

Omission of the primary verbs BE and HAVE
in London teenage speech
- a sociolinguistic study



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why study teenage language?

In recent years, linguistic research has provided extensive studies of varieties of spoken English. In the research field known as 'urban dialectology' it has been customary to describe language variation in terms of social class differences (cf Labov 1972a & 1972b, Trudgill 1974, Macaulay 1977). Descriptions of the effect age differences have on linguistic variation are less common. Some linguists (eg Cheshire 1982b, Eckert 1988, Romaine 1984) observe that certain linguistic features are typical of teenage speech. However, no variety of spoken English has been accounted for through an extensive, systematic sociolinguistic study of its inherently teenage-specific linguistic features. Therefore, the nature and extent of the differences between teenage language and adult language with respect to grammar, semantics, pragmatics and phonology have not been adequately described. Consequently, there is great uncertainty as to the conclusions such a study would yield, regarding the status of a certain variety of teenage language and, indeed, of teenage language in general. On the one hand, it may well be that such a study would lead to a claim that a certain variety of teenage language is a separate linguistic subsystem which contrasts significantly from the language of adults from the same speech community (especially if we bear in mind Labov's (1972a:61) conclusions regarding the Black English Vernacular). On the other hand, one may conclude that the peculiarities of teenage speech are merely aspects of age-grading (cf Hockett 1950), and that teenagers will, once they 'grow up' modify their language and adhere to adult norms of linguistic behaviour. In other words, the nature and extent of the variation between teenage and adult language is an unexplored area of modern linguistics.

It is a common sociolinguistic claim that language is a means to express group conformity for all speakers. As for teenagers, this social function of language is particularly important:

If it is possible to talk in any meaningful way about the language of teenage groups, one aspect which occurs in large measure is that the language of such a group is used by the members of the group deliberately to 'mark themselves off' from *all* adults and other teenagers who are not members of that particular group. (Adelman 1976: 82)

Not surprisingly, the desire to conform to peer group norms of

behaviour extends to language. Children, especially young adolescents use regional forms of syntax - and pronunciation - to show 'who they are', ... Quantitative research ... has found that the proportion of non-standard forms used in speech increases dramatically in early adolescence. The more closely integrated young people are into a peer group that tries to display its independence from adult values and tastes the more frequently they use non-standard regional forms of syntax. (Cheshire & Milroy 1993:20)

Against this background, we have reason to believe that teenagers express communicative competence in a way which differs from other age-groups of a speech community. For instance, it appears that a speaker's indulgence in linguistic innovativeness reaches a peak in adolescence. Teenagers are often associated with the spread of linguistic innovations (cf Eckert 1988), and the linguistic phenomena that characterize this group of speakers may be seen as indicators of linguistic change in progress (cf Milroy 1992). For this reason, the language of the younger members of a society as such is particularly interesting to linguists, and teenage language becomes truly relevant as a field of study in modern linguistics.

The need to study teenage language is reinforced by the fact that it is often subject to criticism from prescriptivists, and more so than is the case with other varieties of English. Teachers, parents and even linguists often express their concern about the corruption and decay of the English language, and adolescent verbal behaviour is allegedly among the worst cases in this respect. This attitude has its basis in the belief that non-standard varieties of English are inferior to standard English and fit the description 'bad' or 'ungrammatical', mainly due to the speakers' ignorance, carelessness or sloppiness. In the eyes of the descriptive linguist, this is of course an erroneous belief, and the need to counter this view emphasizes the demand for an extensive sociolinguistic description of teenage language.

It is obvious that such a description is not possible within the scope of a 'hovedfag' thesis. However, the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), which has recently been compiled at the University of Bergen¹, is a good starting point for studies of the teenage variety of an urban dialect as it appears in everyday conversation. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate a non-standard grammatical feature in the language of London teenagers from a sociolinguistic point of view. I intend to include an extra-linguistic dimension in the description of the chosen variable, namely socioeconomic class. By comparative analysis I will observe to what extent the chosen variable (cf 1.2.2) is an indicator of the social class membership of the speakers. In the few existing accounts of teenage language the

researchers have described the speech of teenagers without comparing the results with that of adult speakers (cf 1.3), and this method is also applied in the present study.

1.2 Choice of sociolinguistic variable as a subject of study

1.2.1 Non-standard ellipsis

One of the most striking features of the language of the teenagers who appear in this corpus is the non-standard ellipsis of sentence elements. By 'non-standard ellipsis' I mean ellipsis which involves omission of a sentence element resulting in a sentence which is ungrammatical (in the sense 'well-formed', cf Crystal 1991:160) and hence unacceptable in standard English². Some examples will illustrate the complexity of non-standard ellipsis in the London teenage vernacular (cf 2.1.3):

- [1] I need some coffee keep me awake. (141701/9:40)³
- [2] Oh. Boy's a sheep. (134801/1:18)
- [3] Have you been up Walthamstow? (135004/1:65)
- [4] Where you going Liam? (134803/1:5)
- [5] That means you gotta do everything. (135207/12:94)
- [6] So who she leave the baby with? (134901/1:97)

Strictly speaking, sentences [1]-[6] are all ungrammatical in standard English. In [1] this is due to omission of the infinitive marker, in [2] the noun *boy* requires the definite article, and in examples [4]-[6] the ungrammaticality is due to omission of the auxiliary verbs BE, HAVE and DO, respectively. [3] is a somewhat special case, in that this is the only type of non-standard omission which is traditionally acknowledged as an element of southern British English grammar (eg Edwards 1993; Cheshire 1982b). Edwards (1993:233) notes that complex prepositions such as *up at*, which is to be expected in [3], are frequently reduced to a single preposition.

It is obvious that examples [1]-[6] raise a number of interesting linguistic questions regarding the phonological and/or grammatical processes involved in non-standard ellipsis. All the examples seem to involve some kind of phonological and grammatical simplification which presumably is a result of the speakers' opting for rapidity rather than grammatical correctness. Examples [1]-[3], however, fall outside the scope of the thesis, since they involve omission of elements other than

verbs. They are included here as a means of showing that non-standard ellipsis occurs in several contexts, and thus indicating the similarities between the various types of non-standard ellipsis found in the corpus. All of the omitted forms *to*, *the*, *at*, *are*, *have* and *did* are monosyllabic words which have little or no semantic significance in the sentences in which they occur. This observation leads to the assumption that sentences such as [1]-[6] are subject to the same process of phonological and grammatical simplification, as speakers tend to omit semantically insignificant elements, presumably as a result of the rapidity that often characterizes everyday speech.

1.2.2 Omission of primary verbs

The topic for investigation in this thesis is an aspect of non-standard ellipsis where the ungrammaticality is due to the absence of a tensed verb (cf examples [4]-[6]). I intend to investigate the nature and extent of the omission of the verbs BE and HAVE in London teenage speech. I have chosen to apply Quirk et al's (1985:64) term 'primary verbs', a term the authors use to refer to BE, HAVE and DO simply to indicate that they are 'the three most important verbs in the language' (ibid:64). This is done to avoid any potential confusion that the term 'auxiliary verbs' may cause, since BE, HAVE and DO can of course function both as auxiliary verbs and main verbs. Indeed, their function as auxiliaries or main verbs does not affect their ability to be omitted in the London teenage vernacular:

[7] She trying a do the butterfly. (134901/1:238)

[8] What sort of people there? (134901/12:184)

Despite the fact that all three of the primary verbs BE, HAVE and DO can be omitted in the vernacular, I have chosen to restrict the research to BE and HAVE. DO-omission appears to be less frequent than the omission of BE and HAVE. Furthermore, the scrutiny of two of the primary verbs seems to fit the scope of the thesis better than three.

It is my primary aim to describe the linguistic patterns and constraints which govern speakers' omission of the verbs by showing where (ie in which grammatical environments) primary verb omission is possible, as well as where it occurs most frequently (cf Chapters 5-6). Consequently, the hypothesis that the investigation is based on is that such patterns and constraints do exist, and that these can be

explored through a quantitative analysis of the primary material.

It is assumed that the verbs BE and HAVE are subject to the same, or quite similar processes of phonological simplification which result in the omission of the two verbs (cf 1.2.1), and consequently that non-standard omission of BE and HAVE are best considered aspects of the same sociolinguistic variable rather than separate variables. The omission of a verb form is likely to be the result of the same phonological process as leads to ordinary contraction of the verb form (cf Trudgill 1978). For instance, *we are coming* may be contracted to *we're coming* by reduction of vowel length and centralization of the vowel quality (cf Brown & Millar 1980:89). The non-standard equivalent involving primary verb omission, *we Ø coming* is considered a continuation of these phonological processes (cf p 39), which was first suggested by Labov (1972a:73). Aspects of phonology are, however, subsidiary to this thesis, since the focus of interest here is mainly grammar.

The reason for the choice of this sociolinguistic variable as a field of study is that non-standard omission of primary verbs appears to be a fairly widespread linguistic phenomenon, and that it is an easily quantifiable discrete variable, where percentages of non-standard forms can be calculated merely by means of presence or absence of a certain sentence element (cf Hudson 1980:157ff).

My second intention is to describe the sociolinguistic variable in terms of the extra-linguistic parameter socioeconomic class. I will use non-standard verb omission as a means to test Trudgill's (1983:40ff) hypothesis regarding the distribution of non-standard forms, namely that we are likely to find a higher proportion of non-standard forms among the speakers of the lowest socioeconomic classes than among speakers of the higher classes. By comparing the percentages of non-standard forms for the speakers it will hopefully be possible to conclude whether or not primary verb omission reflects the social class membership of the speakers (cf Chapter 7).

1.3 Previous studies

In the vast range of corpus-based literature which analyzes language in its social context, the variety which is here labelled 'teenage language' has been accounted for by only a few researchers. Three studies, Labov (1972a) Cheshire (1982b), and Romaine (1984) describe the language of this age group in detail. Of these, only Labov's study includes a comparison with adult speakers (cf p 2f). Another study, Trudgill (1974), briefly mentions the effect age differences have on linguistic

variation (ibid:104f;110ff). The three analyses which account for varieties of British English, Cheshire (Reading), Trudgill (Norwich) and Romaine (Edinburgh) all fail to note non-standard verb omission as a feature of the respective vernaculars. Trudgill's study deals mostly with phonology, except for his account of the present tense marker (ibid:55-63), and as to the other two studies, it is unclear whether the absence of discussions on this particular variable is due to the fact that non-standard verb omission does not appear in their corpora. Thus, whether this phenomenon is restricted to the language of London teenagers remains to be seen.

The only sociolinguistic study which explicitly notes verb omission as a non-standard feature is Labov (1972a). For this reason, his chapter on copula deletion (ibid:65-129) constitutes the most important secondary source in connection with the research that is carried out in this thesis.

Another important article is Edwards (1993), which is a survey (not corpus-based) of the grammatical features specific to southern British English. But not even in this volume - despite its recent publishing - do we find non-standard verb-omission described. A possible explanation for this is that, presumably, it does not belong to the 'traditional' linguistic peculiarities of southern British English, such as multiple negation, irregular past forms and *-ed* participles of verbs (cf 4.2.2), non-standard relative pronouns and the already mentioned reduction of complex prepositions. This might indicate that primary verb omission is a non-regional feature of spoken English.

Finally, I should mention Quirk et al's (1985:898f) discussions of ellipsis of auxiliary verbs. They only briefly mention the possibility of omitting primary verbs in certain contexts in non-standard English. However, this volume is essential in determining whether the authentic examples should be labelled standard or non-standard (cf 1.2.1).

¹ The COLT project is funded by The Norwegian Research Council, The Faculty of Arts - University of Bergen, and The Norwegian Academy of Science.

² The question of acceptability is certainly problematic, as different speakers of standard English (and other varieties of English) make different judgements as to what is an acceptable sentence. Besides, we cannot rule out the possibility that speakers of standard English themselves utter 'unacceptable' sentences. (For a further discussion on competence vs performance, see section 8.3. See also Quirk et al 1985:33f)

³ The significance of the numbering of examples is as follows: The number before the slash is the reference number of the text in COLT. The number immediately before the colon is the speaker identity number, and the final number is the turn number attributed to the utterance in the transcribed text. (For a

definition of 'turn' see section 4.1.1.) The recruit (cf 2.1.1) always has speaker identity number 1, while his/her conversational partners have other numbers.

2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1 Material

2.1.1 About COLT

COLT is the only existing large corpus of English teenage speech. An advantage of using texts from COLT as primary material for linguistic research is that they are of a recent date, unlike most other generally accessible corpora of spoken English. Recordings were made in London in January-June 1993, using young students as recruits for the COLT project. They were equipped with walkmans with lapel microphones for about a week. Thus they provided surreptitiously tape-recorded conversations while taking part in everyday social activities in school, at home and in various settings among their friends. The tapes have been orthographically transcribed by professional transcribers at Longman Publishers in Britain. The 500 000 word corpus is now available on audio tapes, text files and in the form of printouts. COLT is a constituent corpus of the British National Corpus, which has been launched recently.

The 32 recruits who appear in the corpus are boys and girls aged 13 to 17 from five different areas of London. They were requested to fill out a personal data sheet (cf Appendixes 1-3) asking for information regarding area of residence, postcode, mother's and father's occupation and whether the parents were currently employed. The personal data that thus became available for each recruit show that they represent diverse backgrounds with respect to both geography and social class. The social indices 'Area of residence' and 'Parents' occupation' constitute the basis of the calculation of a social class index, which is described in Chapter 3. The areas of residence range in social status from Stoke Newington to Richmond upon Thames, while the reported occupations of the parents range from market traders and waitresses to managing directors and science engineers.

2.1.2 The speakers

The choice of texts which constitute the primary material of this thesis reflects my intention to describe language variation in terms of socioeconomic class differences. The research is based on COLT texts from three speakers, and I have taken care to choose speakers who represent quite different social backgrounds. The 32 COLT

recruits were selected from five schools who responded positively to a request to participate in the project. Consequently, the speakers were not selected randomly, a fact which also applies to my own selection of the three recruits whose language is subject to study.

The social class calculation presented in Chapter 3 divides the COLT recruits into five categories on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, 1 being the highest socioeconomic group and 5 the lowest. My selection of speakers is based on three principles. Firstly, in order to secure maximum variation, I have selected two speakers who represent the lowest and the highest socioeconomic group, respectively, as well as one who represents the middle of the scale. Secondly, I have attempted to select speakers who seem typical of these three socioeconomic subgroups by considering the personal data available. And finally, as a quantitative sociolinguistic investigation requires a considerable amount of primary material in order to make generalizations about a speaker's language, I have taken into account that the recruits had actually provided a satisfactory amount of linguistic data. Therefore, I have chosen to analyze the language of three recruits who have made diligent use of the tape recorders and have thus made greater contributions to the corpus than the average recruit.

These three considerations led to the following selection of COLT-recruits: Speaker 1, Kate,¹ is a fourteen year old girl from Stoke Newington in the borough of Hackney. As will be shown later (cf Table 1 p 16), this is an area which gets the lowest possible score on the applied socioeconomic scale. As for parents' occupation, she has reported the following: Mother's occupation: doesn't work. Father's occupation: none (cf Appendix 1). *The Standard Occupational Classification* (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys:1991) was used as a source of information regarding how to classify individuals in terms of social class on the basis of occupation. This survey does not, however, give the answer as to how to classify cases such as Kate's parents in terms of social class. Nevertheless, I argue in Chapter 3 that the fact that neither of her parents are currently employed nor have a profession makes it plausible to put them in the same occupational category as those who have so-called 'unskilled professions' (ibid:12), namely category 5. Although it may seem strange that such scarce information can be used as a basis for calculation of a social class index, the available personal data made it possible to assign socioeconomic class index 5 to this speaker. Another fact which has relevance here is that Kate's mother has a non-British English (possibly Caribbean) accent, and that under the recruit's text header we find the following piece of personal information: *Respondent's mother probably of Jamaican origin.*

Speaker 2, Julian, who is thirteen, comes from Camden, which is a mid-scale

borough. Both his parents are working; his mother is a secretary and his father a tailor. This information gives him the socioeconomic class index 3.

The third speaker is Sarah, a thirteen year old girl from Westminster. As for parents' occupation, she has only given information about her father, who is a science engineer. Westminster is an area with relatively high social class status (cf p 16), and Sarah has been assigned socioeconomic class index 1.

It should be noted here that it is primarily the language of the recruit which is subject to study, and not the language of his or her conversational partners, since we have detailed personal information regarding the recruits only. Therefore, only sentences which are uttered by the recruit are included in the quantitative study in Chapter 6 and in the calculation of percentages of non-standard forms in Chapter 7. But in some cases the conversational partners provide examples which are interesting and relevant to the general discussion of non-standard verb omission. In these cases, sentences uttered by other speakers than the recruit may be included in the discussion, provided that the speaker is a teenager.

2.1.3 The texts

In a sociolinguistic study, the use of transcriptions of authentic conversations as primary material for a linguistic description can easily be defended. Many linguists argue for studying spontaneous speech as opposed to reading passages, word lists or subtly directed interviews with the informants:

If the objective is to examine the processes and mechanisms of linguistic change, or the structural characteristics of a particular variety, the best data is a speech style as close as possible to a speaker's spontaneous, everyday speech. (Milroy 1987:57)

The purpose of most sociolinguistic studies is to provide an accurate description of the vernacular of a certain group of speakers. The term 'vernacular' is defined by Labov (1972b) quoted in Milroy (1987:57f) as:

... the variety acquired in pre-adolescent years, and the variety adopted by a speaker when he is monitoring his speech style least closely. These two characterizations ... are connected in that adolescent peer groups act as a mechanism for maintaining the vernacular.

In COLT, the speakers are adolescents, and thus the first criterion of the definition of 'vernacular' has been satisfied. Moreover, the fact that the recordings have been made surreptitiously by the recruits enables us to overcome the observer's paradox and supports the claim that the texts truly represent the vernacular of London teenagers. In some COLT texts, however, we find evidence that not all the recruits have made sufficient effort to conceal the tape recorder:

- [9] 1<1>: Turn it on now, come on get on with it.
3<2>: When do you have to start?
2<3>: What, when I have to start? Friday night.
3<4>: Right, let's see it then. We start now?
2<5>: Yeah. They don't care.
3<6>: Oh, oh don't get oh, don't get all over-excited Julian, it's only a bloody tape recorder. (141602/1,2&3:1-6)

This, it could be claimed, is a slight drawback of the primary material, since the awareness of the presence of the tape-recorder could lead to modifications of the speech style. It is doubtful, however, that this awareness affects the language of the teenagers. The teenagers in [9] seem to be quite familiar with such equipment and there appears to be nothing awkward with this situation. The assumption that the speakers here are 'monitoring the speech style least closely' (Milroy 1987:57) is supported by the fact that no adult field worker is present. I will claim, then, that the COLT texts represent the vernacular of the speakers despite the awareness, in some cases, of the presence of recording equipment. I will use the term 'London teenage vernacular' to refer to the language in the corpus. This is a generic term which refers to the various, socially determined varieties which we find within the corpus.

The second slight drawback to be reckoned with can again be illustrated by an example:

- [10] 1<1>: Now to=, for some fucking dirty swear! Wo oh oh oh! You fucking bitch! You Irish bastard! Aden and Mandy have it in bed! Wo oh! Bed squeaking! Ah ha, ah ha, ah ha, ah ah! Fucking slag! Dirty whore! Piss off you Irish slag.
?<2>: Yeah, I'll fucking shag her! For a pint of fucking bitter! Ya pakis! And we hate Holland, the Dutch bastards! Ah ah! Let's go paki bashing. Yeah well bollocks to you too mate! Fucking wanker!
(135904/1&?:1-2)

The occurrence of passages such as this, packed with swearwords and taboos are fortunately not very frequent in the corpus. It is obvious that this is a means of showing off one's swearing capacity due to the presence of the tape recorder. In the selection of texts, I have avoided such blatant examples of linguistic bravado in order to steer clear of an over-representation of taboo vocabulary.

