

The linguistic features of the English language in the TV show 'The Only Way is Essex'

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The Linguistic Features of the English Language in the TV Show “The Only Way is Essex”

Master’s thesis

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Jezična obilježja engleskog jezika u emisiji “The Only Way is Essex”

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Abstract

Southeastern English, like all the other dialects of English, has many specific attributes to it. The variation in the dialect can be found in its morphology, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This paper will deal with the linguistic features of the Southeastern English dialect used in the reality TV series *The Only Way Is Essex*. The show is filmed in Essex, a county in the Southeast of England. The aim of the empirical research presented in the paper is to compare the descriptions offered in the literature to the features found in the present corpus.

Key Words: Southeastern English, linguistic features, dialectal differences

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1 Introduction

Standard English is a model dialect which is used by educated people throughout the British Isles. It is normally used in writing, for teaching, and is often heard on the radio or television. Standard English is not restricted to a particular social group. There are a lot of regional dialects in Britain, which differ from Standard English in different ways. There are grammatical and phonological differences, as well as societal and class differences amongst the speakers. The Standard English dialect has many different variations, some of which are regional. (Hughes, Trudgill, Watt 2005) This paper will deal with English in the south of England, particularly in Essex. The variation used there can be both standard and non-standard. This paper will be dealing with non-standard dialect forms in grammar, lexis, and phonology found in the corpus of several video clips of the reality television series *The Only Way Is Essex*. The corpus used in this paper consists of six videos of the show, some of which are full episodes and some of which are shorter clips. The length of all the videos together amounts to 143 minutes. According to the web page Virtual Speech, the average speaker says between 120 and 150 words per minute in conversation. Using that data, the corpus of this research approximates between 17,160 words to 21,450 words. (VirtualSpeech)

2 The Only Way Is Essex

The Only Way Is Essex (TOWIE) is a British reality television series set in Brentwood, England. The participants in the show are real people who deal with certain situations of which some, as the announcer says “have been inflated for [the viewer’s] entertainment.” (Wikipedia) The participants in the show are both male and female, and their ages are between early twenties to late thirties. There is a similar number of both male and female participants, and it amounts from fifteen to twenty people, with various screen times, depending on the episode. The participants all know each other and they belong to the same social group. Through the series of the show, some participants change, but the core group stays mostly the same throughout the show, which is now in its 24th series. Brentwood, the location where the show is set, is in the county of Essex in the East of England. It is in the London commuter belt. (Wikipedia) All the participants of the show live in Brentwood during the filming, but do not necessarily come from there. In the show,

the participants mostly discuss dating, relationships and going out to various events, therefore most of the language in the corpus is related to interpersonal relationships and the social aspects of the participants' lives.

2.1 The role of social networks

Chambers and Trudgill (1998) write how important the role of social networks is in affecting linguistic behaviour. People are influenced linguistically by close friends, family members, and social groups they belong to. People who are well integrated in the group share more linguistic characteristics with each other than people who are less integrated. The influence of the group can be strong and consistent. However, there are individual characteristics amongst the participants of groups. Some participants adhere to particular social networks more or less than others. Thus, there are differences in the linguistic behaviour of people who do fall under the same social category. The linguistic variation can depend on various social factors, such as age, gender, social class, and ethnic background. In *TOWIE*, the participants all belong to one social group. They are friends, or couples, who have known each other, presumably, for a long time. The speech of the participants, or their linguistic behaviour, is similar to one another. They influence the speech of each other and the grammatical and lexical choices they make. There are some linguistic differences amongst speakers in whether, how often, or how prominent some dialectal features are present in their speech, but it is noticeable in their speech that they all belong to the same social network.

3 The Geographical Influence on the Dialect

Essex belongs to the South of England and is a part of the so-called home counties in the southeast of England. It is situated close to London, so it is linguistically influenced by London and its urban speech. A lot of people who live in Essex work in London, so the London dialect is very prominent in Essex (Wells 1989). According to Trudgill (1999) and his division of traditional dialects, Essex belongs to the Central East, and the north-eastern Essex belongs to the Eastern Counties, or East Anglia, which means that the dialect in Essex it is also influenced by the East Anglian accent.

Geographical mobility and migration are one of the biggest reasons behind the dialect levelling of the areas in the Southeast of England. This dialect area is sometimes referred to as the “Home Counties Modern Dialect area.” (Trudgill 1999) The move of Londoners out of the capital during the Second World War decentralized the metropolitan population. In recent years, young families have been moving out of London to provide a more pleasant environment to their children. Pensioners have also started moving to live in the countryside. All of this has made the interchange between London and elsewhere much higher (Altendorf and Watt 2008).

