

**Innovation in London teenage speech: preliminary analysis of the reversal of  
'diphthong shift'**

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Trudgill (2004) has recently presented a strong case for the existence of 'drift' in the closing diphthongs of New Zealand English: there is strong evidence that, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement, the vowels of PRICE and MOUTH have acquired strongly 'diphthong-shifted' variants giving rise to pronunciations such as [ɔɪ] and [ɛə], respectively. The argument is that NZE inherited the tendency towards diphthong shifting, not the forms themselves. If this is the case, the typologically similar variety, London English, would be expected to have experienced the same 'drift', and indeed shifted vowels are widespread there, too. In this paper, we look again at these two vowels in London to see if diphthong shift continues today. The data form part of the project "**Linguistic Innovators: the language of adolescents in London**" (ESRC RES-000-23-0680), which examines a number of phonological and grammatical features that have been identified as showing variation.

There are two distinct tracks in diphthong shifting: front closing diphthongs are shifting anti-clockwise, while back closing diphthongs are shifting clockwise (Wells 1982); PRICE from [aɪ] to [ɔɪ] and MOUTH from [aʊ] to [æʊ]. This is basically the London diphthong system we can observe among the speakers from the established London families: for PRICE we find [ɔɪ]~[ɒɪ] and for MOUTH [æʊ]~[a:]. One should then expect all speakers in the diphthong shifting area to have these qualities. This does not happen to be the case. Previous work in Reading and Milton Keynes shows a movement away from the shifted quality towards an RP quality. Analysis of the diphthongs among the young speakers in London shows a complex pattern with a quality ranging from [aɪ]~[a] for PRICE and [ɐʊ]~[ɐ] for MOUTH. This identifies a reversal of the diphthong shift and goes also against a universal theory of 'drift' (Trudgill 2004).