In a comparative study of language, it is essential that a large amount of conversations are analyzed in order to make the statistical analysis representative and trustworthy. I have therefore analyzed all the texts that are available for each of the three selected recruits. Recruits 1-3 are represented in the corpus with 17, 14 and 16 texts respectively. The texts vary considerably in length, ranging from a few hundred words to roughly ten thousand words. Recruits 1 and 2 are the most 'productive' ones. The total number of words from each one of recruits 1 and 2 is approximately 35,000. The corresponding total for recruit 3 is approximately 17,000 words. Similar figures for recruits 1 and 2 make a comparative statistical analysis plausible, but comparison with recruit 3 is less reliable due to a smaller amount of transcribed texts.

2.2 Sociolinguistic method

The observation that the three speakers are different with respect to socioeconomic class (cf section 2.1.2) facilitates an investigation of co-variation between the distribution of the non-standard feature and the extra-linguistic factor socioeconomic class. Socioeconomic class has been incorporated into the study for two reasons. Firstly, it is a means of showing whether non-standard primary verb omission is a characteristic feature of a certain socioeconomic group. Secondly, the socioeconomic dimension is relevant in its own right, since it enables us to examine to what extent linguistic variation due to socioeconomic class differences is apparent in adolescence (cf Romaine 1984).

The analysis of the texts proceeds in two stages. First, I identified the instances of primary verb omission, including both the cases where the primary verbs are omitted and potential cases where the verbs are present but where omission is possible in the grammar of the London teenage vernacular. This is in fact an area which requires a number of decisions as to which examples are relevant, and particular effort was put into the task of actually deciding what to count. That this may be a particularly complicated task is asserted by Labov (1972a:82f), and a

thorough discussion is dedicated to this point in later chapters (cf Chapters 4-6). On the basis of the figures that arise in the identification of the relevant examples, I have calculated the percentages of non-standard forms for each speaker. A comparison of the percentages makes it possible to show whether primary verb omission reflects the social class membership of the speakers (cf Chapter 7).

Second, the occurrences of non-standard verb omission were classified according to a number of parameters regarding the grammatical environment in which verb omission occurs. This was done by listing the occurrences in a database which has an entry for each of the parameters as well as an indicator of where the occurrence was found and the socioeconomic class index assigned to the speaker. The database forms a basis of a thorough grammatical description of patterns and constraints that affect non-standard primary verb omission. (cf Chapters 5-6)

¹ Fictitious names are used to refer to all speakers.

3 SOCIAL CLASS INDEX

3.1 Choice of social indices

In order to carry out a sociolinguistic study, some sort of index for classifying the various speakers socially is required. A classification of the speakers makes it possible to study co-variation between the sociolinguistic variable and the extralinguistic variable social class. Trudgill (1974:31-44) gives a detailed account of how such an index can be calculated, and his index is based on a number of social and socioeconomic parameters that were available to him. I have based the calculation of a social class index on information that the 32 COLT recruits provided by filling out a personal data sheet (cf Appendixes 1-3). In the present study, three pieces of information from the data sheet are used as indicators of social class: residential area, parents' occupation and whether the parents are employed or not. Residential area and parents' occupation constitute social indices in their own right, while the employed/unemployed distinction is used as a slight modification of the occupational index. In the following, I will describe how I have used these indicators to calculate a social class index score which makes it possible to divide the COLT recruits into five different social groups.

3.2 The London Boroughs

Any person who has travelled around London is able to recognize differences in social standards between the various boroughs of the city. A major social divide exists for instance between the West End and East London, and similar differences can be observed if one compares the heavily urbanized north to the more fashionable south. A considerable amount of social stigma is attached to certain areas, especially London's East End. Area of residence is a significant constituent in a person's social background, and it is of prime importance that differences in area of residence are reflected in a description of the social profile of the recruits.

The COLT material involves recruits from ten different areas of London. The Inner London boroughs are represented by recruits from Camden, Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets and Westminster. The Outer London boroughs are Barnet, Brent, Enfield and Richmond upon Thames. The last area represented in the corpus is Hertfordshire in the Greater London Metropolitan Area.

Each of the areas has been assigned a borough index on a scale ranging from 1

to 5, which reflects certain social class features of the area. The index is a complex one, calculated by means of figures from the *Key statistics for local authorities, Great Britain* (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys:1994). Four components are used in the calculation of the borough index:

- Component 1: The percentage of the borough's population who are economically active in Social classes I-II (ibid: 172;177).
- Component 2: The percentage of the borough's population who are economically active in Social classes IV-V (ibid: 172;177).
- Component 3: The percentage of the borough's families comprising lone parents with dependent child(ren) (ibid: 172;177).
- Component 4: The percentage of the borough's population who live in a house rented from a local authority (ibid: 127;132).

The effect of components 1 and 2 on the borough index is obvious. A high percentage of the population economically active in the two highest social classes, I and II, gives a high component score for the borough; a high percentage economically active in the two lowest social classes, IV and V, gives a low score. The last two components are perhaps more controversial. If an area has a high percentage of families consisting of lone parents with dependent children (single parent families), it will be perceived by most people as a low-status area. Single parents, and single mothers in particular, are in many ways financially unprivileged in today's Britain, and this counts negatively in terms of socioeconomic status. Therefore, a high percentage of single parent families gives a low component score for the borough. And finally, if a high percentage of the population live in houses rented from a local authority, such as council houses, this will yield a low score in the calculation of the borough index. Housing is used as a social class indicator in a similar way by Trudgill (1974:40f), who considers renting a house from a local council as the accommodation carrying the least status.

The four factors in the borough index are weighted equally, and an approximation of the average score constitutes the borough index. For comparison, the figures for Greater London and Britain are included in the calculation. The following Borough indices are attributed to the ten areas represented in the corpus (The highest score yields Borough index 1.):

Table 1: COLT Borough index

BOROUGH/AREA	COMP 1	COMP 2	COMP 3	COMP 4	AVERAGE	BOROUGH INDEX
Richmond	1	1	1	1	1	1
Barnet	2	1	2	1	1,5	2
Hertfordshire	2	3	1	2	2	2
Westminster	2	2	3	2	2,25	2
Camden	2	2	4	3	2,75	3
Enfield	4	3	2	2	2,75	3
Brent	4	3	4	2	3,25	3
Islington	3	4	5	5	4,25	4
Hackney	4	4	5	5	4,5	5
Tower Hamlets	5	5	5	5	5	5
Greater London	3	3	3	2	2,75	3
Britain	4	4	2	2	3	3

The figures show that the selected COLT recruits represent a wide range of different boroughs in terms of social class. Indeed, as 1 is the highest score and 5 the lowest, all the possible borough categories are represented. We also observe that there is a fair degree of consistency within the boroughs with respect to the four components that the borough index is based on. Two boroughs, curiously the very top and very bottom ones (Richmond and Tower Hamlets), have the same component scores throughout. No borough has a variation in component scores greater than 2 points.

It should be noted that it is the reversed scale of the unapproximated average of the four components which is used in the calculation of social class index for the recruits in the following section.

3.3 Social class based on occupation

3.3.1 Recruit's occupational score

The information regarding parents' occupation is treated in accordance with *The Standard Occupational Classification* (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS): 1991). Each parent has been classified by the standard categories I-V, except for a single, unclassifiable recruit who did not provide any information regarding parents' occupation. The OPCS classification gives a detailed list of how to categorize each single occupation, and each profession falls into one of the following broad categories, known as 'social classes':

- I Professional etc occupations
- II Managerial and technical occupations

- III Skilled occupations
- IV Partly skilled occupations
- V Unskilled occupations (ibid:12)

In some cases, however, it is problematic to classify the parents in this way, since the recruits reported that the parents neither work nor have a profession (cf p 9). In these cases, the parents have been given the same occupational score as that of individuals who belong to class V. The reason is that, assumingly, the parents possess the same - but not greater - occupational skills as that of people in this category. They do not associate themselves with any particular occupational category since they have not reported to do so. After all, a recruit whose father is a lawyer is most likely to have reported his profession rather than not mentioning it at all, despite the fact that the father may be unemployed at the time. Besides, recruits who gave the answer 'none' as to parents' profession consistently answered 'no' to the question of parents' employment. These parents are thus to be considered 'unskilled' in two senses, firstly by virtue of reporting no profession, and secondly by the fact that they are not currently working within any particular profession. It therefore seems plausible that these individuals are best categorized as members of class V.

There is a lot of controversy connected with the issue of how to weigh parents' occupational scores in social class index calculation (cf Milroy 1987:30). Most sociolinguists (eg Trudgill 1974, Macaulay 1977) use only the father's occupation as indicator of social class. Traditionally, the male adult of a family has been viewed as the breadwinner, and his occupational score has determined the social class of the rest of the family:

... in many applications the allocation of individuals to Social Classes or Socioeconomic Groups is done by reference to the occupation of a household reference person. The rules normally used in censuses and surveys to identify the household reference person have the effect of selecting the male in the majority of cases. (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys 1991:16)

More recently, however, the mother's occupation is also being taken into consideration, due to the increase in the number of families with both parents working, as well as a gradual process of levelling of the sex roles. It is claimed that the mother's occupation in many cases contributes a great deal to the family economy and should be acknowledged as an important indicator of the family's socioeconomic status. On this account, I have chosen to include the mother's

occupation in the calculation of the social class index. Nevertheless, I have weighted the parents' occupational scores slightly differently. The reason is that, although the mother may contribute to the family economy, it is arguably the case that she does not contribute to the same extent as the father, since he traditionally fills the role as breadwinner. Besides, socioeconomic status of a family is still predominantly determined by the occupation of the male adult, despite the increase in employment opportunities for women. The OPCS quotation (previous page) showed that it is customary to select a household reference person in calculations of this kind. I have followed this principle only in cases where one of the parents does not contribute to the income of the family because he or she is a student, housewife or an old-age pensioner (OAP). In such cases it is obvious that this parent relies on the income of his or her spouse and is thus given the same occupational score as her or him.

For simplicity, the scale of socioeconomic groups shown above has been reversed, so that in the calculation of occupational index of an individual belonging to the highest occupational category, I, is assigned an occupational score of 5 points, while the lowest category, V, yields occupational score 1 etc. The figures for mother's and father's occupations have been weighted by 3 to 2, so that instead of calculating the average of these two figures I have multiplied the father's occupational score by 3/5 and the mother's score by 2/5. This gives the following formula for calculation of the Recruit's occupational score A:

$$\text{Recruit's occupational score A} = \frac{2 \times \text{Mother's occupational score} + 3 \times \text{Father's occupational score}}{5}$$

This formula, however, has not been applied in the cases where only one parent is mentioned on the personal data sheet. We are ignorant as to why the other parent has been left out. Presumably the question of his or her occupation is not applicable, since he or she is not residing with the rest of the family for reasons such as divorce or death. In these cases, the parent mentioned counts as breadwinner, and her or his occupational score counts as the recruit's occupational score without modification. There is no reason to apply weighting here since, in the single parent families, the economic function of the breadwinner is the same regardless of whether the single parent is the mother or the father of the child. (Not surprisingly, it is the mother who is the breadwinner in most of the single parent families that are represented in the corpus.)

3.3.2 The non-working factor

In most sociolinguistic studies, the factor of unemployment is ignored in the calculation of a social class index. In my opinion, this is a major drawback of these studies, because unemployment certainly has a severe effect on people's economic situation and thus on the socioeconomic status of the family. The number of people who are long-term unemployed has reached unacceptable levels in some parts of Britain, particularly in urban areas such as London. A social class index applied in a sociolinguistic description of an urban dialect ought to reflect this fact. I have therefore chosen to include the employed/unemployed distinction by including a 'non-working factor' in the calculation. Any recruit who has answered 'no' to the question 'Currently employed?' for one or both of his parents is assigned a non-working factor of 1 or 2, respectively. A non-working factor of 1 reduces the recruit's occupational score by 0.25, and a non-working factor of 2 reduces the occupational score by 0.5:

Recruit's occupational score B = Recruit's occupational score A - 0.25x(Non-working factor)

It should be noted that the non-working factor incorporates all cases where one or two of the parents are not contributing to the income of the family economy by working. Thus, parents who are housewives, students and OAPs are considered 'not working' in this sense. This can be justified by the fact that two salaries contribute to the wealth of the family to a significantly higher degree than one, although unemployment benefit or pensions may contribute to a certain degree. These benefits are usually much smaller than a full-time job salary, and thus the non-working parent's contribution to the socioeconomic status of the family is minimal. In such cases, the spouse of the non-working parent is considered 'household reference person' (cf quotation above), and the non-working parent inherits the occupational score of his or her spouse. This is not the case, of course, if the spouse is not mentioned at all, in which case the family is considered a single parent family, and the socioeconomic status of the lone parent determines the social class of the family at large.

3.4 Calculation of the social class index

The previous discussion showed how the two indicators of socioeconomic class were calculated: recruit's occupational score (incorporating the non-working factor) and area of residence. The following is a description of the method of calculating the multiple item index on the basis of these two indicators. In sociological studies which require a stratification of individuals with respect to social class, occupation is commonly considered the best single indicator of social class:

Occupational position is the best single indicator of social stratificational position in contemporary American society ... this is probably also true in any industrial society. ... In contemporary industrial society the single item most commonly used for social class indices is occupational position. (Barber 1957 quoted in Trudgill 1974:36)

In addition to occupation, I have included area of residence and the employed/unemployed distinction for the purpose of making the socioeconomic class index a more subtle one than the single indicator would do. Of the two indicators that are available in the present study, I consider parents' occupation the most important one because it presumably is a better indicator of social class than area of residence. Information regarding parent's occupation is specific to the single recruit, while area of residence is shared with other recruits. No borough of London is completely consistent as regards the social class of its inhabitants. In fact, most of the boroughs are quite complex in this respect. A number of recruits come from Camden, which is probably one of the most heterogeneous and 'unclassifiable' boroughs of London in terms of social class. Here we find the picturesque Upper Middle Class village of Hampstead as well as typical Working Class areas such as Camden Town. A fair amount of complexity in certain boroughs justifies a weighting of this indicator as less important than parents' occupation. I have therefore weighted the two indicators differently by multiplying the recruit's occupational score by 2 before calculating the Recruit's total score. This reflects my view of the relative importance of the two indicators. The weighting is done by applying the following formula for the calculation of the recruits' total score:

$$\text{Recruit's total score} = \frac{2 \times (\text{Recruit's occupational score}) + \text{Borough score}}{3}$$

The figures for 'Recruit's total score' have then been approximated and the scale has once again been reversed. The result is the recruit's Socioeconomic class index, which

forms a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the highest socioeconomic class. For the selected recruits, the figures are as follows: (Both the original COLT recruit numbers and the numbers used in the thesis are indicated.)

Table 2: Socioeconomic class index

SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS INDEX FOR THE SELECTED RECRUITS					
RECRUIT NUMBER, THESIS	RECRUIT NUMBER, COLT	RECRUIT OCCUPATIONAL SCORE	BOROUGH SCORE	RECRUIT'S TOTAL SCORE	SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS INDEX
1 (Kate)	6	0	1,50	0,83	5
2 (Julian)	17	3	3,25	3,08	3
3 (Sarah)	13	5	3,75	4,58	1

4 IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT EXAMPLES

4.1 Criteria for primary verb omission

My first objective in the description of primary verb omission is to outline the criteria which are used in determining whether a primary verb is absent or present. This may seem a trivial task, considering that the primary material consists of written texts, but it becomes more complicated when we take into account that the texts are transcripts of tape-recorded conversations with varying degrees of audibility and clarity. It is my intention to provide a description of primary verb omission which is as realistic and accurate as possible. I have therefore listened to each occurrence of the variable in order to make sure that the sentence uttered is a genuine example of primary verb omission. I have also listened to the occurrences where the speakers have used the standard English variant, ie where the verbs are not omitted although omission is possible. In the vast majority of cases it has been possible to decide whether the verb is present or absent on the basis of the tape recordings, despite the fact that, in some cases, the sound quality of the audio tapes is not too good. The criteria used in this process are primarily of a phonological nature.

4.1.1 Sentences and turns

The first step in the identification of relevant examples was to read through the texts, noting the cases where the transcribers have left out the relevant verbs, BE and HAVE. The transcribers have used conventional punctuation, including conventionally contracted verb forms such as 's and 've, and more informal forms like *gonna* ('going to') *wanna* ('want to'), *gotta* ('got to') etc. This gives the texts a written-like appearance:

- [11] 4<439>: Kate, what's that?
1<440>: Mike.
4<441>: Oh. Recording?
1<442>: No.
...
1<444>: No, I said to Marsha do you wanna come to a rave up.
4<445>: Yeah.

- 1<446>: Yeah and I got so erm <unclear> <nv>laugh</nv>
 4<447>: Did you say, did you say erm
 1<448>: I can't say it again. Can't say that to you Ian.
 (134803/1&4:439-448)

[11] illustrates that it is common in speech to omit initial words with little semantic content, such as <440> (*It's a* mike), <441> (*Are you*) recording? and <448> (*I*) can't say that to you Ian. Although grammatically incomplete, the discourse units that we find in utterances <440>, <441> and <448> still count as 'sentences' in my analysis. Hence, the term 'sentence' is used here to refer to both grammatically complete and incomplete word strings (cf Quirk et al 1985:47). Sentences are marked off by conventional punctuation in the orthographic transcription, and a sentence boundary may or may not correlate with a pause in the conversation or a change in turn. In accordance with most discourse analysts (cf Schiffrin 1994), 'turn' is defined as everything one speaker says before the next speaker takes over. Since the subject of study here is an aspect of grammar, I prefer to use the term 'sentence' instead of discourse analytic terms like 'move' or 'act' (cf Sinclair & Coulthard 1975; Stenström 1994).

The task of identifying examples relevant for the study of primary verb omission at first involved analyzing the sentences and observing whether or not the transcribers had indicated that the sentence contains a tensed verb in the relevant contexts (cf Chapter 5).

4.1.2 Aspects of phonology

The next step was to go through the tapes to ascertain that the primary verbs were indeed left out by the speakers in the examples where the transcribers had indicated so. Observing that the London teenage vernacular allows primary verbs to be omitted, it can be inferred that a speaker in certain contexts has three different variants to choose from: the full form of the verb, the contracted form and the omitted form. In speech in general, the contracted forms usually by far outnumber the full forms of 'contractable' verbs. In the COLT texts, contracted forms are transcribed in the conventional way by using apostrophes. The contracted forms of the verbs BE and HAVE have the following phonological realizations in standard English:

Table 3: Phonological realizations of contracted forms of BE and HAVE in standard English

Verb	Verb form	Contracted form	Phonological realizations
BE	am	'm	/m/
	are	're	/r/, /r/
	is	's	/s/, /z/
HAVE	have	've	/v/, /v/
	has	's	/s/, /z/
	had	'd	/d/, /d/

The task of identifying examples of verb omission involved listening for these phonemes in the relevant environments. In a lot of examples this was a straightforward matter:

[12] I got enough shoes. [ai gOt inUf Su:z] (134803/1:71)

[13] You better check. [ju: be?' tSek] (137701/1:230)

The first criterion used to determine whether the primary verb is absent or present accounts for all the cases where it would be realized by a single consonant. This criterion involves simply listening for the relevant consonant, /m/, /r/, /s/, /z/, /v/ or /d/. In cases like [12] and [13], where there is definitely no audible consonant between the subject of the sentence and the following words *got* and *better*, respectively, we are dealing with genuine cases of primary verb omission, as indicated in the phonological transcription. The speakers' omission of the respective verb forms 've and 'd is also reflected in the orthographic transcription. Since standard English requires these tensed verb forms for the sentences to be grammatical, [12] and [13] are examples of non-standard verb omission. It should be noted here that [12] could be grammatical in standard English, provided that *got* were the past form of the verb GET. It is obvious from the context, however, that this is not the case. The proposition expressed in [12] is that the speaker possesses enough shoes at the moment of speaking, and not that she obtained shoes at some earlier point. In standard English this has to be expressed by the present perfective, and the tensed verb 've would be required in such a context:

[12a] I've got enough shoes. [aiv gOt inUf Su:z]¹

(For a further discussion of this point see section 4.2.)