During the Thatcher era, the employment growth was the highest in southeastern England. This prosperity has attracted many people who migrated for better work opportunities and who have mostly settled in the areas Southeast of London. Therefore, the population has grown most rapidly in those areas of the country, where today about a third of the population of the United Kingdom lives (Altendorf and Watt 2008).

In recent years, the tendency is to change work positions, and therefore move to a different place in the Southeast, which has led to a larger mix within the population in that region. The interaction between speakers of many different accents is much higher in southeastern England. With time, this mix of accents leads to “accommodation, accent convergence and change, and ... the diffusion of “new” variants.” (Altendorf and Watt 2008; 200)

The closeness of London is another major influence. Young professionals living in the Southeast would rather use the London variant in their speech, meaning to sound more metropolitan. A lot of people living in the Southeast commute to work to London, therefore bringing with them some linguistic features back to where they live. The London accent has accordingly had a great presence in the Southeast area. The influence of Cockney, the accent often used by people of London, is also noticeable in the Southeast (Altendorf and Watt 2008).

4 Dialectal differences in the Southeast

Dialectal differences can be distinguished by varieties in grammar, which is obvious in the morphology and the syntax of the dialect, as well as in the vocabulary, and the lexis. Lexical change is more rapid and easier to see than the grammatical change. Sometimes new lexical items completely take over already existing ones (Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt 2005). This paper

will focus on the changes and differences the dialect in the Southeast has compared to Standard English. Those changes are manifested in the vocabulary and the grammar of the speakers in *TOWIE*, and examples of such changes will be listed below each category.

4.1 Variation in vocabulary

There are some specific vocabulary items used in *TOWIE* which could be considered colloquial or slang items. Research of online dictionaries has shown that most of the colloquial items have originated in Britain and are also mostly used there. Some vocabulary choices are informal or non-standard, but to the speakers of the show they are a regular part of their vernacular. Influence of the London speech is noticeable on the show, especially in the items such as *bird* and *bruv*. Since the show revolves around relationships and friendships between the participants, most of the items listed below are related to those aspects of life.

V1:

- a. “He was excited to tell his **goss**.” (25:42) The noun *goss* is used in the British informal vernacular and it means *gossip*. (Oxford Dictionary)
- b. “That’s really **muggy**.” (40:51) The adjective *muggy* refers to a situation in which someone says one thing but they mean another. (Urban Dictionary)
- c. “We heard there was a lot of **grief** in Tenerife.” (37:36) According to Urban Dictionary, *grief* means an annoyance, a frustration, or a difficulty. (Urban Dictionary)

V2:

- a. “Like if you want to start the **beef**, let’s just start it!” (00:58) In this example, the noun *beef* does not have its usual meaning for meat, but refers to a fight or an argument. (Urban Dictionary)
- b. “I get he is only backing his **bird**.” (04:23) In this instance, the noun *bird* does not refer to an animal, but to a woman, potentially someone’s love interest. (Oxford Dictionary)
- c. “I feel like he’s **mugged** me **off** in a way.” (04:44) The meaning of the phrase *to mug off* is to purposefully offend someone. (Urban Dictionary)

- d. “You was **eggy**.” (36:00) The word *eggy* means to be annoyed or irritated in informal British English. (Oxford Dictionary)
- e. “We were **chewing** each other’s **ear off** for ten hours solid.” (14:17) The phrase *to chew ear off* means to “talk so much you wear away your ears from over use.” (Urban Dictionary)

V3:

- a. “I’ll rate ya or I’ll **slate** ya.” (20:43) The verb *slate* means to insult. (Urban Dictionary)
- b. “This is where my true ‘**pæf** is.” (29:07) ‘Pash’ (pronounced as ‘*pæf*’) is an abbreviation for passion. (Urban Dictionary)
- c. “Life is too short for enemies, **bruv**.” (30:52) The noun *bruv* is a shorter version of *bruvva* which is a slang variation of *brother*. (Urban Dictionary)

V4:

- a. “As long as she flirt with the **geezers** that ain’t got girlfriends, ...” (4:34) A *geezer* is a young man, a friend. (Urban Dictionary)

V5:

- a. “He wanted to ask you out and then he **bottled** it.” (2:59) To *bottle* means to have the courage to do something. (Urban Dictionary)

4.2 Pragmatics

The use of the lexeme *like* is becoming more and more frequent in the speech of younger British people, and it is reflected in *TOWIE*. *Like* can fulfill several functions, for example, a pause filler, a focus marker, or it can be a quotative like with which we report speech or verbalize someone’s emotional or physical status (Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt 2005). *Like* as a pause filler is the most prominent one amongst the speakers in *TOWIE*, and based on this corpus it can be asserted that mostly female participants use this lexeme in such a way.

