

Ethnic correlates of morphosyntactic variation: *Come/came* variation in London, U.K.

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Alternation between preterite *came* and its stem counterpart *come* is widely attested in non-standard English, as well as in precursor varieties of the language (Feagin 1979; Smith 2000; Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001; Tagliamonte 2001). In this study, we draw on an extensive corpus of London Vernacular English (LVE) in order to investigate the social and linguistic conditioning of *come/came* variation in a linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous metropolis, reported to be the locus of an emergent multiethnolect (Cheshire et al. 2011).

Drawing on the speech of 85 adolescents (17-19-years-old) and 48 preadolescents (7-11-years-old), as well as an additional 16 elderly speakers (aged 70-86), this study incorporates an apparent time component enabling us to identify and characterize any evidence of change in the use of the target variable. We coded 1323 tokens of *come/came* variation for age, sex, (self-ascribed) ethnicity, and locality (inner vs. outer London), as well as an array of linguistic factors, including sentential aspect, grammatical person and number, and the presence of additional indicators of temporal specification in the ambient discourse.

Multivariate analysis confirms that ethnic affiliation is a key determinant of variant choice. White Anglo preadolescents/adolescents and mixed race Anglo/Black Caribbean adolescents favor preterite *come*, whereas all other ethnic groups disfavor its use. Inspection of the linguistic conditioning reveals a weak aspectual effect associated with the use of preterite *come* in habitual contexts, and a significant propensity for the stem form to occur with plural subjects, as well as in environments where the subject and verb are non-adjacent. The results point to ethnic affiliation as a major factor in sustaining *come/came* variation in LVE, while systematic comparison with other varieties reveals compelling evidence of unacknowledged regional differences in the subtle linguistic conditioning of this variable.