The next criterion is the one applied in contexts where the contracted verb is realized by the vowel /ʔ/ or the combinations /ʔv/ or /ʔd/ in standard English, ie the candidates are the 're form of BE and the forms 've and 'd after consonants:

[14] What you trying to do Sir? [wO? ju traiN tʔ du: s%:] (134803/1:254)

[14a] What're you trying to do Sir? [wOt ʔ ju traiN tʔ du: s%:]

[15] Where you going now? [wE ju gʔ uiN nau] (134801/1:3)

[15a] Where're you going now? [wErʔ ju gʔ uiN nau]

[16] What you been reading? [wO? ju bin ri:diN] (134802/1:3)

[16a] What've you been reading? [wOt ʔv ju bin ri:diN]

Here the absence of the primary verb is evidenced by the lack of /ʔ/ or one of the combinations containing this vowel sound, after the *wh*-pronoun. In such cases it may be sufficient to observe the number of syllables that the sentences consist of. In [14] there is no schwa between the glottal stop of the pronoun *what* and the following pronoun *you*, hence the sentence has only seven syllables. The absence of /ʔ/, and thus absence of a tensed verb, makes the sentence an example of non-standard primary verb omission. In [15] the absence of /ʔ/ coincides with absence of the linking /r/ of the *wh*-word. The lack of a tensed verb 've in [16] is manifested by the lack of /ʔv/ after the glottal stop. Again, one may use either of the two criteria - listening for the relevant phonemes or counting the syllables of the utterance - in determining the absence or presence of the tensed verb.

In certain examples the presence or absence of a primary verb may be obscured by similarity between the phonological realization of the verb form and an adjacent phoneme:

[17] They're bad they're rough and they idiots. (137904/1:71)

In order to be able to determine whether a speaker omits the verb in a certain context it is required that the contracted form of the verb is sufficiently phonologically distinct from the preceding and following sounds. In the phrase *they're rough* it is not possible to determine whether the verb 're is pronounced because this verb form - if present - would have been indistinguishable from the initial /r/ of the following adjective *rough*. It is therefore not possible to say whether this phrase is an example of non-standard verb omission or not. For this reason, cases like *they're rough* are

ignored in the discussion of primary verb omission, and do not count as either an example of the standard or the non-standard variant. Incidentally, [17] gives a good illustration of how marginal phonological nuances elicit variations in a grammatical feature. In the initial clause *They're bad* [Dei' bæd], the pronoun is pronounced only slightly differently from *they* in the last clause *they idiots* [Dei idi'ts], but this difference is great enough to enable us to make judgements regarding the presence or absence of the verb form.

4.2 Grammatical ambiguity

We now turn to cases where the question of omission of a primary verb is indeterminable for other reasons than the phonological ones described above, in other words, examples where it is the grammatical structure of the sentence which leads to indeterminacy.

4.2.1 Grammatical ambiguity in connection with GET

Grammatical ambiguity may arise in connection with verbs which have identical forms for the past form and the *-ed* participle. As we have seen (cf p 24) this is the case with GET, and most commonly ambiguities arise in connection with this verb:

[18] I got really cold hands. (141205/1:89)

For a speaker who allows the auxiliary HAVE to be omitted in the present perfective, [18] is ambiguous with two possible readings. Either, *got* is the past form of GET, ie a finite verb form, and the sentence is acceptable in standard English, or *got* is the *-ed* participle of GET, and the sentence involves a non-standard present perfective with primary verb omission. In fact, a lot of sentences where *got* is not preceded by a form of HAVE are potentially ambiguous with a simple past reading and a present perfective reading where the auxiliary HAVE is omitted. Instances of syntactic indeterminacy of this kind must be resolved at a linguistic level other than the purely grammatical one. This can be done by considering the semantic properties of the verb phrase, or alternatively, the indeterminacy may be resolved pragmatically by considering contextual aspects such as conversational topic. An example like [18] underlines the importance of examining context in discussions of syntactic

phenomena.

The two different grammatical readings relevant to [18] will have different semantic outputs. The grammatical and semantic features that are attributed to [18] may be schematized in the following ways (A or B), according to whether we attribute the simple past reading or the present perfective reading to the verb phrase:

[18] I got really cold hands. (141205/1:89)

A) Grammatical features

Verb form: *got* = past form of GET
Tense/aspect: *got* = simple past tense
Finite/non-finite: *got* = finite verb

Semantic features

Time reference: *got* refers to a past event

Sociolinguistic features

Standard English: the sentence is grammatical²
London teenage vernacular: the sentence is grammatical

B) Grammatical features

Verb form: *got* = *-ed* participle of GET
Tense/aspect: \emptyset +*got* = present perfective³
Finite/non-finite: *got* = non-finite verb

Semantic features

Time reference: \emptyset +*got* refers to past time with current relevance, ie a state leading up to the present

Sociolinguistic features

Standard English: the sentence is ungrammatical
London teenage vernacular: the sentence is grammatical

Since the sentence itself does not reveal the grammatical properties of the verb *got*, we need to look into the semantic content of the verb phrase in order to decide which interpretation is the correct one. Due to this grammatical ambiguity it is necessary to add context to determine the semantic properties of [18]:

[19] 17<88>: Oh yeah, I remember that yeah
1<89>: Y= we put it in the garden and *I got really cold hands* and then was just about to put them into hot water when you said don't

- cos you'll get chilblains
- 17<90>: That's right. Put them in cold water
- 1<91>: Yeah, and gradually heat it up
- 17<92>: That's right (141205/1&17:88-92)

Considered in isolation, the sentence *I got really cold hands* is ambiguous because speaker 1 occasionally omits the auxiliary HAVE in the present perfective. Examined in its context, however, the sentence is most definitely an example of the simple past tense. There are three ways of observing this fact. Firstly, we note that all the other finite verbs in the string of coordinated clauses in turn <89> (viz *put, was, said*) are past forms. Hence, grammatical parallellism is provided by the other verbs (although *put*, like *got*, is of course potentially ambiguous). Similarly, semantic parallellism may be observed in the utterance, since all the above mentioned finite verbs refer to past events. Thirdly, we may say that the structural ambiguity is resolved by a consideration of the pragmatic content of the utterance, since the topic discussed could be labelled 'past events shared by both speakers'.

There are of course many other verbs in the English language where ambiguities of this kind may arise. Other possibilities are a whole range of irregular verbs such as BURN, CUT, HEAR, SPELL. However, GET certainly appears to be more frequent than the rest.

4.2.2 Grammatical ambiguity in connection with DO

A subclass of the verbs with identical past form and *-ed* participle are the ones where either a non-standard past form or a non-standard *-ed* participle results in identical forms. In the London dialect, DO is one of these verbs, and grammatical ambiguity may arise due to the frequent non-standard past form *done* :

- [20] 1<110>: Could she do mine?
- 12<111>: Well she does hair.
- 1<112>: She does hair?
- 7 <113>: Yeah.
- 1<114>: Oh! I thought you meant that *she just done hers*.
- 7<115>: Well obviously she do her hair then she can do a weave
innit?
- 12<116>: On the side of mine something like that.

7 <117>: Well you could, like Sharon did it on Eastenders at the side.
(135207/1,7&12:110-117)

In turn <114> the clause *she just done hers* is ambiguous, with a simple past reading and a present/past perfective reading. The clause is equivalent to either standard English *she just did hers* or *she has/had just done hers*. This is because this speaker, like many other speakers of the London dialect, has two alternative forms for the past form of DO, viz *did* and *done*. Since it is not possible to determine the grammatical properties of the verb phrase in this example on the basis of grammar alone, the semantic and/or pragmatic properties of the utterance must be taken into consideration. In an example like [20], however, it is quite complicated to judge which interpretation was intended on the basis of semantics or pragmatics. Both interpretations, *I thought you meant that she just did hers* and *I thought you meant that she has/had just done hers* are likely. The interpretation seems to depend on how we analyze the adverbial *just*, as equivalent to the adverbial *only* (first interpretation) or as an adverbial of time meaning 'a short time ago' (second interpretation). In the context of this subordinate *that*-clause the semantic difference between the two interpretations is marginal. Semantic or pragmatic considerations are not of much help here, and cases involving indeterminacy of this kind are ignored in the calculation of percentages of non-standard verb omission.

In fact, there is a great deal of variation in the use of standard and non-standard past forms and *-ed* participles in the London dialect. In the texts I have studied, DO by far outnumbers the other verbs where such variation can occur, and idiosyncratic differences seem to play an important part here. Verbs which may have non-standard identical forms for the past form and the *-ed* participle are the following (adapted from Edwards 1993:220f):

Table 4: Non-standard past forms and *-ed* participles

Present	Past form	ed participle
break	broke	broke
come	come	come
give	give	give
run	run	run
drive	drove	drove
forget	forgot	forgot
speak	spoke	spoke
steal	stole	stole
take	took	took
do	done	done

We have seen that the potential grammatical ambiguity in examples like [18] and [19] can be resolved at different linguistic levels, by considering the grammatical, semantic or pragmatic environments in which the sentence occurs. It may be, however, that such considerations are redundant, since the sentence in a way 'disambiguates itself' due to the presence of a certain sentence element, in particular an adverbial of time:

- [21] 4<54>:Your mum gave me a ninety niner and a
1<55>:What's
4<56>:and a erm ...
1<57>:For the rest of the viewers what's a ninety niner Liam? ...
4<58>:Ninety niner, *remember what I done to you last night*.
1<59>:Yeah what exactly is a ninety niner?
4<60>:You know <laughing>you know what it is</>.
1<61>:No I don't know. <nv>laugh</nv>
many<62>: <nv>laugh</nv> ...
4<63>:What I done was er erm what I done was erm erm erm erm
er
1<64>:Do you want a ham sandwich or do you want a ... come on
<nv>laugh</nv> ... what's a ninety niner Ian?
(135001/4&1:54-64)

In turn <58>, the sentence *remember what I done to you last night* cannot be an example of non-standard omission of the auxiliary 've. This is due to the presence of the time adverbial *last night*, which indicates a specific point in the past and requires the past tense. In other words, *done* is an example of a non-standard past form, and is

disregarded in the calculation of percentages of non-standard verb omission. The same applies to the two instances in the repeated (though incomplete) *wh*-clefted sentence in turn <63>. (Incidentally, these examples would have to be ignored in the calculation at any rate, since they are uttered by a speaker other than the recruit. They are included here for the sake of illustration.)

4.3 Conclusion

The previous discussion has shown that, in the quantitative analysis of the texts, it has been necessary to set aside certain examples of standard or non-standard variants of the sociolinguistic variable *which*, on the surface, seem to be relevant. This may be due to one of the following factors: firstly, the sentence may involve phonological indeterminacy which makes it impossible to verify whether a primary verb is absent or not; secondly, the indeterminacy may be of a grammatical kind which may or may not be resolvable through semantic or pragmatic considerations. If semantics or pragmatics does not make the sentence clearer it will have to be ignored. And thirdly, we recall that sentences which seem relevant are ignored in the counting if uttered by someone other than the recruit (cf p 10).

¹ Examples marked [12a], [14a] etc are modifications of authentic COLT examples, marked [12], [14] etc.

² I have used two the term 'grammatical' in two different senses in this context. In this example, it is used in the sense of 'well-formed', while the headline *Grammatical features* refers to the more general sense of the word, ie 'that relates to grammar'.

³ The notation $\emptyset + got$ is used to indicate that the interpretation discussed is one which involves omission of a primary verb, where the symbol \emptyset signifies the 'zero-verb' (in this case 've'). Thus, it is the omitted form \emptyset together with the realized form *got* which form the present perfective and not the word *got* on its own.

5 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMARY VERB OMISSION

Having established the criteria by which examples of non-standard primary verb omission are registered, I will now turn to a general description of the grammatical environments where primary verb omission is possible in the London teenage vernacular. As an introduction to this topic it is necessary to note a basic distinction between two fundamentally different types of omission: sentence-initial and sentence-medial omission. Although both types occur frequently, I shall have far less to say about one than the other, as it turns out to be less relevant to the topic of this thesis.

The purpose of this and the following chapter is to give a preliminary answer to the question 'Where can primary verb omission occur?'. The point of finding the relevant environments in which to look for primary verb omission is closely related to Labov's discussion (1972a:82ff) on deciding what to count in a quantitative sociolinguistic investigation, because, in order to determine the frequency of primary verb omission for the various speakers, it is necessary to know exactly the total set of contexts where omission is possible.

5.1 Sentence-initial vs sentence-medial omission

The distinction between what I call 'sentence-initial' and 'sentence-medial' verb omission can be illustrated by the following examples:

- [22] Gotta pretend that's not on though. (137701/1:14)
- [23] Granddad still around? (134902/? :204)
- [24] They most probably gone down as well. (134901/7:82)
- [25] Where you lot going today? (134901/1:1)

What the four sentences have in common is, of course, the lack of a tensed form of BE or HAVE. [22] is different from the other three because both the subject and the primary verb are omitted. If [22] and [23] were to be written out as grammatically complete sentences, we would find the omitted words *I've* and *Is* initially in the sentence. This is not the case in [24] and [25]. Here, the omitted verbs *'ve* and *'re* would occur sentence-medially. This difference can be illustrated by means of a reconstruction of the examples. 'Ø' indicates where the omitted verb form would appear if the examples were written out as grammatically complete sentences:

- [22a] Ø Gotta pretend that's not on though. (137701/1:14)
 [23a] Ø Granddad still around? (134902/? :204)
 [24a] They Ø most probably gone down as well. (134901/7:82)
 [25a] Where Ø you lot going today? (134901/1:1)

In [24] and [25] the zero-verb comes after a sentence element which is a syntactic constituent of a clause where the omitted verb form would constitute the finite verb. Whenever the zero-verb is preceded by a clause-constituent, the sentence is an example of what is labelled 'sentence-medial verb omission'. In declarative sentences, such as [24], the word preceding the zero-verb is always the subject of the sentence, since declaratives require the subject-verb-object (SVO) pattern. In a *wh*-question, like [25], the sentence element preceding the zero-verb is always the *wh*-word itself.

If, as in [22] and [23], the zero-verb is not preceded by any clause-constituent, the omission is labelled 'sentence-initial verb omission'. This type covers two different sub-classes of examples: the ones which involve omission of both subject and verb, eg [22], and the ones which involve omission of the verb only, eg [23].

It is obvious that the issue regarding which words may be subject to omission is closely related to the issue of sentence type. For instance, sentence-initial omission can never occur in *wh*-questions, because these require a *wh*-word sentence-initially. Moreover, the same sentence may involve either sentence-initial or sentence-medial omission, depending on prosody. For the sake of illustration, I have modified example [24] slightly (intonation indicated in brackets):

- [24b] Ø They gone down as well? [They gone D/OWN as well]
 [24c] They Ø gone down as well. [They gone D\OWN as well]

The rising intonation (indicated by the symbol '/') in [24b] implies an interpretation of the sentence as a *yes/no* question. *Yes/no* questions require subject-verb inversion, and hence the omission of HAVE is sentence-initial. In the declarative counterpart [24c], the SVO pattern is required, and the omission is sentence-medial. There is, however, a third plausible interpretation of [24], given that [24] has the same intonation pattern as [24b]:

- [24d] They Ø gone down as well? [They gone D/OWN as well]

The standard English equivalent of [24d], *They've gone down as well?*, would be classified as a so-called declarative question (cf Quirk et al 1985:814), which has the

grammatical structure of a statement, but generally has a rising intonation. If we interpret [24d] as a declarative question, it must be acknowledged as a case of primary verb omission and, in fact, it could be claimed that *They gone down as well?* is grammatically ambiguous with the two readings [24b] and [24d]. *Yes/no* questions which may be interpreted as either examples of sentence-initial or sentence-medial primary verb omission are set aside due to the grammatical ambiguity involved. There can be no arguments for one or the other of the two interpretations [24b] and [24d] because the difference in pragmatic and semantic content between the two is marginal (if, indeed, existent at all).

The examples of sentence-initial verb omission are no different from the grammatically incomplete turns in example [11] (cf section 4.1.1), quoted to illustrate what is meant by the term 'sentence'. They are examples of what Quirk et al (1985:895) call 'situational (or 'weak') ellipsis', and are used, it appears, by all speakers of English in informal contexts:

more typically, situational ellipsis is initial, especially taking the form of omission of subject and/or operator; eg: *(Do you) Want something?* In such cases, which are restricted to familiar (generally spoken) English, the ellipted words are those that normally occur before the onset of a tone unit, and hence have weak stress and low pitch. It may therefore be more appropriate to ascribe the omission to subaudible utterance or some other reductive process on the phonological, rather than on the grammatical level. (Quirk et al 1985:896)

Regardless of whether we ascribe sentence-initial verb omission to grammar or phonology, the fact remains that it is acknowledged as a feature of spoken English in general, including standard English. Since the focus of interest in this thesis is aspects in which the London teenage vernacular deviates from standard English, the discussion of sentence-initial omission becomes less relevant to the topic.

In sentences of the type illustrated by examples [24] and [25], standard English would require a tensed verb. Presumably, most speakers of standard English would find these sentences unacceptable, but, as we have seen, this is not the case with speakers of the London teenage vernacular. Sentence-medial verb omission is therefore one of the points where these two varieties of English differ.

The notion of grammaticality in relation to examples like [22] and [23] is, however, slightly problematic. Although they are 'ungrammatical' in the sense of not constituting grammatically complete units, no one would conceivably reject these utterances on the grounds of well-formedness. They are merely results of the

speakers' opting for simplicity and economy, features that usually characterize speech in general. This type of verb omission is described rather in detail in Quirk et al (1985:896-899). They put forward a number of restrictions in the use of situational ellipsis, and presumably the same restrictions apply to all varieties of English. Therefore, it is unnecessary to go into further detail regarding sentence-initial omission in relation to the London teenage vernacular. Examples of sentence-initial verb omission are only interesting to the extent that the speakers fail to adhere to the principles sketched by Quirk et al. At present, I have found no indications that the London teenage vernacular contrasts with standard English in this respect, and a discussion of this point in connection with a description of the London teenage vernacular becomes superfluous. The working assumption here is that it is only sentence-medial omissions that are examples of non-standard verb omissions proper. The main concern in the rest of the thesis will therefore be with examples of the type illustrated by examples [24] and [25]. Since primary verb omission in *yes/no* questions is always sentence-initial (cf examples [23a] & [24b]), these will not be discussed to any considerable extent. The terms 'question' and 'interrogative sentence' are therefore applied in the following to refer to *wh*-interrogatives.

5.2 The major types of primary verb omission

I will now turn to the description of the various types of sentence-medial primary verb omission. The purpose of the grammatical description of the phenomenon (Chapters 5 & 6) is to account for the rules and constraints which govern primary verb omission in the London teenage vernacular. The description of rules and constraints will make it possible to state exactly in which grammatical environments omission can occur. Such a description is required in order to register to what extent the various speakers omit the primary verbs (Chapter 7).

It is convenient to categorize the examples that were found according to the grammatical properties of the sentences in which they occur. The categorization of primary verb omission is based on three grammatical parameters: firstly, whether the omitted primary verb is a form of either BE or HAVE, secondly, whether it occurs in a declarative or interrogative sentence and thirdly, whether the omitted form is an auxiliary, part of a semi-auxiliary (eg BE+*going to*, cf p 38) or a main verb. Eighteen categories of sentence-medial primary verb omission were identified, and examples from each category are given below. As a matter of fact, the actual division into categories may be somewhat contentious and is therefore discussed in the

sections that follow. The categories are numbered according to the three parameters, so that category 1ai signifies omission of BE (hence '1') in a declarative sentence ('a') when it is an auxiliary ('i'). Category 3 is a 'combined example category' because it includes both BE and HAVE. Examples from this category are not as frequent as those belonging to categories 1 and 2, but they are included as separate types of omission to show that primary verb omission can occur in a number of so-called 'special grammatical environments'.