a. *Like* as a pause filler:

“I’ve been, **like**, burnt so many times in the past.” (V2 20:37)

“We kind of, **like**, coat it.” (V1 12:47)

“There’s literally, **like**, no beef between me and Courtney.” (V2 11:38)

“He is, **like**, the most laid-back person I’ve ever met in my life.” (V2 27:14)

“I just feel **like**, after the whole after-party situation ...” (V4 0:16)

“I feel **like**, last week I opened up a little bit ...” (V3 4:41)

b. *Like* as a focus marker:

“I just feel **like** we are very different.” (V2 20:17)

c. *Quotative (be) like*:

“And I’m **like**, I love him, I want to be with him.” (V1 10:32)

“I was **like**, I was supporting my mate!” (V2 40:51)

4.3 Non-standard grammatical forms in *TOWIE*

There are several non-standard grammatical forms noticeable in *TOWIE*. Some instances of non-standard grammatical forms are multiple negation, negation using *ain’t*, irregular use of the past tense and present tense, and different varieties of the use of pronouns.

In standard English, the use of multiple negation or negative concord is not ubiquitous. However, such constructions are found in most non-standard grammatical forms. The use of multiple negation is ultimately judged because of social rather than linguistic reasons (Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt 2005). In this corpus, negative concord is not very prominent, which could lead to the conclusion that it is not one of the most distinctive features of non-standard form in Southeastern English. However, it can be asserted that the use of negative concord is not frowned upon in this dialect.

a. “You **don’t** know **nothing**? – I **don’t** know **nothing**.” (V2 16:57)

- b. “I wouldn’t worry about it, you **ain’t** done **nothing** wrong.” (V5 3:58)

According to Anderwald, *ain’t* is a part of the traditional dialect system of the Southeast of England. The form *ain’t* can be used for all present tense forms of the verb *be*, as well as for *have*. It is most often used for negating an auxiliary than for negating a full verb (Anderwald 2008). *Ain’t* can have two functions, both of which are used quite often in *TOWIE*, and their distribution is equal amongst both male and female participants of the show. First function of *ain’t* is the negative form of the present tense of *be* in Standard English (Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt 2005).

- a. “It **ain’t** hard!” (V1 9:36)
- b. “It’s so nice being here. - **Ain’t** it nice?” (V1 3:33)
- c. “Gemma **ain’t** the only one missing.” (V1 35:54)
- d. “Me and you **ain’t** friends, yeah? We **ain’t** in a good place ...” (V3 9:42)
- e. “That’s making me look bad and that **ain’t** true.” (V3 12:58)

The second use of *ain’t* in non-standard English is as the negative present tense of auxiliary *have*. In this case, *ain’t* corresponds to Standard English *haven’t* or *hasn’t* (Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt 2005).

- a. “You **ain’t** met a proper man yet.” (V2 02:19)
- b. “As long as she flirt with the geezers that **ain’t** got girlfriends, ...” (V4 4:34)
- c. “I can understand why Danni’s upset, but she **ain’t** got the right ...” (V4 4:48)
- d. “I wouldn’t worry about it, you **ain’t** done nothing wrong.” (V5 3:58)
- e. “She’s got mates. – No, she **ain’t**.” (V1 9:33)

There is a variation pattern in the past tense forms of *be* in *TOWIE*. The most prominent pattern is the levelling of *was*. The use of *was* for second person singular and for plural is quite common in the show (Beal 2010). Anderwald points out that the use of *was* in the Southeast of England is apparent in almost 80% of uses. This extension of the use of *was* for plural is also used in negation (Anderwald 2008). The extensive use of *was* for plural in the show confirms the

statements found in the literature. Levelling of *was* is amongst the most prominent non-standard grammatical uses in this corpus, and some examples are listed below.

- a. "I don't think you **was** in the right." (V1 07:35)
- b. "They **was** both the same with each other." (V1 05:29)
- c. "Can you believe this time last year we **was** in Gran Canaria,..." (V1 7:14)
- d. "You **was** all happy and in love, everything was good." (V2 27:28)
- e. "You **wasn't** accepting the apology." (V2 36:21)
- f. "I thought you **was** gonna start bench pressing me at one point." (V3 6:58)

In non-standard grammatical forms there is a variation in the present tense form where it is identical to the past tense and to the past participle (Edwards 1993). As Anderwald further explains, the meaning of the past tense in such uses can only be understood from the context of the sentence. For example, in this non-standard use, there is a possibility of only one form *come-come-come* from which the listener or the reader can understand which tense it refers to from the context of the use (Anderwald 2008). There is also an extension of the past tense to the past participle in irregular verbs (Edwards 1993). In this corpus, we can see examples of both extensions, and we can notice that the verb *speak* is the most commonly used in this sort of a variation.

