the participants said they know the meaning of it and 82.4% of them got the meaning right.

#### 4.2.2 Results for grammatical MLE features

For the example ‘You *was* at the top but you slipped off’, 88.5% of the people had heard this way of speaking before and 61.5% of these people have also said ‘you was’ instead of ‘you were’. The people who have used this before normally use it with friends or just anybody and the frequency is low compared to the percentage of people who use that expression. The same thing happens with the frequency in which the participants have heard this before.

For the example ‘*Man* got money and moved area’, 82.7% of the people had heard this way of speaking before, however, only 32.7% of these people have used the word ‘man’ to talk about themselves in third person. The people who have used this before normally use it with

friends and family and the frequency tends to be low, however, the frequency in which the participants have heard this way of speaking is higher than its usage.

For the example ‘but that *don't* mean I don't take you seriously’, nearly 81% of the people had heard this way of speaking before and 56.9% of the participants have used ‘don't’ instead of ‘doesn't’ for the third person before. The people who have used this before normally use it with friends or just anybody and the frequency is somehow in between, neither very high nor very low. The frequency in which the participants have heard this before is higher than its usage.

For the example ‘you know that *ain't* really wise’, 90.4% of the people had heard this way of speaking before and 70.6% of these people have also said ‘ain't’ as a form for the negative. There does not seem to be a specific context in which the participants use this and the frequency for its usage is quite mixed, neither high nor low. However, the frequency in which participants have heard this before is high.

For the example ‘*why* am I calling God *for?*’, only 46.2% of the people had heard this way of speaking before and only 18% of them have said ‘why for’ instead of ‘what for’. The frequency in which the participants have heard this before is very low. This shows this grammatical feature is not common between the participants.

#### 4.2.3. Results for pragmatic MLE features

For the example ‘*Wagwan*’, 67.3% of the people had heard this expression before, however only 40% of these people have used it as well. The people who use the expression *wagwan* normally use it both with friends and family and the frequency in which they use this is very mixed, neither low nor high. The same thing happens with the frequency in which people have heard this term before.

For the example ‘*Rahhh!* That's a madness!’, 65.4% of the people had heard this expression before, however only the 38.8% of these people have used it as well. The people who use the expression *rah* normally use it with friends and family but the frequency in which they use this is low. However, the frequency in which people have heard this term before is quite mixed. The 57.1% of the participants said they know the meaning of it and 91.5% of them got the meaning right, which shows that the meaning for this expression is somehow predictable.

For the example ‘Don’t test me man, *swear down!*’, the 86.5% of the people had heard this expression before and 64% of these people have used it as well. There does not seem to be a specific context in which participants use this expression and the frequency in which they use this is very mixed, neither high nor low. However, the frequency in which people have heard this term before is quite high. 85% of the participants said they know the meaning of it and 92% of them got the meaning right.

For the example ‘Oii them man are safe, *get me!*’, 86.5% of the people had heard this expression before, however only 45% of these people have used it as well. The people who use the expression *swear down* normally use it with friends, family or anybody but the frequency in which they use this is extremely low. However, the frequency in which people have heard this term before is quite mixed, neither high nor low. Nearly 79% of the participants said they know the meaning of it and 80.4% of them got the meaning right, which makes this expression somehow predictable

Lastly, for the example ‘*Oh my days!* You man must be trippin!’, 94% of the people had heard this expression before and 68.6% of these people have used it as well. There does not seem to be a specific context in which people use the expression *oh my days* and the frequency in which people have used this term before is quite mixed, nether high nor low. The frequency in which people have heard this expression, on the other hand, seems to be quite high.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The information provided to us through the questionnaire has only given a small approach to MLE from people living in Greater Manchester. Participants had heard most of the expressions as opposite to the percentage of participants who used them. The percentage of people who got the meaning of these expressions right might be caused by context or by mere guess. Whatever the reason is, one thing is clear, most of the participants were somehow familiar with most of these terms except two specific ones: *dash* and *why for*. I could only ask participants if they knew the meaning of lexical and pragmatic MLE features as the words in isolation have a meaning, as opposite to grammatical MLE features, which only have sense in a constructed sentence.

The most common context in which participants used these expressions is among friends, but having a general look at the charts, the most common occupations are students and

participants working in hospitality. Greater Manchester is a very cultural city with many mixed backgrounds and due to being a big city, it attracts tourism of different kinds including people who come for football, business, concerts or just a cultural visit. This constant flow of tourism and the fact that most of the participants work in hospitality or are students might be a definite factor as to why generally speaking most of the expressions in the questionnaire have been used at some point and they have been used with friends.

It seems that people between the ages of 16-30 whose first language is English are more familiar with Multicultural London English than those participants whose first language is a different one. A small percentage of the participants could name grime/drill artists like Giggs, Skepta, Stormzy, Aitch or Bugzy Malone among others. This fact shows that Multicultural London English is present in more or less measure in our way of speaking and has been introduced to us in different ways and not necessarily through the music genres of grime and drill. These expressions could have also been introduced through TV series, social media, magazines aimed at teenagers among other sources.

After researching the topic of this dissertation, I have got to know myself better, developing my own English discourse. Even though I have only lived in England for the past five years, I have always been surrounded by English speakers and it was not until a couple of years ago that I noticed I share some of those MLE features above explained. It has been noted that this sociolect is becoming the English of London. To summarize, MLE plays an important role in the local, regional and national identities of speakers from throughout the capital of England. Even though MLE is not only introduced through music, a lot of grime and drill songs have been released in these last couple of years and the use of MLE terms seems to have increased with time, resulting in a big source of MLE feature that has been spread around not only in Greater Manchester but in the whole of United Kingdom.

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