- 1 Omission of BE
 - a Omission of BE in declarative sentences
 - i BE = auxiliary verb; before *-ing* participle or *-ed* participle
 - [26] Hundreds of schools doing it. (132610/1:26)
 - [27] You see them outside. They all lined up, and you can see Kate and Pete going like this. (137803/1:292)
 - ii BE = part of semi-auxiliary BE + *going to / gonna*
 - [28] I dunno if we gonna be, oh Miss <name> didn't say I'm, yeah, no, he said separate. (136404/1:218)
 - iii BE = copula
 - [29] They're bad, they're rough and they idiots. (137904/1:71)
 - [30] Them trainers alright, innit Sir. (134803/1:114)
 - b Omission of BE in *wh*-interrogative sentences
 - i BE = auxiliary verb; before *-ing* participle or *-ed* participle
 - [31] Where you lot going today? (134901/1:1)
 - ii BE = part of semi-auxiliary BE + *going to / gonna*
 - [32] What one you gonna get? (136602/1:91)
 - [33] What you gonna stick on here? (137701/1:248)
 - iii BE = copula
 - [34] How much the chips? (136403/1:35)
 - [35] What question you on? (135004/10:175)
- 2 Omission of HAVE
 - a Omission of HAVE in declarative sentences
 - i HAVE = auxiliary verb; before *-ed* participle (other than *got*)
 - [36] Well, you seen her. (134801/1:1)
 - [37] Marsha gone shops. (134801/1:7)
 - ii HAVE = part of semi-auxiliary *got to / gotta* and HAVE = auxiliary before *-ed* participle *got*

- [38] This one we gotta do now (136403/1:16)
 [39] I got much more homework than you Nick.
 (139603/1:83)
- iii HAVE = part of modal idiom *had better*
 [40] Come now, come on we better go. (132601/2:268)
- b Omission of HAVE in *wh*-interrogative sentences
- i HAVE = auxiliary verb; before-*ed* participle (other than *got*)
 [41] So what you been reading then? (134802/1:1)
 [42] How long you been standing here for?
 (135207/12:231)
- ii HAVE = part of semi-auxiliary *got to / gotta* and
 HAVE = auxiliary before -*ed* participle *got*
 [43] So what you gotta say about Glen? (132616/1:1)
 [44] What you got in there? (140402/1:134)
- iii HAVE = main verb; before *better*
 [45] Why you better take it back? (constructed example, cf
 p 66)
- 3 Omission of BE and HAVE in special grammatical environments
- a Omission in subordinate clauses
- i Omission in reported clauses (ie nominal *that*- clauses)
 [46] But you say she got hay fever. (134902/12:231)
- ii Omission in dependent interrogative clauses
 [47] I don't know what you gotta do, you know.
 (135003/10:58)
- iii Omission in conditional clauses
 [48] You got anything to say, say it out loud. (134804/4:32)
- iv Omission in relative clauses
 [49] Right then, what was the other one? The one we on
 now? Irish. (138201/1:241)
- b Omission of BE in pseudo-cleft sentences
- i Omission in cleft sentences with *wh*-pronoun
 [50] Well what we did we stopped at this track and we
 turned round. (141205/1:154)
 [51] What they do they say oh it's shit. (137803/1:234)

- ii Omission in paraphrastic pseudo-cleft sentences (cf 6.1.7)
 - [52] The only problem with it it's lost a lot of power.
(141405/1:9)

The survey shows that BE can be omitted when it is in copular or auxiliary function, while HAVE as a main verb is not included in the survey (cf 6.2.1). I have separated examples involving the verb phrases BE + *going to / gonna*, HAVE + *got to / gotta* and the expression *had better* from the rest of the examples. There are two reasons for doing this. Firstly, Quirk et al (1985:136ff) acknowledge two categories of 'verbs of intermediate function', the 'semi-auxiliaries', including the phrase BE + *going to / gonna* and the 'modal idioms', including HAVE + *got to / gotta* and *had better*. The verbs of intermediate function do not fully belong to either of the categories main verb or auxiliary verb. The modal idioms 'begin with an auxiliary verb and are followed by an infinitive' (ibid:141), while the semi-auxiliaries

... express modal or aspectual meaning and ... are introduced by one of the primary verbs HAVE and BE. (ibid:143)

Secondly, it appears that, in relation to primary verb omission, the semi-auxiliaries behave slightly differently from 'ordinary' present progressive, eg *She is going home* and 'ordinary' present perfective, eg *I have done it*, despite their similar structures. With reference to COLT examples, I will attempt to justify this classification below.

The contracted form *gotta* has, according to Quirk et al (1985:898), acquired a 'semi-institutionalized' status when signifying the construction *got to*. In this connection it should be noted that in COLT, *gotta* may signify either *got to* as in [53] or *got a* as in [53], and for this reason *gotta* may be ambiguous [55]:

[53] You've gotta be very very careful. (134803/9:72)

[54] I've gotta big one. (137701/1:59)

[55] Yeah, we gotta tape. (134901/1:190)

5.3 Restrictions on omission of BE and HAVE

The first restrictions on primary verb omission that will be noted here are basic, fundamental restrictions that seem to apply categorically to both of the primary verbs that are subject to study.

I have occasionally been referring to Labov's (1972a) studies of copula deletion in the Black English Vernacular. Observing that BE was frequently omitted in that

variety of English, Labov's fundamental assumption was that contraction and deletion of BE were two sides of the same coin, in that deletion was considered a continuation of the phonological processes that bring about contracted forms such as 's and 're:

We find that the following general principle holds without exception: wherever SE (standard English) can contract, BEV (the Black English Vernacular) can delete *is* and *are*, and vice versa; wherever SE cannot contract, BEV cannot delete *is* and *are*, and vice versa. (Labov 1972a:73)

It is certainly of interest to investigate whether this principle accounts for not only *is* and *are*, but the contracted forms of HAVE as well. One of my objectives in the description of primary verb omission is to show that this principle does not hold for all forms of BE and HAVE in the London teenage vernacular, not even for *is* and *are* (cf p 47 & 75). However, it is likely that there is a close connection between contraction and omission of the primary verbs, since both are considered phonological reductions characteristic of everyday speech. The issue of whether contraction and omission result from the same phonological process, or of separate, but related processes is, however, slightly peripheral in this thesis, since the focus of interest here is mainly grammar.

I will use the terms 'contractable' and 'contractability' in describing verbs that can be contracted in standard English and in the London teenage vernacular, and the terms 'omissible' and 'omissibility' in describing verbs that can be omitted in the London teenage vernacular.

5.3.1 The finite verb constraint

The most fundamental condition for omissibility of primary verbs is that the verb form in question must be a finite verb form. Non-finite verb forms like infinitives or participial verb forms can never be omitted. This may be illustrated quite clearly by modifications of COLT examples:

[56] You could have asked why. (138102/11:202)

[56a] *You could \emptyset asked why. [\emptyset = *have*]¹

[57] Enjoy yourself while you're having a baby? Gosh. (138301/1:16)

[57a] *Enjoy yourself while you're \emptyset a baby? Gosh. [\emptyset = *having*]

The second example serves particularly well as an illustration, because its finite verb form 're is quite readily omitted in the London teenage vernacular:

[57b] Enjoy yourself while you having a baby? Gosh. [\emptyset = 're]

From this I will make a generalization regarding finite and non-finite forms of BE and HAVE with respect to their omissibility. Generalizations of this kind are presented as schematic rules in the fashion of Labov (1972a), but with a slightly less complex structure². I have also given an explanation in ordinary discourse for the rules presented. The rule which accounts for finite and non-finite verb forms is known as the 'finite verb constraint':

Rule 1: The finite verb constraint

if X = primary verb (BE / HAVE)
if sentence(X) --> X = non-finite verb form

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE and the sentence containing X requires that X be a non-finite verb form, then X is not omissible.

5.3.2 The past form constraint

Another feature which most of the examples in the survey (cf p 36ff) have in common is that in all categories except 2aiii and 2biii, the verb forms that are omitted are present tense forms. An adequate example is the following:

[31] Where you lot going today? [\emptyset = are]³

It is a straightforward matter to omit present tense verb forms in the London teenage vernacular. Apart from examples of type 2aiii and 2biii (to be discussed below), I have found no indications that BE or HAVE can be omitted in contexts which require the past form of a verb. In other words, the following example appears to be ungrammatical in the London teenage vernacular:

[31a] *Where you lot going yesterday? [\emptyset = *were*]

Assuming that a past form of a verb cannot be expressed by a zero-verb, I argue that the following rule, henceforth referred to as 'the past form constraint' applies to BE and HAVE in the London teenage vernacular:

Rule 2: The past form constraint

if X = primary verb (BE / HAVE)

if sentence(X) --> X = past form

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE and the sentence containing X requires that X be a past form, then X is not omissible.

It is assumed that the constraint applies categorically to all verb phrases which require a past form of either BE or HAVE. From this follows that BE and HAVE cannot be omitted in the simple past tense [35a], the past perfective [36a], or the past progressive [31a] (above):

[35] What question you on. [\emptyset = *are*]

[35a] *What question you on. [\emptyset = *were*]

[36] Well, you seen her. [\emptyset = *have*]

[36a] *Well, you seen her. [\emptyset = *had*]

The only exception to this rule is the one we find in grammatical environments of type 2aiii and 2biii, ie in the modal idiom *had better*, with the meaning of 'advisability' (cf Quirk et al 1985:142):

[40] Come now, come on we better go. [\emptyset = *had*]

The reason why the past form is omissible in this context has to do with the semantics of the various verb phrases where past forms can occur. Quirk et al (1985:183-198) attribute the following semantic content to the different uses of past forms in the most general, unmarked usage:

The past tense	Refers to an event or state that took place in the past.
The past progressive	Refers to an event or state in the past that has limited duration and is not necessarily complete.
The past perfective	Refers to an event or state anterior to a time of orientation in the past.

There is a major difference between the use of past forms in these environments and the use of *had* in the expression *had better*. The finite verb in the simple past tense, the past progressive and the past perfective carries the semantic feature of 'pastness'. This is not the case with *had* in *had better*. There is nothing that relates an utterance like [40] to the past, since the meaning of the phrase *we had better go* is 'it is advisable that we go (now, at this moment)'. Hence the verb *had* does not carry any meaning of pastness. It appears, then, that the past form constraint only applies to past verb forms that are bearers of the semantic feature 'pastness'. In other words, the expression *had better* is an exception to the past form constraint at the grammatical level, in that the past form *had* is omissible, but not at the semantic level, since *had* is no bearer of 'pastness' and may be omitted in the expression *we better go*.

These considerations make it plausible to reformulate the past form constraint in the following way:

Rule 2: The past form constraint

- if X = primary verb (BE / HAVE)
- if sentence(X) --> X = past form
- if X ≠ part of modal idiom *had better*

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE and the sentence containing X requires that X be a past form without being part of the modal idiom *had better*, then X is not omissible.

There is another interesting point that should be noted in connection with the past form constraint. The constraint does not seem to apply to the third of the primary verbs, DO:

- [58] 1<95>: So what, didn't Jane buy erm, didn't Jane have the baby?
 7<96>: She didn't have the baby.
 1<97>: *So who she leave the baby with?*
 7<98>: Mummy.
 1<99>: I didn't know mummy was there. (134901/1&7:95-99)
- [59] 1<618>: Where's Kathy?
 9<619>: Gone, gone work.⁴
 1<620>: She gone work.
 9<621>: Yeah.
 1<622>: Oh.
 7<623>: *What you say?*
 ?<624>: <unclear> hear it, can you hear it?
 1<625>: W= what did you say?
 ?<626>: Erm Samantha wants you. (134902/1,9,7&?:618-626)

It seems likely from the context that he omitted forms in <97> and <623> are past tense forms, viz *did*. This shows that the past form constraint cannot be used as a generalization to describe all primary verbs, since DO seems to behave differently from the other two. Incidentally, Quirk et al (1985:895) note cases like <623> as examples of situational ellipsis.

Furthermore, the past form constraint conforms with Labov's principle regarding contractability and omissibility of BE. The forms *was* and *were* are not contractable in standard English and are not omissible in the London teenage vernacular. As for HAVE (not discussed by Labov), his principle does not apply, since *had* is contractable in standard English but not omissible in the London teenage vernacular, except for the expression *had better*.

5.3.3 The nuclear stress constraint

The next constraint that appears to apply categorically to BE and HAVE is labelled the 'nuclear stress constraint'. This is the rule by which the modified examples in the following become ungrammatical:

- [60] You have to put them all in a s= in there. [you H\AVE to] (141201/1:35)
 [60a] *You to put them all in a s= in there. [Ø = have]

[61] What is it? [what \ IS it] (132601/? :88)

[61a] *What it? [\emptyset = *is*]

[62] 1<30>: Oh! My God! Ah my pen's run out.

2<31>: Well don't use mine.

1<32>: I am. [I \ AM] (132606/1&2:30-32)

[62a] 1<30>: Oh! My God! Ah my pen's run out.

2<31>: Well don't use mine.

1<32>: *I. [\emptyset = *am*]

We observe that primary verbs cannot be omitted in contexts where the primary verb carries the nuclear stress of the sentence. The nuclear stress constraint may be schematized as follows:

Rule 3: The nuclear stress constraint

if X = primary verb (BE / HAVE)

if sentence(X) --> X has nuclear stress

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE and the sentence containing X requires that X has nuclear stress, then X is not omissible.

This constraint covers all cases where the primary verb has unmarked nuclear stress, eg [60] and [61], as well as cases where the nuclear stress hinges on some kind of highlighting, emphasis or marking of the primary verb, such as the contrastive stress used in [62<32>].

5.3.4 The final position constraint

A closely related constraint is the one which rules out sentences like [63a]:

[63] How tall do you reckon I am, Tasha? [reckon \ I am] (136407/? :114)

[63a] *How tall do you reckon I, Tasha? [Ø = am]

The prosodic transcription shows that in [63] the contrastive highlighted element is *I*, not *am*. Therefore [63a] is not ruled out by the nuclear stress constraint. The primary verb BE is sentence-final due to *wh*-fronting of the complement of BE. An additional rule is required to handle cases where a primary verb in sentence-final position is not omissible:

Rule 4: The final position constraint

if X = primary verb (BE / HAVE)
if sentence(X) --> X has sentence-final position

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE and the sentence containing X requires that X has sentence-final position, then X is not omissible.

Primary verbs in sentence-final position are often found in *wh*-questions like [63] and in elliptical constructions like [62<32>], but primary verb omission in elliptical constructions is ruled out by the nuclear stress constraint:

[64] 2<18>: What, are you going out with Warren?
1<19>: Yes I am. [yes I \AM] (132601/2&1:18-19)

[64a] 2<18>: What, are you going out with Warren?
1<19>: *Yes I. [Ø = am]

Primary verbs may also occur sentence-finally in comparative clauses like *Mary is older than Peter is* (no relevant examples found in COLT). The primary verb behaves differently here, since it is possible, and in fact much more common, to omit the verb, as in *Mary is older than Peter*. This can be ascribed to structural ellipsis of the primary verb in comparative clauses (cf Quirk et al 1985:911 & 1130f) rather than phonological simplification. The contracted form 's is not applicable here (cf **Mary is older than Peter's*) and it is difficult to perceive the verbless comparative clause as a result of phonological reduction.

Observing that a clause-final verb may be omitted in comparative clauses, the

final position constraint must be modified slightly:

Rule 4: The final position constraint

if X = primary verb (BE / HAVE)
if sentence(X) --> X has sentence-final position
if sentence(X) ≠ comparative clause

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE, and the sentence containing X requires that X has sentence-final position, and the sentence containing X is not a comparative clause, then X is not omissible.

5.3.5 The negative verb constraint

The last constraint to be noted in this section is the one required to deal with cases where a primary verb is negated by the enclitic negative polarity item *n't*. It is obvious that the primary verb is never omissible in contexts where it is negated in this way, because the negative particle requires the full form of a verb to attach to:

[65] You haven't got the flu. (141302/1:19)

[65a] *You n't got the flu. [Ø = *have*]

This principle is described as the 'negative verb constraint':

Rule 5: The negative verb constraint

if X = primary verb (BE / HAVE)
if X = negated to *Xn't*

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE and X is negated with *n't* , then X is not omissible.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced five rules which set basic limitations as to where to look for examples of primary verb omission. It should be noted that the constraints only partly conform with Labov's principle that contractability in standard English implies omissibility in the non-standard variant in question. Two constraints contradict this principle: the finite verb constraint and the past tense constraint, since HAVE in sentences of the types *You could have asked why* and *You had seen her* (cf 5.3.1 & 5.3.2) are contractable in standard English but not omissible in the London teenage vernacular. The other three constraints are compatible with Labov's principle, because primary verbs with nuclear stress (cf 5.3.3), primary verbs in sentence final position (cf 5.3.4) or primary verbs negated by *n't* (cf 5.3.5) are not contractable in standard English.

¹ An asterisk is used in this thesis to indicate ungrammaticality in the London teenage vernacular.

² Labov (1972a) presents both categorical rules and so-called 'variable rules' in his discussion (cf Hudson 1980:181ff). In the present study, the focus is on patterns of primary verb omission that seem to be shared by all speakers, and the rules presented are to be considered categorical for speakers of the London teenage vernacular.

³ Examples that have already been presented retain their 'old' numbers, and the COLT references are not repeated.

⁴ Speaker 9 in this example is a one-year-old baby, and the highly elliptic phrase in <619> must probably be ascribed to elements in the language of very young children. Similarly, <620> may be seen as an example of the recruit converging towards the language of the child, and not an example of how she would speak in other contexts.

6 FEATURES OF OMISSION SPECIFIC TO BE AND TO HAVE

I will now turn to a description of the characteristics of primary verb omission that are specific to the verbs BE and HAVE. It will be shown that some constraints, although described as a constraint on one of the verbs, do in fact have a more general application. This is because some of the categories that are affected by the constraints involve grammatical environments which are similar to the grammatical environments of other categories, eg 1bi and 2bi (cf p 36f). The description below is also meant to show that the actual division into the categories can be justified by reference to examples.

On the basis of a quantitative analysis, I will describe the general tendencies that characterize the omission of BE and HAVE. By referring to frequency of occurrence of the various types of examples it is possible to draw conclusions as to the rules that seem to apply. Examples belonging to the various categories occur with varying frequencies (cf 7.1), and in some of the categories the number of occurrences is not sufficient to carry out a quantitative analysis (cf p 55).

When referring to the number of occurrences that belong to one of the main categories 1 (BE) or 2 (HAVE), the figures also include the number of instances from the combined categories 3ai-3aiv (cf p 37). This is because subordinate clauses have an internal structure as either declarative or interrogative sentences and, thus, examples of types 3ai-3aiv can easily be categorized in terms of the parameters of categories 1 and 2 (cf 6.1.4). Examples of types 3bi and 3bii (cf p 38), however, are not as readily characterized in terms of the three parameters, and are considered so 'special' that they are not included in the quantitative analysis. Arguments for this decision are given in section 6.1.7.

It should be noted that frequencies of occurrence are calculated, in this chapter, on the basis of the total number of examples of sentence-medial primary verb omission for each of the main categories 1 and 2, without including the examples where a primary verb is present in the texts but could be omitted. The calculation of 'non-standardness' percentages (the proportion of non-standard variants compared to the total number of standard and non-standard variants) is given in Chapter 7. In the present chapter, the figures for each recruit are not distinguished, and generally, the recruit-specific tendencies are not described here. The variation in usage related to each recruit is given in Chapter 7. The figures appearing in the tables below are based on sentences uttered by the three recruits only (cf p 10).

6.1 Omission of BE

By analyzing the COLT texts and tapes, I identified 60 instances where the recruits omitted BE, 25 in declarative sentences and 35 in questions (cf section 6.1.4). These figures form the basis of the quantitative analysis in the present section.

6.1.1 Subject categories

Labov (1972a:85) observed that the most important constraint that affected omission of BE in the Black English Vernacular depended on the characteristics of the subject of the sentence where the omission occurred. In my material, it appears that similar (but not identical) constraints apply, in that omission is much more common in the context of certain pronominal subjects than in the context of other subject types. The grammatical characteristics of the subject is therefore considered a factor of prime importance in the description of primary verb omission.