- a. "Last time I'd **see** you, youse was jetting off to Oz." (V1 27:52)
- b. "That's why I **come**." (V2 06:25)
- c. "I haven't **spoke** to him since." (V2 11:57)
- d. "Have you **spoke** to Mario tonight?" (V5 3:07)
- e. "Oh, there she **come**." (V4 2:15)

The use of *don't* instead of *doesn't* in third person singular is prominent in the speech of *TOWIE*. This variation is not used by all the speakers, but it appears regularly in the corpus.

- a. "I hope Megan **don't** fight her battle too much." (V1 23:31)

- b. “If he **don’t** do that, he ain’t a man.” (V1 39:29)
- c. “This **don’t** count as a second date.” (V2 39:07)
- d. “It **don’t** mean that I’m hard.” (V3 11:24)

In *TOWIE*, the speakers use several varieties of non-standard pronoun use. One feature of colloquial style is the use of demonstrative pronoun *them* instead of using *those* (Anderwald 2008). This feature appears only twice in the corpus, therefore it can be concluded that it is not a common feature amongst the speakers of the show.

- a. “Imagine what **them** doctors think?” (V1 14:42)
- b. “I just think she’s one of **them** girls, ...” (V4 4:27)

Another notable feature is the difference concerning the use of the reflexive pronoun *myself*. In *TOWIE*, we can observe that some participants use *meself* in place of *myself*, which comes from forming the reflexive pronoun from the object pronoun *me* (Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt 2005). The use of the object pronoun *me* instead of the possessive pronoun *my* can also be heard in Southeastern accents, and is also heard in *TOWIE* in several examples (Edwards 1993).

- a. “Christmas day I’m gonna enjoy **meself**.” (V2 13:46)
- b. “I’m trying to make all **me** mates back, you know what I mean?” (V3 8:04)
- c. “Oh, I’m in **me** element.” (V1 6:05)

The use of *youse* is prominent in *TOWIE*. It stands for the second person plural pronoun form of *you*, and is common in non-standard varieties of English (Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt 2005). This feature is quite common in this corpus, and the speakers sometimes use it to refer to the second person singular pronoun form of *you*, which means that the use deviates a bit from the data found in the literature.

- a. “Regardless of all this past that’s happened with **youse** two, Chloe is a very fair person.” (V1 23:42)
- b. “I am so happy **youse** are home.” (V1 36:35)
- c. “Last time I’d see you, **youse** was jetting off to Oz.” (V1 27:52)

d. “I get what **youse** was doing there.” (V3 23:36)

e. “Are **youse** coming back?” (V1 26:21)

The use of the tag question *innit* is also noticeable in this corpus. *Innit* comes from the form *isn't it*. It can be used with all persons and verbs (Anderwald 2008).

a. “It’s a woman, **innit**?” (V2 3:53)

b. “Spiritual home for you, **innit**?” (V1 6:11)

c. “It’s unbelievable, **innit**?” (V2 21:37)

d. “If you ain’t gonna compromise, it’s all gonna end up in tears, **innit**?” (V2 29:31)

5 Phonetics and phonology

The dialect used in this corpus has several distinctive qualities. In vowels, we can notice *Happy Tensing*, and the change in the vowel PRICE from the one in RP, amongst others. The changes from Standard English are more prominent in consonants. *H Dropping* and *TH Fronting* are two of the most obvious features, whilst *L Vocalization* is also noticeable in the speech of the participants.

The local accents in the south of England, as well as Cockney, the accent of London, have gone through what is known as the Great Vowel Shift, or the Diphthong Shift. The speech of people from those areas is therefore different and the Diphthong Shift is the reason behind the different variation in the pronunciation. It is presumed that the Vowel Shift started in London in the nineteenth century. Because of the Great Shift, the vowel in PRICE has changed from [aɪ] to [ɔɪ] or sometimes to [ɑɪ] or [ɒɪ]. The vowel in CHOICE has moved up from [ɔɪ] to [oɪ], whilst the one in GOOSE shifted from [u:] to [əʊ], and it has the possibility of being realized as [u:]. Lastly, the vowel in MOUTH has shifted forwards to [æʊ ~ æə ~ εʊ] (Wells 1982).

