

Multicultural London English (MLE)



- 1 If you're a Londoner, or even if you're not, have you noticed the way a lot of young Londoners speak? Have you ever thought about the kind of dialect that people like Dizzee Rascal, Stormzy or Big Shaq use in their music? This is a kind of English that linguists have called Multicultural London English, or MLE for short. Sometimes MLE goes by the name 'Jafaican', at least in the media.
- 2 MLE is a dialect of London English which has emerged since the early 1980s in parts of London where there has been a relatively high level of immigration. The first major group of post-Second World War immigrants to London came from the West Indies (the Caribbean) in the period from 1948 to around the mid-70s. They brought their language – Jamaican Creole or 'Patois' – and this sowed the seed that, 40 years later, would become MLE.
- 3 But relatively few of the features of MLE can be proved to be Jamaican – it's mainly the slang that reveals any Jamaican ancestry. MLE certainly isn't 'fake Jamaican' as the name 'Jafaican' suggests: it's home-grown. And, MLE has many other ancestors, too. This is obvious if you consider the very large number of other languages that immigrants brought with them, ranging from Punjabi, Bengali and Tamil to Yoruba, Akan, Arabic and Turkish – and many more besides. Researchers have counted over 300 languages spoken in London.
- 4 Many of the people who spoke these languages learnt English after they arrived, and like almost all adult learners they spoke it with a 'foreign' accent. This foreign accent formed part of the linguistic 2 that made up the input to MLE. Remarkably, though, it's virtually impossible to say that a particular feature – a sound or a bit of grammar – comes directly from this or that language.

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