The types of subject available to a speaker have been divided into three categories with the labels 'name', 'noun phrase' (NP) and 'pronoun'. The 'name' category incorporates all proper nouns, eg *Kate*, *the <name>s*¹ and *Dillons* (a bookstore). All common nouns and other non-pronominal NPs, including expressions of family relations like *my mum* and *Granny*, are included under the 'NP' category. The distribution of instances belonging to the various subject categories is as follows:

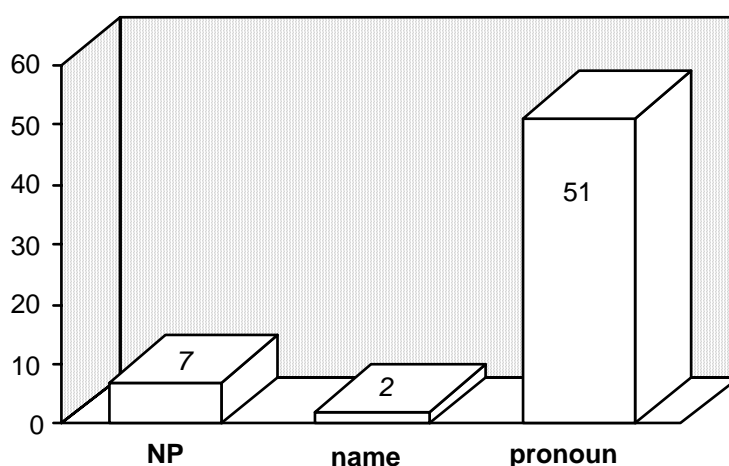


Figure 1: Omission of BE in the three subject categories

Figure 1 shows that it is much more common to omit BE when the subject is a

pronoun than with the other subject categories. This tendency is partly explained by the fact that pronominal subjects, especially *I* and *you*, are the most frequent subjects in spoken English in general (cf Crystal 1988:141). However, the proportion of instances where BE is omitted in contexts with a pronominal subject exceeds the proportion of sentences with a pronominal subject in general. (Cf Chapter 7 for calculation of percentages of primary verb omission in possible environments.) Consequently, sentences with a pronominal subject favour omission of BE to a greater extent than sentences with a name or an NP as subject.

This observation supports the assumption that omission of primary verbs results from phonological processes by which a contractable verb form is subject to further phonological reduction and eventually disappears. In rapid speech, it appears that both contraction and omission of BE are much more likely to occur in the context of a pronominal subject than that of an NP subject. This may be illustrated by slight modifications of example [29] above:

- [29a] They are idiots.
- [29b] They're idiots.
- [29c] They idiots.
- [29d] The people in my class are idiots.
- [29e] ?The people in my class're idiots.
- [29f] ?The people in my class idiots.

[29b] and [29c] are straightforward reductions of the verb form *are* following a regular pattern of phonological reduction: [a:r - 'r - r - Ø]. This reduction process is, apparently, less likely to take place in [29d], where the subject is a more complex noun phrase, hence the awkwardness of [29e] and [29f]. Nevertheless, these two examples cannot be altogether rejected, since this process of reduction appears to have affected BE in [26]:

- [26] Hundreds of schools doing it.

However, the absence of BE here need not necessarily be the result of phonological reduction of a sentence-medial BE, but could also be explained by sentence-initial omission of existential *there* and BE. In other words, [26] could be a phonologically reduced version of (*There's/ 're*)*hundreds of schools doing it*.

6.1.2 Pronominal subjects

Several interesting tendencies can be observed if we investigate the examples where BE is omitted with a pronominal subject. The likelihood of a form of BE being omitted when the subject is a pronoun depends heavily on whether it is the first, second or third person pronoun and whether it is singular or plural:

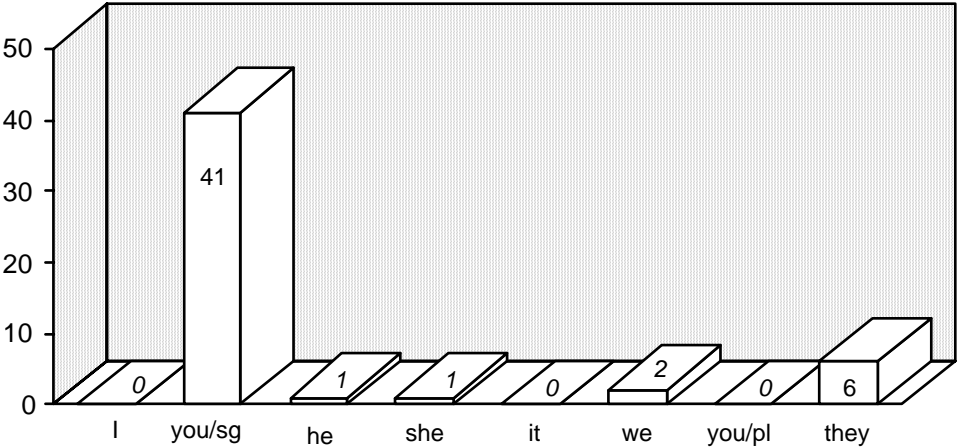


Figure 2: Omission of BE with the various pronouns

We observe that BE is most commonly omitted with the pronoun *you* as a singular subject. Again, this is partly explained by the fact that *you* is among the most frequent subjects in speech in general. It is, however, necessary to elaborate the explanation of the high proportion of BE-omission in environments with *you*, since we also observe that the other frequent pronominal subject, *I*, never elicits omission of BE. I will suggest that the extreme difference in the proportion of omissions in connection with the pronouns *I* and *you* has to do with the phonological characteristics of the actual verb form that is being omitted. (cf section 6.1.5) The omissions of the present tense verb forms 're and 's have the following distribution:



Figure 3: Omission of 're and 's with any subject

Omission commonly affects the verb form *'re*, while omission of *'s* is quite rare. The form *'m* is not omitted in any context, either by the recruits or by other speakers. The form *'re* is phonologically different from the other two present tense forms of BE, in that it is commonly realized by a vowel sound, /r/, unlike the forms *'m* and *'s* which are most often realized by the consonant sounds /m/ and /s/ or /z/, respectively (cf Table 3, p 24). Analysis of the examples in the database showed that in almost 70 per cent of the cases where BE is omitted, the verb would be realized by the vowel /r/ only. This observation makes the following generalization plausible: BE is most likely to be omitted when the phonological environment of the verb requires that it be realized by the vowel /r/. (For further discussions about the phonological characteristics of these forms, see 6.1.5 and 7.1)

Figure 2 also reveals a major difference in the proportion of omissions of BE in contexts where the pronoun *you* is the subject. We observe that *you* elicits BE-omission frequently when it is used in the singular, but never in the plural. This difference can probably not be ascribed to any inherent difference in the nature of *you/sg* and *you/pl*, but is best explained by the frequency of occurrence of the singular and the plural pronoun in general. In the analyzed texts, the teenagers very often say things like *Where you going?* and *What you doing?*. In fact, sentences of the type *Wh +you/sg +V+ing?* constitute more than 45 per cent of the examples of BE-omission. A speaker in a conversation most often addresses a single individual, and it is thus much more common to use the pronoun *you* with situational reference to a single addressee, than to use it with plural meaning to refer to a group. This explains the difference in the distribution of BE-omission in connection with *you* in the singular and the plural in my examples. The possibility of omitting BE in contexts with the plural *you* as subject must not be ruled out, however, since *'re* can generally be omitted in the plural, as in:

[66] Where you lot going today? (134901/1:1)

Besides, considering an example like [67], it is not difficult to perceive [67a] as having a plural subject, for instance, in a situation where the speaker expresses his surprise at finding two people in the room he has just entered:

[67] What they doing here? (136404/1:102)

[67a] What you doing here?

I conclude from this that BE is omissible in contexts with the plural *you* as subject.

6.1.3 Constraints on BE-omission

We have seen that no speaker ever omits the form 'm in any context. It seems plausible to conclude that speakers of the London teenage vernacular have only two variants to choose from when the subject is the first person pronoun singular, 'm and am, and consequently that the Ø form does not exist for the first person singular. The fact that 'm is never omitted facilitates the formulation of a constraint applicable to BE only, which I have labelled 'the first person singular constraint':

Rule 6: The first person singular constraint

if X = primary verb (BE)
if subject(X) = 1st person singular pronoun

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE and the subject of the sentence containing X is the first person singular pronoun, then X is not omissible.

It is, of course, an open question whether this rule applies categorically for all speakers of the London teenage vernacular, since we cannot entirely rule out the possibility of finding counterexamples. If we accept that this rule is of general application, we must rule out the possibility of finding examples of the following, which hence become ungrammatical in the London teenage vernacular:

[68] *What I doing here?

[69] *I gonna be there tomorrow.

Intuitively, these examples seem awkward and unlikely to be found. The observation that a first person singular constraint seems to apply in the London teenage vernacular is interesting, first because it deviates from the Black English Vernacular (examples like [68] and [69] are in fact observed by Labov (1972a:70) in his New York study), and second, because Quirk et al (1985:898) mention an example like [69] in their description of non-standard ellipsis. My material suggests that the form *I gonna*

is unlikely in the London teenage vernacular.

Other environments where omission of BE apparently never occurs is when one of the pronouns *it* or *that* is the subject. No instances like the following were found:

[70] *How long it gonna be open?

[71] *It not raining any longer.

[72] *That the one I want.

[73] *I want the one that green.

Intuitively, these examples seem very unlikely, and along the lines of the foregoing rule, I propose that an '*it/that* constraint' applies categorically in the London teenage vernacular:

Rule 7: The *it/that* constraint

if X = primary verb (BE)
if subject(X) = pronoun *it* or *that*

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE and the subject of the sentence containing X is one of the pronouns *it* or *that*, then X is not omissible.

It appears that the rule applies regardless of whether *it* is used as a reference pronoun [70], or as the dummy pronoun [71] and whether *that* is a demonstrative [72] or a relative [73] pronoun. This may suggest that the restriction applies because 's is particularly unlikely to be omitted after the dental /t/ (cf Baugh 1980). It is difficult to ascribe the fact that BE is not omissible in [70]-[73] to some grammatical property of these sentences. (For a comment on dummy *it* used in cleft sentences, see section 6.1.6.)

6.1.4 Omission of BE in relation to sentence type

I will now turn to the discussion of BE-omission in relation to the various types of examples listed in the previous chapter (cf p 36ff). The survey of the types of primary

verb omission showed that, in declarative and interrogative sentences, BE can be omitted if it is an auxiliary preceding an *-ing* participle or an *-ed* participle, if it is part of the semi-auxiliary BE+ *going to/gonna*, and if it is a copula. Figure 4 gives the distribution of BE-omissions in relation to the categories 1ai-1aiii and 1bi-1biii. Instances belonging to the third main category 'Omission in special grammatical environments' are incorporated in the figures in Figure 4 (except categories 3bi and 3bii, cf p 48), since they are too few to constitute their own categories. This may justifiably be done because the subordinate clauses in the combined example category have an internal structure as either declarative or interrogative sentences. For instance, the relative clause *we on now* in

[49] Right then, what was the other one? The one we on now? Irish.

counts as a declarative sentence belonging to type 1aiii. The 60 instances of BE-omission that were found, have the following distribution:

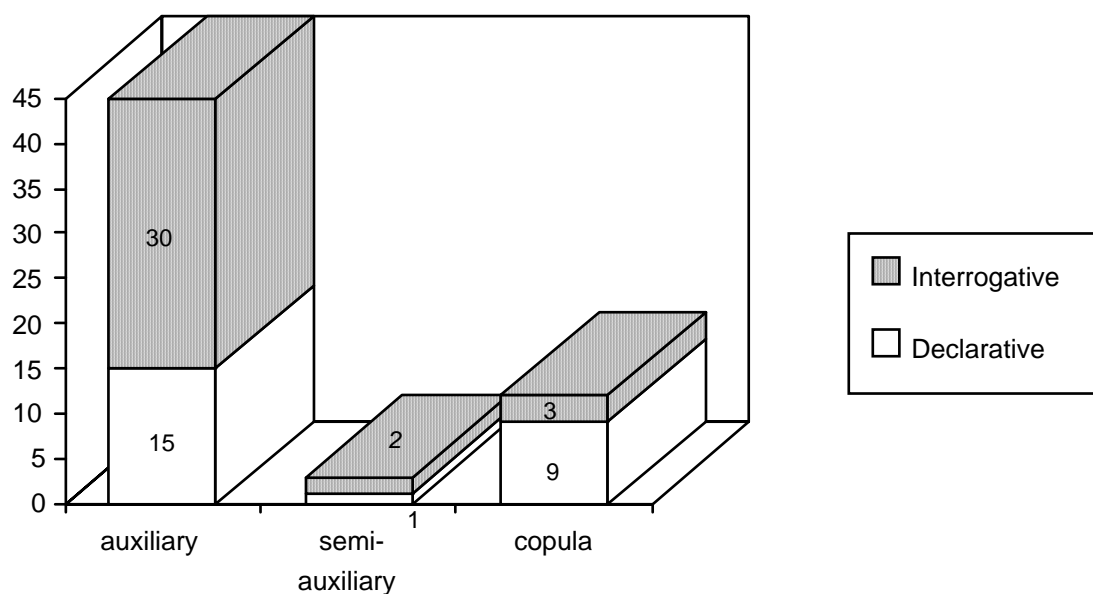


Figure 4: Distribution of BE-omission

Two main tendencies can be observed in Figure 4. Firstly, it is much more common to omit BE if it is an auxiliary verb than if it is a copula or part of the semi-auxiliary. Secondly, there is a fair degree of consistency between the two main categories, declarative and interrogative sentences, since the highest figures for both categories are found in the auxiliary class, and the lowest figures for both are found in the semi-auxiliary class.

Only three instances of BE-omission as part of the semi-auxiliary were found, two of which in questions. This observation is interesting, particularly when we consider the high frequency of the semi-auxiliary in general. On average, the semi-auxiliary BE + *gonna/going to* occurs six times in an average text of 3,000 words. This figure excludes, of course, instances of the verb phrase BE + *going to* when BE is an auxiliary verb proper:

[74] I'm going to bed now erm it's ten past ten. (137801/1:3)

The question to ask then, is why it is that omission of BE is so much more common when it precedes an *-ing* participle than when it is part of a semi-auxiliary. The fact that BE + *going to* formally (and historically) consists of an auxiliary BE and an *-ing* participle *going* ought to entail that it followed the same patterns regarding BE-omission as ordinary *-ing* participial constructions. We have seen that this is not the case, since omission of BE in connection with *going to/gonna* is, in fact, quite rare. With reference to these observations, it is conceivable that *going to/gonna* generally behave differently from *-ing* participles proper with respect to linguistic variation.

Another point that should be noted here is that the distribution shown in Figure 4 differs from Labov's (1972a:86) corresponding figures in an important respect. In his data, omission of BE when it is part of the semi-auxiliary is the most common type, while omissions of the type \emptyset +*ing* participle are the second most common type. Against this background, it is remarkable that omission of BE, when it is part of the semi-auxiliary, is so infrequent in the London teenage vernacular. At any rate, the figures for distribution of BE-omission in the various categories provide an argument for separating the semi-auxiliary categories 1aii and 1bii from the *-ing* participial categories 1ai and 1bi, since the substantial difference in the distribution of examples would otherwise be undiscovered.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the categories where BE is omitted when it is an auxiliary verb, 1ai and 1bi, cover two different subtypes: BE-omission with the *-ing* participle in the present progressive [26] and with the *-ed* participle in passive constructions [27]:

[26] Hundreds of schools doing it.

[27] You see them outside. *They all lined up*, and you can see Kate and Pete going like this.

There is a major difference in the distribution of these two subtypes. Of the 44

instances where BE is omitted in categories 1ai and 1bi, only a single instance of BE-omission was found in a context with the *-ed* participle, namely the one shown in [27]. This must be ascribed not to distinctions in the omissibility of BE in the two grammatical contexts, but to a general difference in frequency of the two constructions. The passive is a relatively rare construction in the London teenage vernacular, hence the low figure for instances of BE-omission in connection with the *-ed* participle. However, I have come across examples of passive constructions where BE-omission seems very unlikely:

[75] You know the current cars that are run by battery? (141202/1:89)

[75a] ?You know the current cars that run by battery?

Omission of BE is unlikely here, not because BE cannot be omitted in passive constructions, but presumably because of properties of the grammatical subject *that* in the relative clause *that are run by battery*. It seems unlikely that BE can be omitted after the relative pronoun *that*, but my data does not provide conclusive evidence in this respect. An argument in favour of accepting BE as omissible in the passive is that the following modification of [75] appears to be acceptable as a passive construction:

[75b] The cars Ø run by battery.

It is remarkable, however, that examples of the passive category are completely ignored by Labov (1972a:68f) in his survey of contexts where BE is omitted.

6.1.5 Omission of BE in declarative sentences

So far, the discussion has been confined to patterns of BE-omission without considering whether the omission occurs in declarative or interrogative sentences. In the following I will describe the patterns that are specific to these two sentence types.

It has been shown that two declarative constructions *I'm* and *it's* (along with their *wh*-interrogative counterparts) never elicit BE-omission, and that the verb form *'re* is generally more liable to omission than *'s* (cf p 52). It is of interest to find out whether these conditions are due to some inherent phonological property of the *'m* and *'s* realizations /m/, /s/ and /z/ which makes them less readily omissible than the *'re* realizations /r/ and /r/. I suggest that the phonemes /m/, /s/ and /z/ are generally more distinct from their neighbouring phonemes than the *'re* realizations

are, and that this distinctness makes them less likely to be omitted. Consider:

[76] You Ø going to Hampton Court. [Ø = 're] (136502/1:56)

[76a] *I Ø going to Hampton Court. [Ø = 'm]

[76b] ?He Ø going to Hampton Court. [Ø = 's]

[76a] is ruled out by the first person singular constraint, while [76b], although not ruled out by any constraint, seems awkward. I propose that the following principle is characteristic of rapid speech and accounts for the differences in omissibility in [76]-[76b] (as well as for other cases of non-standard ellipsis, cf 1.2.1):

The articulation of a phoneme requires a certain amount of 'phonological effort'. Certain phonemes are distinct in their phonological environment, and these require more effort than other less distinct phonemes. The more phonological effort is required to produce a phonological representation of a grammatical form, the less likely it is for a speaker to omit this form.

In [76]-[76b], the effort needed to turn the form *you* into *you're* is minuscule compared to the effort needed to produce the nasal /m/ or the sibilant /s/. These two latter phonemes are quite distinct in the phonological context, and this distinction makes them less readily omissible. The phonological representation of the form 're requires little phonological effort and is most readily omitted. Due to the lack of distinctness of 're in its phonological environment, its presence or absence makes little difference to the overall phonological output of the sentence.

The general phonological distinctness of the verb forms 'm and 's explains why the first person singular constraint and the *it/that* constraint apply to the London teenage vernacular. It also explains the high proportion of omitted 're forms compared to 's (cf Figure 3 p 52). And finally it accounts for the awkwardness of [76b], since the constructions *he's*, *she's* and *it's* are unlikely to elicit BE-omission due to the generally distinctive pronunciation of 's. The COLT examples show indeed the regularity of this pattern, as omissions of BE after a third person singular pronoun were only found in two sentences, one of which is:

[77] She trying a do the butterfly. (134901/1:238)²

Apart from two instances, the omissions of 's have either noun phrases or names as subject. This suggests that, in declarative sentences, constructions with BE-omission after a third person singular pronoun are among the rarest of forms in the London

teenage vernacular, and that the phonological representation of BE in these contexts is semi-categorical. Consequently, the a- and b-modifications of [78] are unlikely to be heard, but not entirely ruled out, while the c-example is ruled out by the *it/that* constraint:

[78] They talking about a password (138201/1:34)

[78a] ?He talking about a password.

[78b] ?She talking about a password.

[78c] *It talking about a password.

Closely related is the tendency not to omit BE in environments involving *there*, whether it be the existential pronoun, [79] or a place-adjunct, [80]:

[79] There's this man I know and he's that quick yeah. (137804/1:102)

[79a] *There this man I know and he's that quick yeah.