5.1 Vowels in Southeastern English

In Southeast England, accents have undergone the so called *Happy Tensing*. That is a historical process by which the short final [ɪ] in *happy* has been replaced by a closer vowel of the [i(:)] type

(Altendorf and Watt 2008). The /i(:)/ vowel is pronounced as a tense and sometimes long, rather than a short, lax /ɪ/ or even /ɛ/ (Beal 2010). In the corpus, *Happy Tensing* is most prominent amongst females. It is commonly used and its presence is easily noticeable in the speech of the participants.

V1:

- a. “Basically, like, the last couple of **dei:z**, obviously since we’ve come out here ...” (5:10)
- b. “I have arranged the most amazing ‘**pa:ti:**, it’s the diamond blue ‘**pa:ti:**.” (6:52)
- c. “You all ‘**spa:kli:**.” (6:55)

V2:

- a. “You didn’t get one Sims, you got two. See how ‘**lʌki:?**” (23:24)
- b. “I’m so **æpi:**.” (6:51)

V3:

- a. “I have a really bad addiction. – To what? - ‘**ʃɒpi:n.**” (17:13)

V6:

- a. “It takes me so long to get ‘**redi:**, I hate it, it drives me mad.” (1:28)

Southeastern English has both monophthongal and diphthongal GOOSE variants. In the case of monophthongal GOOSE variants, there are two new variants. The process of fronting results in variants ranging between [u:] and a mid-front variant [y:]. In the diphthongal GOOSE variants, the principle is that the more centralized the first element of the diphthong is, the more basilectal the variant (Altendorf and Watt 2008). These variants are not very common in the corpus, which is noted in the examples below.

V1:

- a. “Tenerife is just not the same without **ju:**.” (3:20)

V5:

- a. “That’s very **ru:d.**” (2:44)

Southeastern accents are prone to a phoneme split in which there is a difference in the pronunciation between *goat* [gʌʊt] and *goal* [gɔɪ]. Furthermore, the GOAT vowel is diphthongal. In the GOAT vowel, there is an alternation between [ɘʌ] and [ɘi] (Altendorf and Watt 2008). This corpus does not contain many examples of this phoneme split, which resulted in only two examples.

V2:

- a. “What I would do to eat that right **nɘʌ** guys.” (12:51)
- b. “You always turn on the one closest to you when you get the advice you don’t want to **hɘi**.” (27:55)

The prevalent variant of the MOUTH vowel in most Southeastern accents is the “metropolitan” [æʊ] type. This variety is different from the London MOUTH monophthong, which means that levelling in this case compromised on the RP form rather than on the London variant (Altendorf and Watt 2008).

V1:

- a. “I try to show her that she can trust me by not going **æʊt**.” (9:05)

V2

- a. “You are actually doing **wæʊ!**” (13:07)
- b. “How is it **næʊ?**” (29:02)

In PRICE, the vowel tends to be a bit more back than in RP. Wells (1989) describes it as /aɪ/, instead of the RP /aɪ/. Even though Wells describes this vowel change for speakers of Cockney, because of the influence the speech of London has had on the Southeast of England, we can hear many speakers in *TOWIE* using this variant of PRICE. The corpus contains many examples which confirms the findings in the literature.

Wells (1989) further observes that the CHOICE vowel has merged with PRICE vowel in some areas of the south of England. Wells states that the diphthong /aɪ/ can be used for the CHOICE vowel as well, the vowel which is traditionally /ɔi/.

V1:

- a. “Ain’t it **nais**?” (3:34)
- b. “Girls this is ridiculous, we’ve all been best friends for a really long **tam**.” (7:51)

V2:

- a. “This state in **laif** is like a culture.” (13:20)
- b. “And I’m **lark**: mate, they’re lovely, but ...” (13:29)
- c. “That’s always a **sam** of a good date: when you can spend hours just talking ...” (14:24)

V3:

- a. “It’s not **raut**, you know what I mean?” (9:16)

V5:

- a. “I’m trying not **krai**.” (*sic*) (2:05)
- b. “Oh, yes, please, get me a **wam**.” (2:12)
- c. “I hope you’ve all had a wicked **tam**.” (0:16)

V6:

- a. “And I was like, I put myself on the **lam**.” (0:55)

5.2 Consonants in Southeastern English

Words such as *hit*, *happy*, *heat* have /h/ in the standard accent, which is the voiceless glottal fricative. This /h/ contrasts with the zero, such as in *heat* vs. *eat*. According to Wells, *H Dropping* is prevalent across working-class accents in England. Therefore, the [h] found in the standard accents is missing in non-standard ones. The words such as *hit* and *happy* therefore start with a vowel (Wells 1982). The distribution of *H Dropping* is considered to be more of a social than a geographical phenomenon. Since the 18th century, the failure to pronounce initial /h/ has become stigmatised. It has become one of the most prominent ways of distinguishing dialectal groups (Beal 2010). In Southeastern and in London accents there is sociolinguistically variable *H*

Dropping. The zero form is mostly avoided by middle-class speakers, unless it is “*licensed*,” such as in unstressed pronouns and verbs (Altendorf and Watt 2008). *H Dropping* is very common and prominent amongst the speakers of *TOWIE*. It is one of the features that are fairly easy to distinguish and one that is rather noticeable. The corpus contains many examples, a lot of which are repeated many times, like *him, her, have*. Several examples of *H Dropping* are listed below.

