

Multicultural London English Intonation: Generalizations from Corpus Data

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Segmental features of Multicultural London English (MLE) have been extensively investigated (e.g., Cheshire et al, 2011) but its intonational phonology awaits full description (pace: Grabe 2004; Passoni et al 2025). A barrier is that most MLE data comprises spontaneous speech, elicited in sociolinguistic interviews and not designed to facilitate systematic intonational analysis. We report on a method for forming initial intonational generalisations from this type of data, with the key feature that tokens are identified by non-prosodic criteria to avoid circularity. We present results of applying this method to two anecdotally salient prosodic features of MLE, identified using two types of non-prosodic criteria: polar questions, identified on a next-turn-proof basis; and 2) emphatic consonantal lengthening (ECL), identified from segmental phonetic cues.

We identified 140 polar qs + 52 ECL in corpus data from 8 (4F/4M) teenaged East London L1 English speakers of Caribbean heritage (6 recordings, mean length ~ 1 hr) from the *Generations of London English* (ESRC 2023-2026, generationsoflondonenglish.org) and *Linguistic Innovators* projects (ESRC 2004-2007). Tokens were manually annotated for contour shape (rise/fall etc) and key segmental landmarks (preaccentual + accentual + any postaccentual syllables; see Fig. 1) in the target accentual domain, utterance-finally in polar questions and on the lengthened word/phrase for ECL. Annotations were performed by the first author and checked by the second author (inter-transcriber agreement 93%). We used landmark registered fPCA with time-warping (Gubian et al, 2015) to explore the shape of extracted F0 contour(s), and their mapping to utterance types and auditorily assigned contour labels, controlling for number of post-accentual syllables.

Results indicate that the contours observed in MLE polar questions (Fig. 2) resemble those in many Mainstream English Varieties, with rise, rise-fall and rise-plateau etc observed; however, their distribution appears distinct, with near ubiquitous use of rise-fall contours in this type of corpus data. Emphatic lengthening targets both sonorant and obstruent word-initial consonants; it also typically co-occurs with a rise-fall contour but is not realised with greater F0 excursion than polar questions. We will discuss potential phonological representation(s) of the rise-fall, parallels to descriptions of Jamaican/Trinidadian Creole and the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, noting other MLE prosodic features ripe for study.

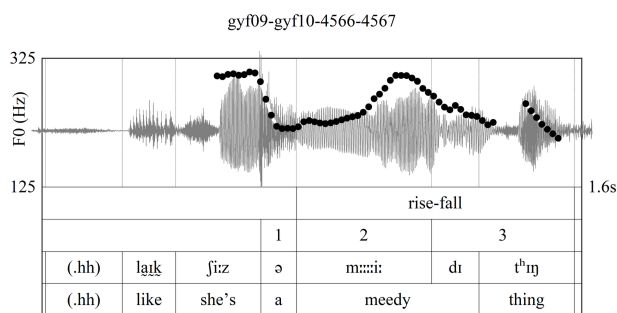


Figure 1: Sample annotated emphatic consonantal lengthening (ECL) token by speaker gyf10 labelled as a rise-fall. [1= pre-accentual syllable; 2 = accentual syllable; 3 = post-accentual syllable(s)]

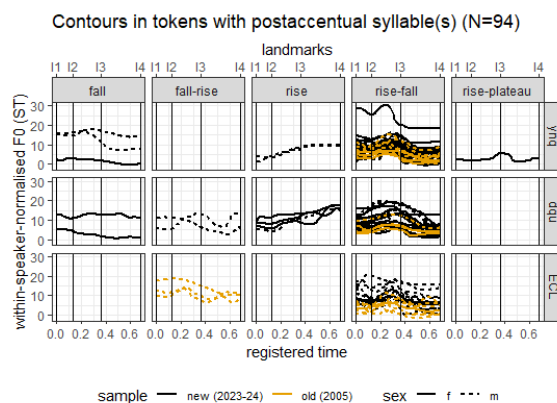


Figure 2: Reconstructed F0 contours in registered time in tokens with postaccentual syllable(s), by contour label, speaker sex and target utterance type (N=94).

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Gubian, M., Torreira, F., & Boves, L. (2015). Using Functional Data Analysis for investigating multidimensional dynamic phonetic contrasts. *Journal of Phonetics*, 49, 16–40.

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