[80] There's my mum. (134901/1:220)

[80a] *There my mum.

However, an example of the opposite was found in an interrogative sentence:

[81] What sort of people there? (134901/12:184)

This may be taken to indicate that constructions with *there* are environments where the omissibility is confined to questions. The constraint that applies here must then be formulated accordingly:

Rule 8: The *there* constraint

if X = primary verb (BE)
if sentence(X) = declarative sentence
if subject(X) = pronoun *there*

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE occurring in a declarative sentence, and the subject of the sentence containing X is *there*, then X is not omissible.

6.1.6 Omission of BE in interrogative sentences

Most of the regularities that are described so far in this chapter (except Rule 6, p 53) are applicable to BE in both declarative and interrogative sentences. The fairly frequent tendency to omit *'re* while *'s* is rarely omitted can also be observed in interrogative sentences. Besides, BE-omission with the pronouns *he* and *she* are rare, although not ruled out by any constraint:

[82] Where you taking him? (134902/? :513)

[82a] ?Where he taking him?

[82b] ?Where she taking him?

[82b] is particularly difficult to describe for obvious phonological reasons. The sibilant of the pronoun *she* makes it virtually impossible to determine whether the verb *'s* is present or absent here, and quite often, examples of the type *wh*-word + *she* must be set aside due to phonological indeterminacy of the kind suggested in [82b].

Very often, omission of *'s* is highly unlikely in connection with a non-pronominal third person singular subject:

[83] What colour's your bath? (136402/1:61)

[83a] ?What colour your bath?

But omission of *'s* in interrogative sentences must not be ruled out entirely in contexts like these, because of a few examples like the following:

[84] Where that bitching thing now? (137904/1:99)

I will, however, propose a constraint affecting omission of BE in certain types of *wh*-questions, depending on the function of the *wh*-word within the interrogative sentence. Omission is unproblematic if the *wh*-word has adverbial function [85], or if it is the object [86]:

[85] Where you going? (134901/1:127)

[86] What Kate doing? (134902/1:145)

33 of the 35 examples of questions with BE-omission are of the patterns shown in [85] and [86], that is, with *wh*-words that function as either adverbial or object. With reference to Quirk et al's (1985:818) survey of possible functions of the *wh*-word, I will propose a constraint that rules out the possibility of omitting BE in certain *wh*-interrogative environments. Apparently, BE is not omissible in questions where the *wh*-word functions as subject [87] or subject complement [88]:

[87] Hello who's calling? Okay, hold on a minute. (135207/7:225)

[87a] *Hello who calling? Okay, hold on a minute. (135207/7:225)

[88] What's that? (134802/1:6)

[88a] *What that?

The awkwardness of the modified examples may be taken to indicate that there is a rule which restricts BE from being omitted in these circumstances. Exceptions are cases where the question word *how* serves as a premodifier or a determiner and is followed by *much/many/little* etc:

[89] How many blokes do you guess upstairs? (134803/1:13) (*wh*-phrase in subject)

[90] How much the chips? (136403/1:65) (*wh*-phrase in subject complement)

If the *wh*-word is the adverbial complement, then BE can be omitted [84]. The possibility of omitting BE in contexts where the *wh*-word is object complement need not be considered, since BE is not a complex transitive verb, cf *They elected/*were him president*. A generalization from these observations suggests that the following constraint applies in the London teenage vernacular:

Rule 9: The *wh*-interrogative constraint

- if X = primary verb (BE)
 - if sentence(X) = interrogative sentence
 - if *wh*-word = subject or subject complement of X
 - if *wh*-word ≠ *how* (determiner/premodifier)
-
- then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE occurring in a *wh*-interrogative sentence, and the *wh*-word of this sentence functions as the subject or subject complement of X without being of the type *how* (determiner/premodifier), then X is not omissible.

Due to its many conditions, this is probably the most uncertain constraint presented so far. Furthermore, one single example has been found that raises doubt as to the application of Rule 9:

[91] What sort of people there? (134901/12:184)

This example runs counter to the general tendency of BE-omission in questions, since the NP *what sort of people* is the subject of the verb BE, although it is different from an example like [88] in that *what* in [91] is an interrogative determiner in a complex NP. It is possible that this example, being uttered by a speaker other than the recruit and being the only one of its kind, is an example of idiosyncratic usage, and as such need not necessarily disprove the validity of Rule 9. Anyway, it illustrates that it is a highly complex matter to make generalizations regarding BE-omission in questions on the basis of the examples found in the corpus.

6.1.7 Omission of BE in cleft sentences

The final types of BE-omission to be considered are categories 3bi and 3bii, omission in cleft sentences. So far, these have not been included in the counting, due to too few examples (cf p 49). The possibility of omitting BE in cleft sentences proper (*it*-clefts), such as *It is John who will be there tomorrow*, has already been ruled out by the *it/that* constraint (cf 6.1.3). It is therefore sufficient to describe BE-omission in the so-called pseudo-cleft sentences. These may be introduced by a *wh*-pronoun, as in [92], or by a noun phrase 'of general reference' (Quirk et al 1985:1388) such as the word *problem* in [93], in which case it is a so-called 'paraphrastic pseudo-cleft sentence':

[92] Well what we did we stopped at this track and we turned round.
(141205/1:154)

[93] The only problem with it it's lost a lot of power. (141405/1:9)

Sentences of this kind are by no means frequent in the COLT texts, but they are

linguistically interesting and call for discussion for two reasons. Firstly, a *wh*-cleft like [92] appears to be a blatant contradiction to the otherwise generally applicable past tense constraint (cf 5.3.1) in that, apparently, the omitted form in [92] is *was*. Secondly, these kinds of examples were the only ones that made Labov (1972a: 76ff) depart from his theory that phonological reduction elicits BE-omission in explaining their occurrence:

Careful examination of these examples shows that the deletion of *is* is not the product of the deletion rule, but a very different process. ... It appears from these examples that contractability may be a lexical property of these verbs (of saying, knowing, meaning) or auxiliaries (DO). (Labov 1972a:77-80)

I support Labov's assumption that the lack of BE in sentences like [92] and [93] are not the results of phonological reduction. However, I am not altogether certain that [92] and [93] are omissions of BE at all. It could be argued that the two phrases before and after the supposedly omitted BE-forms are separate discourse units that are not syntactically linked together. The clauses on each side of the 'cleft' are always pronounced as separate tone units with a brief pause between them. In constructions like these, the introductory nominal clauses (*what we did* and *the only problem with it*) always function pragmatically as 'announcers' of the following information-loaded (and 'real') sentence. A more pragmatically accurate punctuation would perhaps be to include a colon between the clauses:

[93a] The only problem with it: it's lost a lot of power.

Thus, the BE-less cleft construction is simply a way of saying 'Listen to the following piece of information', before presenting the intended proposition.

The primary material of this thesis does not, however, provide a sufficient number of examples to pursue this alternative analysis of constructions of this kind.

6.2 Omission of HAVE

The purpose of this section is to formulate constraints and generalizations on the basis of the registered examples of HAVE-omission, and the main idea is to bring about an analysis parallel to the one that described BE-omission in the previous section. It is necessary to investigate to what extent the same constraints apply to BE

and HAVE, with the intention to eventually observe whether it is justifiable to include the two verbs as two aspects of the same sociolinguistic variable, or whether they should be considered separate variables that follow their own verb-specific constraints (cf p 5). In particular, this involves observing whether the same distribution of omissions is apparent in relation to the three subject categories (cf Fig 1) and the various pronominal subjects (cf Fig 2). Furthermore, it must be considered whether a certain present tense verb form *'ve* or *'s* favours HAVE-omission (cf Fig 3), and whether omission of HAVE is more common in certain grammatical environments than in others (cf Fig 4).

As far as HAVE is concerned, the discussion cannot include a comparison with Labov's study (1972a), since he does not analyze this verb as a sociolinguistic variable in detail. He does, however, briefly mention an observable tendency without applying quantitative analysis:

...there seems to be little question that the grave member of [v] favors deletion more than [z]. This is particularly true, of course, before labial consonants, so that *I've been* would be among the rarest of BEV forms. (Labov 1972a: 121)

His observation that *'ve* is more commonly omitted than *'s* calls for a quantitative analysis of the distribution of omission of these verb forms.

6.2.1 Omission of HAVE in relation to sentence type

As a starting point, it should be noted that, generally, HAVE-omission is slightly less common than BE-omission. I found 37 examples where the recruits omitted HAVE, 31 in declarative sentences and six in interrogative sentences. Since linguistic generalizations require a representative number of occurrences, the lower figures for HAVE-omissions indicate that the proposed constraints affecting HAVE alone are not as reliable as those affecting BE alone.

The most fundamental difference between HAVE-omission and BE-omission is that, whenever HAVE functions as a main verb, it is not omissible (cf 6.1.4):

[94] When I have a conversation with you I have to write it down.
(137701/1:161)

[94a] *When I a conversation with you I have to write it down.

[95] Here we have the plate I bought for Jenny. (136501/12:61)

[95a] *Here we the plate I bought for Jenny.

One reason for this fundamental difference between BE and HAVE is probably that HAVE as a main verb has semantic significance by denoting dynamic or stative meaning. HAVE as a main verb cannot be omitted regardless of whether its meaning is dynamic, ie that of 'experience' as in [94], or stative, ie that of 'possession' as in [95]. Semantic content of this kind cannot be attributed to BE as main verb (except for the meaning 'exist' as in *To be or not to be*).

Although HAVE is not omissible in main verb function, I have recognized three categories of HAVE-omission: omission of HAVE with *-ed* participle, omission of HAVE with the forms *got/gotta* and omission of HAVE in the *had better* construction. The merging of all examples involving the forms *got* and *gotta* into one category is explained below. Omission in the *had better* construction is considered a separate category due to the idiomatic nature of this expression:

[96] I better take that back. (137904/1:57)

This is a fairly common type of omission, and it is irregular in the sense that a past form of a primary verb is being omitted (cf section 5.3.2). No examples were found of the type 2biii (cf p 37), omission of HAVE in the *had better* context in interrogative sentences:

[97] When had we better come tomorrow? (constructed)

[97a] ?When we better come tomorrow? (constructed)

In my opinion, this does not mean that '*d*' is not omissible in such contexts, since the phonological reduction of '*d*' in [97a] seems no less likely than the one that has taken place in [96]. The lack of examples of type 2biii should probably be ascribed to the fact that *had better* in *wh*-questions is extremely rare in the language of the COLT teenagers; perhaps the speakers perceive it as slightly archaic. This is emphasized by the fact that no examples of the other variant of this construction, the one with the verb HAVE, as in [97], were found either.

The fundamental restriction regarding omission of HAVE as a main verb can be formulated as follows:

Rule 10: The HAVE/main verb constraint

if X = primary verb (HAVE)

if X = main verb

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb HAVE, and X is a main verb, then X is not omissible.

The distribution of HAVE-omissions in the categories 2ai-2biii (cf p 37) reveals some interesting facts if we compare it to the corresponding figures for BE, (cf Figure 4 p 56):

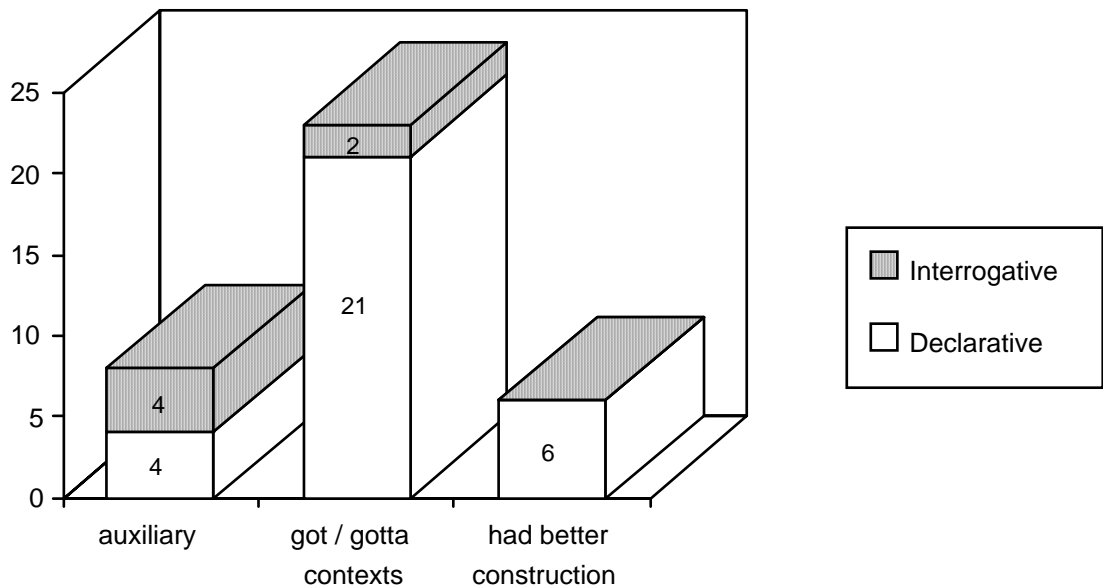


Figure 5: Distribution of HAVE-omission

The most obvious feature that can be observed in Figure 5 is that contexts involving the forms *got* and *gotta* favour HAVE-omission. About 70 per cent of the examples of HAVE-omission belong to the categories 2aii (declarative) and 2bii (interrogative). These categories cover examples of four different types:

- [98] I got these wicked comics man. They're rough. (137903/1:44)
 [99] Now I gotta passage. (138001/1:25)
 [100] I got to give him to you, hold it. (134902/12:71)
 [101] This one we gotta do now. (136403/1:16)

The semi-auxiliary *got to /gotta* expresses 'obligation' and 'necessity', while the meaning of the *-ed* participle *got* in [98] and the contracted form *gotta* (=got a) in [99] is that of 'possession'. In [100] and [101] the verb HAVE is part of verb phrases of intermediate function between main verb and auxiliary (cf Quirk et al 1985:141ff), while in [98] and [99], HAVE is an ordinary auxiliary. Despite these different grammatical and semantic properties, I have decided to include [98]-[101] in the same category. This is done primarily for phonological reasons, assuming that the same process of phonological reduction affects the form 've in all the examples. We have no reason to assume that [98] and [99] are the results of a phonological process different from the one that results in sentences of the type illustrated in [100] and [101]. Besides, this categorization has a purely practical reason, as the transcribers have not distinguished the two senses of *gotta*. (For further considerations on the semantics of *got/gotta* see section 6.2.3.)

It is also interesting to note that HAVE-omissions of types 2aii and 2bii (cf p 37) are much more frequent than the corresponding types of BE-omission, ie the ones involving the semi-auxiliary *gonna*. Two factors may explain this difference. Firstly, types 2aii and 2bii incorporate both the semi-auxiliary and the *-ed* participle, while types 1aii and 1bii (cf p 36) include the semi-auxiliary only. Besides, it appears that the form 've is readily omissible, also in the first person singular, and that, consequently, no first person singular constraint applies to HAVE [94]. The phrase *I gotta* is in fact quite common, while, as we have seen, its counterpart *I gonna* does not appear at all in the COLT texts.

Furthermore, a comparison of Figure 4 and Figure 5 reveals that BE-omission is more common in interrogative contexts (58 per cent of the instances of BE-omission) than HAVE-omission is (16 per cent). Consequently, sentences of the type *Where you going?* is more likely to occur than the corresponding type *What you been reading?* (cf p 56 & p 73f).

6.2.2 Subject categories

BE and HAVE show the same tendency regarding omissions in relation to the three

subject categories:

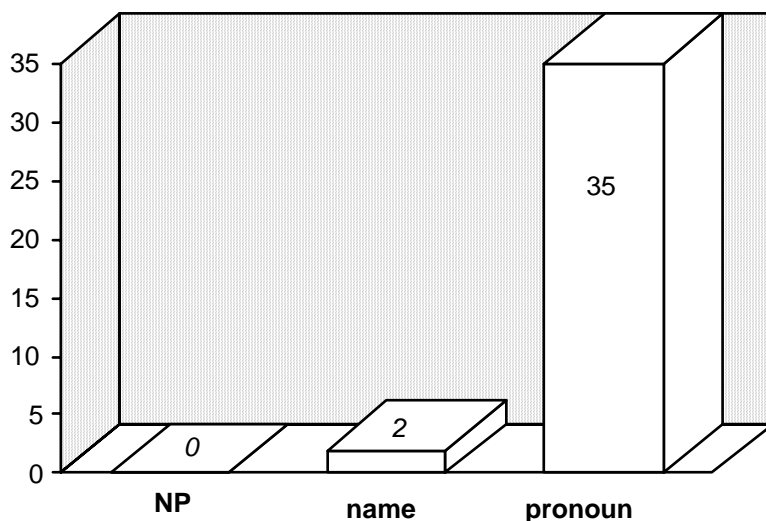


Figure 6: Omission of HAVE in the three subject categories

Figure 6 shows that pronominal subjects favour omission of HAVE, just as much as they favour BE-omission. No examples of HAVE-omission after an NP subject were found, but the possibility of HAVE-omissions in such a context cannot be completely ruled out, since the following reformulation of an authentic example is conceivable:

[102] Marsha gone shops. (134801/1:5)

[102a] ?Marsha and her friend gone shops.

The distribution of HAVE-omissions with the various pronominal subjects is quite different from the figures for BE-omission. This is not surprising, considering that the first person singular constraint does not apply to HAVE:

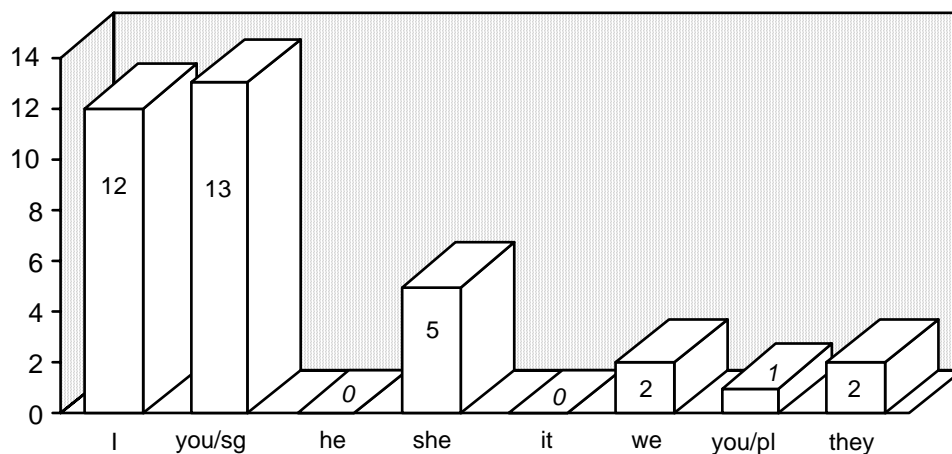


Figure 7: Omission of HAVE with the various pronominal subjects

It can be observed that HAVE-omission is almost equally common with the subjects *I* and *you* (singular), and that the differences between the figures for each pronominal subject category are much smaller for HAVE than for BE (cf Figure 2 p 51), where the singular pronoun *you* accounted for more than 80 per cent of the cases. Consequently, the patterns for BE-omission and HAVE-omission are different in that a certain pronoun, *you* (singular) markedly favours omission of BE, while this tendency is not as strong in connection with HAVE.

Figure 7 also shows that there were no examples of HAVE-omission with the pronoun *he*. This cannot be ascribed to any particular constraint regarding this pronoun, since HAVE-omission in connection with *he* is just as likely as with *she*:

[103] Jane said she gotta dry clean it. (135203/1:20)

[103a] Peter said he gotta dry clean it.

The *it/that* constraint appears to be affecting HAVE as well as BE, since the following reformulations seem unlikely to occur:

[104] It's got more nuts in it. (136502/1:49)

[104a] *It got more nuts in it.

[105] That's got no continues. (137803/9:145)

[105a] *That got no continues.