V1:

- a. “It’s mental what we’re doing **ɪər**.” (4:04)
- b. “Ultimately, I don’t want to disrespect **ɪm** or hurt **ɪm** in any way.” (4:09)
- c. “Spiritual **əʊm** for you, innit?” (6:12)
- d. “I’m gonna be sitting by her bedside, holding **ɜ:r ænd**.” (12:11)

V2:

- a. “You ain’t met a proper man, **əv** you Lauren?” (2:21)
- b. “It’s disrespecting **ɜ:(r)** and me, ...” (4:25)
- c. “Amber got **əʊm** and I just ended up **əvɪn** a row with her about it.” (4:54)
- d. “I’m so **æpi:**.” (6:51)

V3:

- a. “He’s a decent lad and he’s got a good **ɑ:t**.” (7:46)
- b. “He just let it all go over **ɪz ed**, ...” (31:38)

V4:

- a. “Everything ‘**æpənd** the other night has just been” (0:38)
- b. “You ‘**ævnt** met the girls yet, **əv** you?” (1:25)
- c. “What’s going on? Why are you standing over **ɪər**?” (2:24)

V6:

- a. “I thought I’d come over and say ə'ləʊ.” (0:30)

Sociolinguistically variable *TH Fronting* is prominent in Southeastern accents. It is prominent in the use of [f] and [v] for /θ/ and /ð/, respectively. *TH Fronting* can apply to /θ/ in all positions, and to /ð/ in non-initial position (Altendorf and Watt 2008). *TH Fronting* is associated with ‘Estuary English’ and is assumed to be diffusing from London (Beal 2010). This feature is extremely common in this corpus, and speakers use it extensively. Various examples are listed below.

V1:

- a. “Did you fall in love **wɪf** her?” (5:38)
- b. “The last **mʌnf** has been eighty percent rows, twenty percent being happy.” (10:51)
- c. “When we were spending that time tə'geɪə, I had no doubts ...” (33:32)

V2:

- a. “Is there 'ʌvə option on the table?” (0:22)
- b. “I can’t believe you are not even coming to my 'bɜ:fdeɪ.” (1:31)
- c. “It’s nice to spend it **wɪf** my family in England.” (1:53)
- d. “Is this the 'fɜ:tiəf?” (3:27)

V3:

- b. “I’ve sorted out this laughter 'ferəpi ‘cause it’s like ...” (1:59)
- c. “But we’re not laughing **wɪv** him, we’re laughing at him!” (2:17)
- d. “A lot of it has got to do with the whole Megan **fɪŋ**, a lot of it is to do with the Chloe Sims **fɪŋ**.” (7:32)
- e. “He wants an apology, which I know you don’t **fɪŋk** you owe him.” (7:55)

V4:

- a. “I just **fɪŋk** she’s one of them girls, ...” (4:27)

V5:

- a. “When I actually saw him, it wasn’t as bad as I **fɔ:t**.” (1:34)
- b. “Even though, ‘**evrɪfɪŋ** he’s done, ‘**evrɪfɪŋ** I’ve heard.” (1:40)

In London and the Southeast, *Preglottalization* and *Glottal Replacement* of syllable-final voiceless plosives /t/, /p/, and /k/ is quite common. There are several conditions for *Preglottalization* to occur. First, it occurs when /p/, /t/, /k/ are in syllable-final position. Second, these voiceless plosives need to be preceded by a vowel, a liquid, or a nasal. The affricate /tʃ/ can also be *Preglottalized* in the same conditions, as well as in the environment which is the same as the one in which /h/ would commonly be used (Wells 1982).

Wells further describes how there is a possibility of using “a glottal stop which masks the release stage of the oral plosive.” (1982, 261) Such *Glottaling* is noticeable both in London and in the accents in the south of England. It can appear in all the same environments as the *Preglottaling*. *T Glottaling* is made more prominent in Cockney, but is also being used in RP by some speakers (Wells 1982). Speakers of *TOWIE* use these features quite a lot in their speech. *Glottaling* is easily noticeable and is one of the most discernible features of Southeastern English, which is reflected in the corpus.