This observation necessitates a reformulation of the constraint so that it includes both BE and HAVE:

Rule 7: The *it/that* constraint

if X = primary verb (BE/HAVE)

if subject(X) = pronoun *it* or *that*

then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE and the subject of the sentence containing X is one of the pronouns *it* or *that*, then X is not omissible.

Finally, my material provides evidence for Labov's assumption that 've is

more commonly omitted than 's³:



Figure 8: Omission of 've and 's with any subject

The percentages indicated show that 've is more likely to be omitted than 's. This tendency is similar to the one which was observed in relation to BE, since the 's form was the least frequently omitted form for BE as well. This suggests that the principle regarding phonological distinctness (given on p 60) accounts for HAVE as well as BE. The phoneme /v/ is generally less distinct in its phonological environment than the phoneme /s/ (cf 6.1.5), and the presence of 's in [107a] makes greater difference to the overall phonological output than is the case with 've in [106a]:

[106] I gotta walk to it. (135206/1:49)

[106a] I've gotta walk to it.

[107] Jane said she gotta dry clean it. (135203/1:20)

[107a] Jane said she's gotta dry clean it.

6.2.3 Omission of HAVE in declarative sentences

Omission of HAVE is the generally most common pattern in one of the following contexts: pronoun + *got/gotta* and pronoun + *better*. These types (2a_{ii} and 2a_{iii}, p 37) account for almost 90 per cent of the examples of HAVE-omission in declarative sentences. It is also worth mentioning that HAVE-omissions with *got* is used invariably without *to*, (ie denoting 'possession' [108]) while *gotta* is generally the contracted form of *got to* (75 per cent). Consequently, the following examples would

be the most likely type of HAVE-omission:

[108] I got these wicked comics man. They're rough. (137903/1:44)

[109] I gotta walk to it. (135206/1:49)

A possible explanation for the frequency of omissions of this kind is that the auxiliary HAVE would have very little semantic significance in [108] compared to

[110] Well, you seen her. (134801/1:1)

where the auxiliary would have the obvious function as a marker of the perfective aspect. The HAVE + *got* construction is perfective in form (and historically related to the perfective), but its meaning does not incorporate the perfective aspect, since none of the meanings of the perfective (state, event or habit in a period leading up to the present) can be ascribed to utterances like [108]. The perfective aspect always involves the notion of 'anterior time' (cf Quirk et al 1985:190), but in [108] no such time orientation is intended. The proposition expressed in [108] is simply 'I *have* some 'wicked' comics (at this moment)'. This usage is very common, and it would be interesting to consider whether this may be seen as an indicator that *got* is becoming a lexical verb on its own, meaning 'have', 'possess', 'own' in the London teenage vernacular. Indications of the opposite would be that, in the third person singular, the form *she's got* is still dominant, and that *got*, if considered a separate verb, would have no person/number inflection, cf **he gots* (not found). This reanalysis of *got* would also require an investigation of how it behaves in relation to pro-forms and tag questions, in other words whether a proper response to the utterance *I don't think I Ø got it.* would be *You do.* (*got* = close to a lexical verb) or *You have.* (*got* = part of the perfective).

It is also possible that an equivalent reanalysis is affecting the contracted form *gotta* in the 'obligation' sense. The anterior time orientation is absent in examples like [109] and *gotta* would, under this reanalysis, be synonymous with the modal *must*. A similar process is suggested by Fischer (1976:93), who observes that, in children's speech, the contractions *wanna* and *gimme* are unanalyzed independent lexemes (she calls *wanna* a 'quasi-modal') and that speakers of a certain dialect may preserve these forms later in life. An argument against the analysis of *gotta* as a quasi-modal is that it cannot be used interchangeably with *must*, since SV-inversion is not possible with *gotta*, cf *Must we go?/*Gotta we go?.*

If we disregard the examples of type 2aiii (the *had better* type, p 37), the

examples of HAVE-omission demonstrate a clear tendency to omit HAVE when it is not a marker of the perfective aspect. Omissions of the *had better* type are quite common, and in these examples also, HAVE is being omitted in contexts where it does not have any influence on tense or aspect (cf p 41). These observations clearly indicate that the omissibility of HAVE is dependent on its semantic function as a marker of the perfective aspect.

6.2.4 Omission of HAVE in interrogative sentences

The analysis of the examples of HAVE-omission suggests that HAVE is a slightly less 'versatile' verb than BE in terms of omission in questions. While BE was omitted in many different interrogative contexts (cf section 6.1.5), HAVE-omission was found only after *what*, *where* and *how long* with the pronominal subject *you* (singular). It may be, however, that this is due to the generally low frequency of occurrences of HAVE-omissions in questions, rather than restrictions on omissibility. A few reformulations of examples of BE-omissions in questions indicate that HAVE-omission may be conceivable in other contexts than the ones found in the primary material:

[111] What they doing here? (136404/1:102)

[111a] What they done here?

[112] What question you on? (135004/10:175)

[112a] What question you just finished?

[113] Where that bitching thing now? (137904/1:99)

[113a] Where that bitching thing gone now?

Apparently, there is no reason to rule out HAVE-omission in other interrogative contexts, such as before the pronoun *they* in the perfective [111a], after *what* + noun [112a], or with a subject of the type NP [113a].

Finally, too few examples of HAVE-omission in questions make it problematical to check whether Rule 9, the *wh*-interrogative constraint, applies to HAVE, but none of the examples that were found actually contradicted this rule. Consequently, the following modification of Rule 9 can be made:

Rule 9: The *wh*- interrogative constraint

if X = primary verb (BE/HAVE)
 if sentence(X) = interrogative sentence
 if *wh*-word = subject or subject complement of X
 if *wh*-word ≠ *how* + modifier

 then X not omissible

If X is a primary verb BE or HAVE occurring in a *wh*-interrogative sentence, and the *wh*-word of this sentence functions as the subject or subject complement of X without being of the type *how* (determiner/premodifier, then X is not omissible.

6.3 Summary of constraints

The previous discussion has shown that primary verb omission can be described in terms of a number of rules, some of which apply to both BE and HAVE and some of which apply to one of the verbs only. The following constraints were found to be applicable to BE and/or HAVE:

Table 5: Summary of constraints on primary verb omission

	Name of constraint	Applies to verb:	
		BE	HAVE
Rule 1	The finite verb constraint	X	X
Rule 2	The past form constraint	X	X
Rule 3	The nuclear stress constraint	X	X
Rule 4	The final position constraint	X	X
Rule 5	The negative verb constraint	X	X
Rule 6	The first person singular constraint	X	
Rule 7	The 'it/that' constraint	X	X
Rule 8	The 'there' constraint	X	X
Rule 9	The <i>wh</i> -interrogative constraint	X	X
Rule 10	The HAVE/main verb constraint		X

These constraints limit the total number of contexts where BE and HAVE are omissible, and are thus guidelines as to the identification of the total population of utterances where variation occurs. On the basis of these limitations, the degree of 'non-standardness' for each speaker can be calculated and compared. This is the

purpose of the next chapter.

In section 5.4 it was shown that Labov's principle regarding contractability and omissibility (cf p 39) was contradicted by the finite verb constraint and the past form constraint. Of the five constraints presented in the present chapter, as many as four contradict his principle. The following examples show that rules 6-9 involve environments where the primary verb is contractable in standard English but not omissible in the London teenage vernacular:

[69] *I gonna be there tomorrow.
(ruled out by the first person singular constraint)

[69a] I'm gonna be there tomorrow.

[71] *It not raining any longer. (ruled out by the *it/that* constraint)

[71a] It's not raining any longer.

[80] *There my mum. (ruled out by the *there* constraint)

[80a] There's my mum.

[88] *What that? (ruled out by the *wh*-interrogative constraint)

[88a] What's that?

The four pairs of examples above all involve contexts where the primary verbs are contractable in standard English but not omissible in the London teenage vernacular. They are thus contradictions to Labov's principle that contractability in standard English leads to omissibility in the non-standard variety. Thus we may conclude that his principle is not applicable to omission of BE and HAVE in the London teenage vernacular.

¹ For the sake of anonymity, surnames are not used in the COLT transcriptions, and the notation shown could for instance signify *the Jacksons*'.

² The 'word' *a* in this sentence is the reduced form of the infinitive marker, *to*, which is frequently transcribed in this way, particularly after TRY.

³ The counting does not include omissions of the form *'d*, since this is an invariant form omitted in the *had better* construction only and is not discussed by Labov (1972a).

7 SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION OF THE VARIABLE

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question: to what extent does primary verb omission reflect the social class membership of the speakers? (cf 1.2.2 & 2.2). Since we now have available a number of constraints that restrict the total number of contexts where primary verb omission can occur, it is possible to calculate and compare percentages of non-standardness for this particular variable for each recruit. The present chapter is an account of recruit-specific variation in primary verb omission.

The account of primary verb omission in the two previous chapters was based on a division of the examples into a number of categories. In this chapter it will be shown that recruit-specific variation covers not only variation in terms of standardness, but also variation in relation to the various categories of primary verb omission. The aim is to observe to what extent the individual speakers actually omit primary verbs and in what environments they tend to do so. The focus will therefore also be on idiosyncratic differences in relation to the categories. We will observe that some speakers have all of the omission types available in their grammatical repertoire, while others do not. Furthermore, we shall see that quantification can be applied to some of these categories, while it cannot be applied to others, due to lack of examples (cf 7.1).

So far, the quantitative analysis has consisted of a comparison of the number of occurrences from each of the categories, and percentages have been calculated from the total number of occurrences of primary verb omission (97 in all). In this chapter, the percentages that are presented are 'non-standardness' percentages, which give the proportion of non-standard variants compared to the total number of analyzable instances which include both standard and non-standard variants. This calculation is possible, since the proposed constraints set limitations to the total population of utterances where variation can occur.

The discussion in Chapter 3 showed that a social class index could be calculated for each of the recruits on the basis of the available information regarding the recruits' social background. The three recruits were classified as belonging to socioeconomic groups 1 (Sarah), 3 (Julian) and 5 (Kate), (in the following, the recruits will be referred to by these fictitious names). The underlying assumption regarding the distribution of non-standard variants is that the percentage of non-standard forms is inversely proportional to a speaker's socioeconomic score (cf Holmes 1992:145). Thus, the highest proportion of non-standard variants is expected to be the one calculated on the basis of Kate's speech, since she belongs to the lowest

socioeconomic group, while Sarah's examples will yield the lowest proportion of non-standard forms. This hypothesis will be tested in the sections that follow.

7.1 Quantification of the omission categories

In order to get a clear picture of the extent to which primary verb omission reflects social class membership, it is required that the non-standardness percentages exceed a minimum level. Comparing very low percentages is not a beneficial task if one's purpose is to draw conclusions as to whether a certain linguistic variable correlates with a social class index. For this reason, the calculation of non-standardness percentages is confined to certain types of primary verb omission. If one were to include all environments where primary verb omission could occur in the calculation, one would end up with very low percentages for all recruits, and subtle differences in the distribution of examples would be lost. This method of restricting the total population of examples is also used by Labov (1972a), who argues for disregarding environments where the verb is rarely omitted, in the following way:

If all the environments ... were included in a quantitative study of the variable deletion rule, the frequency of application of the rule would appear much lower than it actually is; a number of important constraints on variability would be obscured, since they would appear to apply to only a small proportion of the cases; and the important distinctions between variable and categorical behavior would be lost. (Labov 1972a:82)

In order to show that there is indeed co-variation between socioeconomic class index and percentage of non-standard forms, I have disregarded environments involving BE in declarative sentences. It is a fact that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, BE in declarative sentences is not omitted in my primary material. The inclusion of categories 1ai-1aiii (cf p 36) in the calculation of overall non-standardness percentages would inevitably lead to minuscule percentages for all speakers. This would obscure the aspects of idiosyncratic variation, and make it impossible to demonstrate the co-variation of primary verb omission and social class index. Therefore, I have reduced the total population of examples of primary verb omission with BE and HAVE by disregarding BE in declarative sentences.

Another reason for disregarding these environments is that BE in declarative sentences is very often characterized by phonological indeterminacy (cf 4.1.2):

[114] Yeah Jane, you're so smart. (138301/1:188)

[115] They're so disgusting. (137903/1:2)

A substantial number of declarative sentences with BE in the plural involve phonological indeterminacy of the kind suggested in [114] and [115]. In rapid speech, a combination like *they're* [Dei'] is quite often subject to further reduction, and to distinguish it from the corresponding *they* [Dei] may be virtually impossible. *They're* may even be reduced to [Dʹ], and even the most ardent listener will have difficulties in making judgements as to the presence or absence of the verb form 're. Quite a few examples of this kind were actually set aside due to phonological indeterminacy. If categories 1ai-1aiii were to be included in the calculation, the reliability of non-standardness percentages would have been severely reduced, and conclusions regarding the social differentiation of the variable could easily become mere speculations.

A further requirement for reliable percentages is that the total occurrence of a certain category is above a minimum. For example, the observation that Sarah omits BE twice in environment 1bi (eg *What you getting?*), while no corresponding examples with BE were found, is not sufficient evidence that she categorically omits the auxiliary BE in *wh*-questions. The few examples may only be taken as an indicator that she tends to do so. In fact, Sarah's figures for the interrogative categories are generally so low that percentages cannot be calculated. For this reason, all categories involving interrogative sentences (ie 1bi, 1bii, 1biii, 2bi and 2bii, p 36f) have been combined to a joint category, 'omission of BE and HAVE in interrogative sentences' in the description that follows.

This leaves us with the following categories where non-standardness percentages can be calculated and compared:

- 1) Category 2ai, omission of HAVE in declarative sentences before *-ed* participle (cf Figure 9)
- 2) Category 2aii, omission of HAVE in declarative sentences before *got/gotta* (cf Figure 10)
- 3) Category 2aiii, omission of HAVE in declarative sentences before *better*
- 4) Categories 1bi, 1bii, 1biii, 2bi and 2bii, omission of BE and HAVE in interrogative sentences (cf Figure 12)

7.2 Recruit-specific variation in primary verb omission

The description of the recruit-specific tendencies that apply to primary verb omission is presented as diagrams in the following sections. The diagrams are based on the figures in Table 6, which gives the distribution of primary verb omission for each recruit in the categories where percentages can be justifiably calculated and compared.

Table 6: Quantitative analysis of non-standard primary verb omission

	Number of omitted verbs	Number of verbs not omitted	Total	Percentage of non-standard forms
Type 2ai				
Kate	3	10	13	23%
Julian	1	8	9	11%
Sarah	0	15	15	0%
Type 2aii				
Kate	12	12	24	50%
Julian	7	30	37	19%
Sarah	2	14	16	13%
Type 2aiii				
Kate	1	0	1	100%
Julian	5	3	8	63%
Sarah	0	0	0	0%
wh-questions				
Kate	27	17	44	61%
Julian	11	16	27	41%
Sarah	3	4	7	43%

Table 6 shows that yet another category has to be disregarded as a separate indicator of non-standardness. Category 2aiii, involving the *had better* construction, cannot be considered a reliable indicator, due to insufficient number of occurrences for two of the recruits.

7.2.1 Declarative sentences

Since declarative sentences with BE and the *had better* construction are ignored, the categories that remain to be considered are 2ai and 2aii (cf p 37). In these two declarative contexts, a relatively large number of occurrences were found (cf Table 6), and the diagrams show clear recruit-specific tendencies:

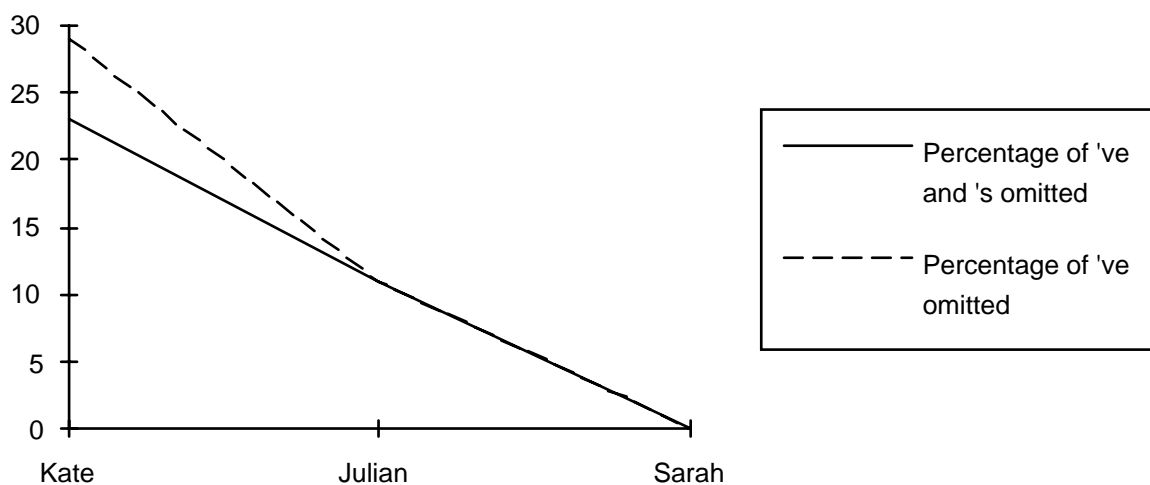


Figure 9: Percentages of non-standard forms in category 2ai, omission of HAVE before *-ed* participles in declarative sentences

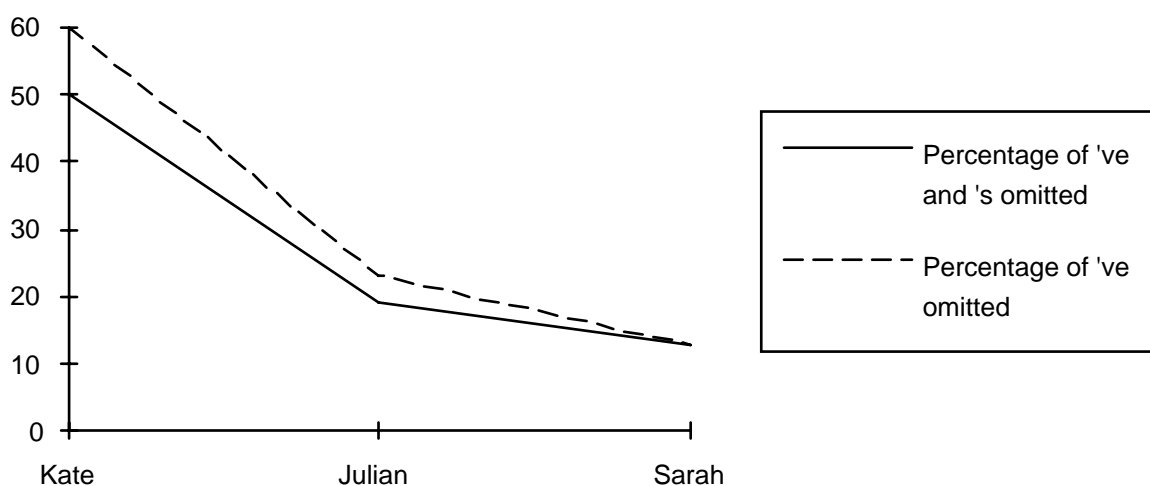


Figure 10: Percentages of non-standard forms in category 2aii, omission of HAVE before *got/gotta* in declarative sentences

Since we know that the verb form *'s* generally does not favour HAVE-omission (cf Figure 8, p 71), it is of interest to observe whether the percentages of non-standard forms increase to any extent if examples involving *'s* or omission of *'s* are ignored in the counting. Hence both the percentages for the total population of HAVE in the contexts 2ai and 2aii and the ones involving *'ve* only (indicated by a discontinuous line) are given in the diagrams.

We can observe that HAVE-omission in environments 2ai and 2aii clearly correlates with the socioeconomic class index. Kate (socioeconomic class index 5) has consistently the highest percentage of non-standard forms, while Sarah (index 1) has the lowest. The differences between Kate and the other two recruits are greater than the differences between Julian and Sarah. This suggests that HAVE-omission in these contexts is primarily associated with the language of speakers from the lowest socioeconomic group. Sarah never omits HAVE in the context 2ai, indicating that an idiosyncratic rule applies here, namely that the auxiliary HAVE is not omitted by this speaker in declarative sentences before an *-ed* participle. There is a danger, however, of taking implications too far. One should not entirely rule out the possibility that this speaker can omit HAVE in this environment, although the figures do suggest categorical behaviour. Furthermore, it can be observed that HAVE-omission is generally more common before *got/gotta* than before and *-ed* participle, (a fact which was also indicated in section 6.2.1).

Figures 9 and 10 also show that these tendencies are even clearer if we exclude the contexts involving the verb form 's from the counting. We then observe that Kate omits HAVE before *got* and *gotta* in as much as 60 per cent of the cases, which indicates that the non-standard form without the auxiliary is the preferred variant for this speaker, in other words that she is more likely to say *I gotta do it* than *I've gotta do it*.

7.2.2 Interrogative sentences

Turning now to recruit-specific patterns in relation to interrogative sentences, the relevant categories, 1bi, 1bii, 1biii, 2bi and 2bii (cf p 36f) have been combined, due to few occurrences in certain categories for some of the recruits. This joint category indicates the social differentiation of the variable less clearly than the separate categories described above.

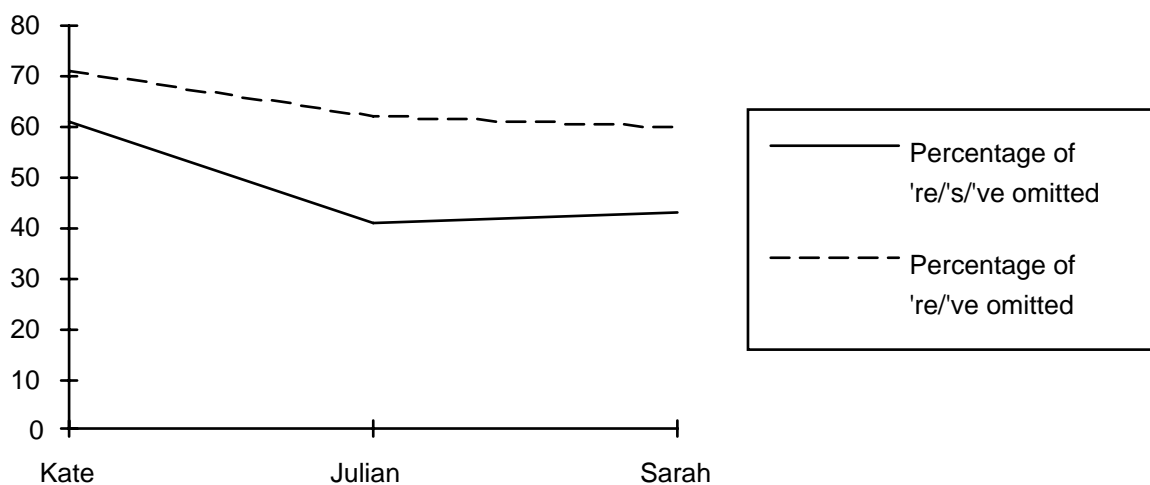


Figure 11: Percentages of non-standard forms in interrogative sentences; categories 1bi, 1bii, 1biii, 2bi, 2bii

The fact that all of the non-standardness percentages are higher than 40 per cent indicates that there is a tendency for all speakers to omit BE and HAVE quite frequently in interrogative contexts. Again, Kate has the highest percentage. Julian's and Sarah's percentages are almost equal (41 and 43 per cent, respectively). This confirms the theory that primary verb omission is most frequently featured in the language of the lowest socioeconomic group. Sarah's relatively high percentage here is not a very reliable indicator, however, since this percentage is based on no more than seven sentences.

We also observe that the forms *'re* and *'ve* favour omission, and that Kate is highly likely to omit BE and HAVE in interrogative sentences, as her percentage of non-standard forms is as high as 71 per cent when the *'s* forms are ignored.

Figure 11 gives the percentages of a joint category and, hence, does not show how primary verb omission varies in relation to the various categories. It is, however, possible to show aspects of category-specific variation for two of the recruits, Kate and Julian, since the number of instances from these recruits are sufficient for this purpose (cf Table 6 p 80):

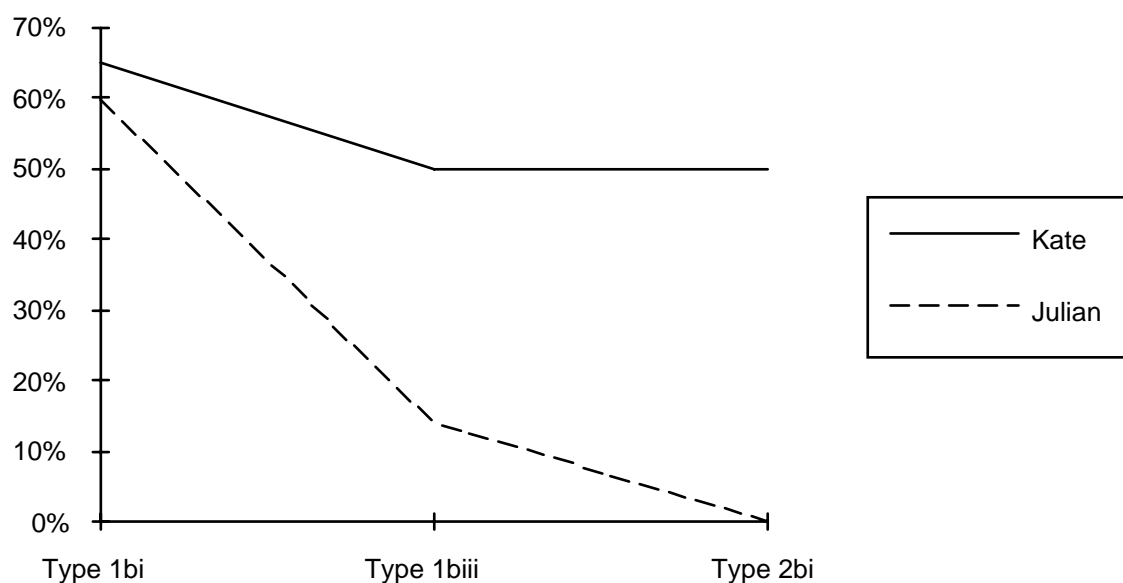


Figure 12: Percentage of non-standard forms of BE and HAVE in interrogative sentences for two of the recruits

Figure 12 includes the three interrogative categories where there are enough examples for calculating reliable percentages, namely 1bi (eg *Where you going?*), 1biii (eg *Where that bitching thing now?*) and 2bi (eg *What you been reading?*). Kate's percentages are consistently higher than Julian's, and the assumption that primary verb omission is primarily associated with the lowest socioeconomic group is thus emphasized. The differences are greatest in connection with categories 1biii and 2bi. Julian never omits HAVE in sentences of category 2bi, which indicates that an idiosyncratic constraint that restricts omission in such contexts might apply here. Furthermore, category 1bi strongly favours BE-omission for both recruits.

7.3 Summary

The previous discussion showed that co-variation of omission of BE and HAVE with the socioeconomic class index assigned to the three recruits could clearly be demonstrated in all the categories where non-standardness percentages could be calculated. The summation of the number of occurrences from the various categories (except BE in declarative sentences) yields the following overall percentages of non-standard forms for each of the recruits:

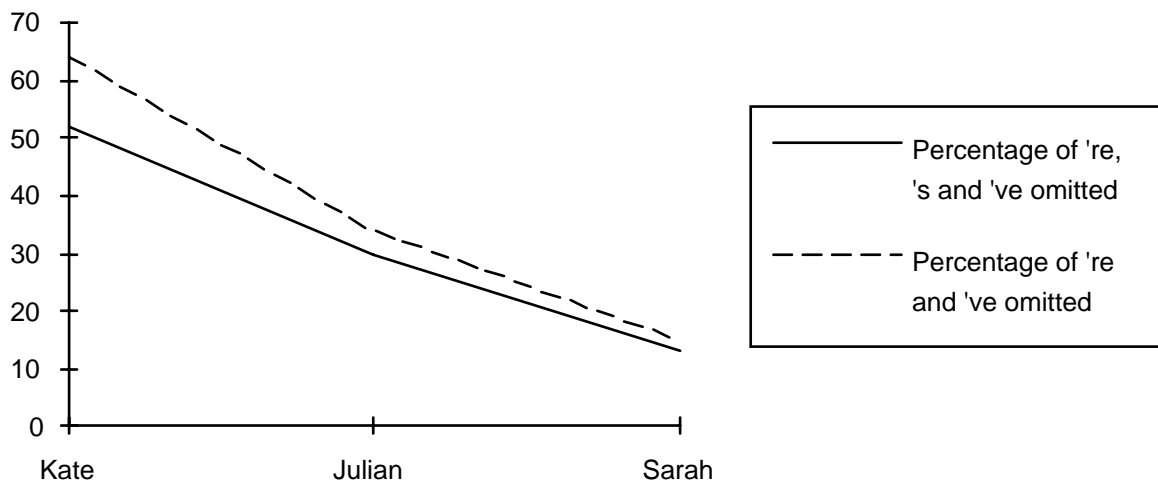


Figure 13: Percentage of non-standard forms, sum of examples from categories 1bi, 1bii, 1biii, 2ai, 2aii, 2aiii, 2bi and 2bii

This diagram gives us a rather important piece of information. It shows that the tendency for Kate to have the highest percentage of non-standard forms and Sarah to have the lowest is even stronger when we consider the total of all examples. Thus, there is clearly co-variation between non-standard percentages and the socioeconomic class index, and the sociolinguistic variable demonstrates social differentiation. Non-standard primary verb omission is thus primarily associated with speakers from the lower socioeconomic groups, which means that Trudgill's (1983) hypothesis has been confirmed (cf p 5).

The fact that co-variation of non-standardness percentages and socioeconomic class index are observable in all the categories as well as in the total of examples suggests that we are dealing with a sociolinguistic variable where the patterns of social differentiation is generally consistent. The two verbs BE and HAVE are affected by the constraints in the same manner, and this supports my fundamental assumption (cf 1.2.2) that omission of BE and of HAVE can be considered aspects of the same sociolinguistic variable, here labelled 'non-standard primary verb omission', and not two separate variables.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 The sociolinguistic variable

The previous chapter showed that the quantitative analysis of primary verb omission revealed patterns of social differentiation that were fairly consistent, and this was taken as an indicator that omission of BE and of HAVE are justifiably considered aspects of the same sociolinguistic variable. Several linguistic facts that support this assumption have previously been demonstrated.

First, we note that, generally, the same rules apply to both BE and HAVE. The observable patterns of primary verb omission have been described in terms of ten grammatical constraints (cf Table 5 p 74). Only two of these constraints, the first person singular constraint and the HAVE/main verb constraint, did not apply to both verbs. I have suggested that the first person singular constraint applies only to BE due to the general distinctness of the form 'm, which makes BE less liable to omission than the equivalent HAVE-form 've (cf pp 59 & 71). HAVE as a main verb is not omissible since it carries stative or dynamic meaning, unlike BE as a main verb. In my opinion, these verb-specific characteristics are not sufficient evidence to reject the assumption that BE and HAVE may be subject to the same processes of phonological and grammatical simplifications. Consequently, I consider omission of BE and HAVE aspects of the same sociolinguistic variable.

Second, we have seen that omission of BE and of HAVE is favoured in quite similar environments. For instance, a pronominal subject, and especially the pronoun *you* strongly favours omission of both verbs (cf Figures 1,2,6 &7). Moreover, the verb form 's is rarely omitted, regardless of whether it represents the full form *is* or *has* (cf Figures 3 & 8). An exception to this consistent pattern of omissions of BE and HAVE is evident if we consider the verbs of intermediate function: *got to/gotta* favour HAVE-omission, while *gonna* does not favour BE-omission (cf Figures 4 & 5). The discussion has also indicated that it was justifiable to separate the contexts involving verbs of intermediate function from the contexts involving auxiliary verbs proper or main verbs (cf p 56 & 67).

The similarity in the patterns of BE-omission and HAVE-omission seems to indicate that these verbs are subject to the same processes of phonological and grammatical simplification (cf p 5). For instance, it seems plausible that the same reduction process affects BE and HAVE in the two examples *What you doing?* and *What you been reading?*, despite the fact that the omitted verb forms 're and 've are different. This might suggest that the zero-verb in these two contexts is a further

reduction of an identical reduced form, [ʹ], representing an intermediate stage in the reduction process. Furthermore, we have seen that the forms that are liable to be omitted are those which have little semantic significance and which are generally not phonologically distinct. This suggests that two factors determine whether a verb form is likely to be omitted in a certain context: the characteristics of the grammatical environment (eg *What+Ø+you*) and the characteristics of the verb form itself (eg *'re* vs *'s*).

My discussion has also shown that Labov's principle regarding contractability and omissibility is not applicable to BE and HAVE in the London teenage vernacular (cf 6.3). Nevertheless, I have, throughout the discussion, endorsed Labov's assumption that contraction and omission are results of the same processes of phonological reduction (cf p 5), and that the grammatical and sociolinguistic variation that is noticeable in connection with primary verb omission is the result of phonological simplifications. (For discussions on grammar vs phonology in relation to primary verb-omission, see Labov 1972a:23 & Baugh 1980:95-97.)

8.2 Socioeconomic class variation and linguistic change

The scrutiny of the variable in relation to social class showed that primary verb omission correlates with the social class membership of the speakers. The implications that can be drawn from this observation are twofold. First, we may conclude that non-standard primary verb omission is primarily a characteristic feature in the speech of teenagers from the lowest socioeconomic groups, and that the occurrence of this non-standard feature decreases as we move upwards in the socioeconomic continuum. Second, the investigation has shown that linguistic variation due to socioeconomic class differences is in fact apparent in the language of London teenagers, and that regular social differentiation is a characteristic of teenage speech (a fact which is also observed by Romaine 1984:83ff).

In the concluding sections of the thesis it is of interest to consider whether the observed characteristic of the London teenage vernacular, non-standard primary verb omission, is an indicator of linguistic change (cf Fischer 1976, Slobin 1977, Milroy 1992, Labov 1994). The fact that this phenomenon occurs most frequently in the speech of London teenagers from the lowest socioeconomic group may have some rather interesting implications, if we consider Eckert's (1988) observations:

Recent work in linguistic geography shows that sound change, like

other kinds of innovation, follows networks of communication and influence, spreading gradually to the outlying areas of urban centers and also spreading directly from larger to smaller urban centers. Community studies have found, furthermore, a regular socioeconomic stratification of (phonological) variables within communities, in which the frequency of innovative forms decreases as one moves upward from the working class through the socioeconomic hierarchy, suggesting that it is the working class that brings changes into communities and that these changes then spread from the working class through local class related networks. The progress of phonological change is further reflected in age differences within communities, with a general increase of innovative forms as one moves downward through the age continuum. (Eckert 1988:184)

Assuming that primary verb omission can be placed under the heading 'sound change' (since it is, arguably, triggered by phonological processes of reduction) we may suspect that non-standard primary verb omission is likely to spread along the three dimensions suggested by Eckert, that is, outwards from the urban area of London, upwards from the lowest socioeconomic group and upwards from the adolescent age group.

It is, however, also likely that non-standard primary verb omission is not confined to a specific age group or a specific urban area. Both Labov's study and my own are set in urban dialectological frameworks, and the sociolinguistic variable has not been subject to comparison with material involving speakers who are not teenagers from urban areas. An investigation of whether non-standard primary verb omission is a specific feature of urban adolescent language would require primary material from other sources, such as transcripts of conversations with speakers from other age groups, from other cities, from rural areas and so on. It has not been possible within the scope of this thesis to make such comparisons. Consequently, this study does not provide evidence as to whether non-standard primary verb omission is a typical 'London teenage phenomenon'.

8.3 Competence vs performance

The issue of the social and regional distribution of the sociolinguistic variable is further complicated by the fact that non-standard primary verb omission may be an effect of linguistic performance rather than linguistic competence (cf Crystal 1987:409

& 1991:66f). Throughout the present study, it has been assumed that primary verb omission may be considered an aspect of the linguistic competence of speakers of the London teenage vernacular. Therefore, the variable has been described in terms of a set of constraints which seem to apply to this particular variety of English. This description is meant to demonstrate how the grammar of the London teenage vernacular differs from the grammar of standard English. It may be, however, that omission of primary verbs is a mere performance effect, in which case primary verb omission must be ascribed to the characteristics of casual speech and would be expected to occur in the language of any speaker of English. In this connection, it should be mentioned that, in the early stages of this project, I made an inquiry to the subscribers of the Linguist List regarding this topic. Most of the 22 linguists who replied seemed to agree that this phenomenon had a more widespread distribution than in the language of London teenagers. None of them would, however, ascribe this phenomenon to performance issues. There also appeared to be consensus that primary verb omission is a widespread phenomenon in American English, and especially Black English (cf Labov 1972a)¹. Previous studies of the dialects of Southern England (eg Cheshire 1982b, Edwards 1993) have not been concerned with primary verb omission (cf p 6). A possible explanation for this may be that the researchers consider it a performance effect.

8.4 Suggestions for further investigation

The most obvious topic to be pursued in connection with primary verb omission is the issue of social and regional distribution, sketched in the previous section. A comparative investigation incorporating other varieties of English² would reveal how regional and social factors determine the distribution of non-standard forms, and may also shed light on the competence/performance issue. Knowing that primary verb omission is a characteristic feature of the Black English Vernacular, one might, in this connection, exploit the issue of whether primary verb omission in varieties of British English results from cross-atlantic influence.

Other topics to be pursued are the correlation of the sociolinguistic variable with other non-linguistic factors, such as sex, social networks or ethnicity (cf Milroy 1980, Romaine 1982, Trudgill 1983), and whether it can be considered a linguistic marker of adherence to the vernacular culture (cf Cheshire 1982a). For instance, it is highly relevant to consider whether primary verb omission in British English is typically associated with a particular ethnic group, since Labov (1972a) clearly

demonstrated that it was a characteristic feature of the Black English Vernacular.

Finally, it is necessary to study how far primary verb omission has reached in the institutionalization process (cf Milroy 1992). This topic is motivated by the observation that primary verb omission does, in fact, appear in written, familiar style in advertisements, and in the lyrics of pop and rock songs. Thus, it is relevant to find out whether primary verb omission is stigmatized (cf Finegan 1985, Whitcut 1985), as varieties of English involving non-standard features tend to achieve low status in the English language today.

¹ One of the respondents also believed that primary verb omission is widespread throughout England.

² There is, obviously, the possibility of comparing English to other languages. For instance, standard Swedish allows omission of auxiliary HAVE in the present perfective:

[1] Polisen tror att Petterson har mördat Palme.
(The police believe that Petterson has murdered Palme.)

[2] Polisen tror att Petterson mördat Palme.
(The police believe that Petterson has murdered Palme.)

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Personal data *cu*

All information will be treated confidentially. Recruits, their family and conversation partners are guaranteed full anonymity.

Recruit number 6

A) Area of residence (London borough) Stoke Newington

Postcode OSX

B) Have you ever lived in any other part of England? If so, NO
where? _____ and for how long? _____

C) Mother's occupation doesn't work

Is she currently employed? Y/N _____

D) Father's occupation None

Is he currently employed? Y/N _____

Please remember to take this form with you when you are giving back the personal stereo etc. to Ms Haslerud

Thanks very much for your co-operation!

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Recruit number 17

A) Area of residence (London borough) Camden

Postcode NW6 2BA

B) Have you ever lived in any other part of England? If so,

where? Rowley Way and for how long? couple of years

C) Mother's occupation Secretary

Is she currently employed? ~~Y/N~~ Yes

D) Father's occupation Tyler

Is he currently employed? ~~Y/N~~ Yes

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Recruit number 13

A) Area of residence (London borough) Westminster

Postcode W9 2UU

B) Have you ever lived in any other part of England? If so, where? _____ and for how long? _____

C) Mother's occupation _____

Is she currently employed? Y/N N

D) Father's occupation Science Engineer

Is he currently employed? Y/N Y

Please remember to take this form with you when you are giving back the personal stereo etc. to Ms Haslerud

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