V1:

- a. “We ended up having a massive row, don’t speak, we **splɪʔ** up ...” (10:15)
- b. “...and he was like, I know, tell me ə’baʊʔ **rɪʔ**.” (1:11)
- c. “You kind of **rɪ’greʔ rɪʔ**, a little **bɪʔ**?” (10:31)
- d. “You gotta go through it, to come out ‘**beʔə(r)** on the other side.” (12:59)
- e. “Only Gem could have her hair and makeup on in ‘**hɒspɪʔl**.” (14:40)

V2:

- a. “It’s nothing massive, it’s just something that you ‘**wɒʔɪd**.” (2:46)

- b. “A **'lɪ?** tiny surprise present.” (2:47)
- c. “That’s not **ɪm'pɔ:ʔnt**, more importantly is you and her.” (5:44)
- d. “Obviously, there was this **'pɑ:ʔi.**” (10:22)

V3

- a. “For anyone watching, who’s interested in **stɑ:ʔm** a business, building a brand ...” (3:50)
- b. “So many people have told me: Bobs, you should be a **pri'zenʔə**, and I thought about it, and I’ve always wanted to do it.” (4:23)
- c. “I am starting to **daʊ?** if there is ...” (6:12)
- d. “If things get **'sɔ:ʔɪd** or whatever, then so be it.” (8:11)

V4:

- a. “You two spent the whole night **'flɜ:ʔm**, and then she kissed Pete.” (1:49)

V6:

- a. “You’re gonna get him to do your **'dɜ:ʔi** work?” (1:54)

In Southeastern accents, /r/ is mostly realised as an alveolar or a post-alveolar approximant [ɹ]. Despite Southeastern accents being non-rhotic, the /r/ is pronounced in a post-vocalic position if the following word begins with a vowel. In those cases, the /r/ is referred to as a *linking /r/* (Altendorf and Watt 2008). There is also a phenomenon of the *intrusive /r/*. It is inserted to perform the gap-bridging function, same as the *linking /r/*. The *intrusive /r/* is not looked upon as substandard pronunciation (Josipović 1999).

V2:

- a. “I heard about all this **'drɑ:məɹ** at the bonfire night.” (4:03)

V3:

- a. “I hardly **sɔ:r ɪm** last week.” (~saw him) (4:50)

V5:

- a. “When I actually **sɔ:r ɪm**, it wasn’t as bad as I thought.” (1:34)

Very prominent in the show is the variable *L Vocalization* in post-vocalic positions. Wells describes the range of pronunciation of /l/ as [ɾ], [o], [ʊ], and [u] (Wells 1995). Thus, for example, *milk* is pronounced as [mɪðk]. *L Vocalization* can cause a complete reorganization of the vowel system. It offers new diphthongs such as [ɪʊ] or [ɛʊ] (Wells 1982). The process of vocalization has an impact on the preceding vowel. A common allophonic effect is neutralization. For example, the vowel in *meal* can almost be homophonous with the vowel in *mill* (Altendorf and Watt 2008). Likewise, Josipović Smojver (2017) discusses the same phenomenon with reference to lenition processes.

According to Wells, *L Vocalization* originated in the local accent of London and is about a century-old development. Its use is entering the RP pronunciation and it is becoming more common in the speech of Londonders and of speakers in counties nearby (Wells 1982). *L Vocalization* is a very salient feature in *TOWIE*, and the changes it makes to the vowel system also make it one of the most interesting ones. The corpus contains plenty of examples, some of which are listed below. This feature is unmistakable when listening to the speakers.

V1:

- a. “I love, I’m gonna go for **siuk**.” (6:57)
b. “She should have been like: **gɜ:us** this is ridiculous.” (7:48)

V2

- a. “I can have a nice home cooked **mɪʊ**.” (7:18)
b. “If you are inviting me, I **wɪɾ** come with you.” (10:46)
c. “We need more nights like these. **tʃɪud**.” (11:16)
d. “And then these three girls ‘**gɪgou**: and say this comment ...’ (0:47)
e. “I know some ‘**pɪpo**, I can hook you up.” (10:32)

V3

- a. “This **həʊ** situation has cause me to **fi:u** so stressed.” (0:41)
- b. “I think it’s made him someone **eus** to everyone.” (9:01)
- c. “Big **di:ʊ**. Like, what’s the problem?” (10:21)

V4:

- a. “It makes it very '**famʊ**.” (0:34)
- b. “I just think it’s '**disrɪ'spektfoʊ**.” (2:48)
- c. “Why are they taking it to this '**levʊʊ**?” (3:06)

V5:

- a. “The best dressed '**fi:meɪʊ** goes to Lydia.” (0:27)
- b. “Put it on your dressing room '**teɪbʊ** and look at it every night before you go to bed.” (0:46)

In the accents in the south of England, there is a variability of the ending *-ing*, in which, instead of the final nasal, we can note a velar or an alveolar. Thus, the speakers use /n/ instead of /ŋ/, so, for example, *running* becomes '**rʌnɪn** or '**rʌnən**. It is mostly used in less formal speech and in speakers with a lower social status. The change occurs in verbs, nouns, and adjectives which end in *-ing* (Wells 1982). In this corpus, the variability is most common in verbs, with several examples in nouns and adjectives.

V1:

- a. “I have arranged a most ə '**meɪzɪn** party.” (6:51)
- b. “She’s just əb'zɔ:**bɪn** you in.” (17:55)
- c. “I’m really '**strʌɡlɪn**.” (20:59)
- d. “Don’t worry Chloe, we’re gonna find your Prince '**tʃɑ:mn**.” (28:50)

V2:

- a. “What are you **'weərɪn?**” (3:44)
- b. “You’re actually **'du:m** well ... Is it **'kɪlɪn** ya? (13:10)

V4:

- a. “You two spent the whole night **'flɜ:ʔɪn**, and then she kissed Pete.” (1:50)
- b. “What’s **'gəʊɪn** on, why are you **'stændɪn** over here?” (2:22)
- c. “This is **ɪm'bærəsɪn**, all of ya.” (3:00)

V5:

- a. “Thank you so much for **'kʌmɪn** this **'i:vɪnɪn**, ...” (0:13)
- b. “No **'faɪtɪn** over the award, you’ll have to share it.” (2:29)

6 Conclusion

This paper shows how variable and dynamic modern Southeastern English is. It can be noticed that some features described in the literature are not as prominent as expected, for example the realisation of /r/ as an alveolar or a post-alveolar approximant [ɹ], which only appears a few times. On the other hand, features like *H Dropping* and *TH Fronting* are extremely common. This confirms the major influence the speech of London has had and still has on speakers in Essex and on Southeastern English in general. As for vowels, one can also notice that the most prominent differences in vowels also come from London. The vowels in *PRICE* and *Happy Tensing* are the most frequent and most noticeable ones. The *GOOSE* variant as well as the *GOAT* variant were not as prevalent as expected, but some examples are present in the corpus.

The grammatical and pragmatic features found in this corpus confirm and expand on the descriptions found in the literature. Some non-standard variants are more typical of the dialect, like the use of *ain't* and the pattern variation of the past tense of *be*. These are some of the most prominent features and they are prevalent in the corpus. However, some phenomena, like the use of *youse* for second person singular are not pointed out as one of the features of this dialectal area, whilst it is used rather extensively in the corpus.

The lexical level was interesting to analyse, as some vocabulary items were completely non-standard and could not be found in formal dictionaries. The speakers use these vocabulary items freely and everyone in their social network seems to understand them. Vocabulary items like *eggy* and *muggy* were particularly frequent. As previously stated, most vocabulary items in this corpus regard interpersonal relationships, so for further research it would be interesting to look into other corpuses which deal with different topics in order to find out which other vocabulary items are commonly used in Essex and the surrounding areas and that are perhaps non-standard.

The Only Way Is Essex is a show that deals with a certain type of situations and therefore a certain kind of language is used. What we can ascertain from the corpus in this paper is that the features described in the literature are perhaps not as common as expected. Whilst some features are still as prominent as ever, it is noticeable that the dialect used in the Southeast of England is dynamic and evolving. There is a rise in some features which have not been described at length in the literature, like the use of *don't* instead of *doesn't* in third person singular, whilst some features are perhaps less frequently used, like the use of the GOOSE vowel variants. Speakers of *TOWIE* represent their dialect in the most modern form. The slang, colloquialisms and the informal speech used in the show can give the viewer an idea of what kind of language the speakers of that region use in their day-to-day lives. Their speech reflects the geographical influence on the language, in the sense that the speech of London is incorporated in their speech. We can also note the influence of the social networks and their influence on the language, in the sense that the speakers all know the casual dialect of that region and they all influence each other.

This paper gives an overview of the modern, everyday language used by speakers in Essex. The corpus used in the paper reflects the language shifts and changes that have occurred over the years, but it also displays some newer lexical items and phenomena that are present in the speech at this moment. To be able to reach a conclusion that the materials found in the literature are valid for all of Southeast of England, further and more detailed research should be done, with aim at language used in other areas and aspects of life.

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V4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khRE5G8T4dY&t=43s>

V5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQLeDLibzaI&t=106s>

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