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THE DEVELOPMENT OF MULTICULTURAL LONDON ENGLISH FEATURES FROM
2015 TO 2025: EVIDENCE FROM RAP SONG LYRICS
Bachelor's thesis

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Narva 2026

Kinnitus

Olen koostanud töö iseseisvalt. Kõik töö koostamisel kasutatud teiste autorite tööd, põhimõttelised seisukohad, kirjandus allikatest ja mujalt pärinevad andmed on viidatud.

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PREFACE

Multicultural London English (MLE) as defined by Cheshire et al. (2024) is

a new dialect spoken in multilingual and multicultural boroughs of London. In these areas it has largely displaced traditional working-class London dialects such as Cockney. It results from the large-scale immigration from many different parts of the world that has occurred in London, as in many European cities, since the 1950s. (Cheshire et al, 2024)

Many different researchers have already studied the origin, characteristics and development of the Multicultural London English dialect, as well as classified the MLE users and identified the main regions where the MLE dialect is used (e.g., Cheshire et al, 2024; Oxbury et al, 2025; Ilbury et al, 2024). The MLE dialect is currently gaining immense popularity among British people (especially youth and immigrants) and linguists from all over the world (Ilbury et al, 2024; Oxbury et al, 2025); the MLE dialect is actively used in British rap, which, in turn, sets trends in fashion and language, for example, constantly expanding the vocabulary of young people with new slang expressions.

As MLE is a non-standard English dialect that is greatly affected by the changes in the London demographics, it is important to study the evolution of the MLE dialect in order to understand how these demographic changes have affected the use of MLE in British rap songs between 2015 and 2025. Firstly, it is vital to understand how MLE features (e.g., grammar and lexis) have evolved from 2015 to the present day, as exemplified in UK rap songs. Secondly, it is important to examine, in connection with MLE, how the themes in the UK rap songs reflect the socioeconomic and sociocultural issues associated with MLE users in British society, and how the representation of these issues in rap songs has changed through the years.

The present research aims to provide a comprehensive outline of the MLE dialect (its origin, characteristics, functions, attitudes to MLE in the British society, socioeconomic issues associated with MLE speakers, and previous research studies into MLE); to give an overview of the UK rap subgenres (drill, grime etc.) and its connections with the MLE dialect; to reveal how MLE features (e.g., grammar and lexis) have evolved from the year 2015 to 2025 on the basis of UK rap lyrics analysis; to describe how UK rap songs reflect the socioeconomic and sociocultural issues associated with MLE users in the British society and how the representation of those in rap songs has changed through the years.

This research paper includes an introduction, two main chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides a brief overview of MLE persona, characteristics and functions of MLE, the

role of media in recontextualization, areas of MLE usage, attitude towards MLE in British society, sources of MLE dialect acquisition, and problems in MLE dialect usage. Chapter I, “Overview of the MLE Dialect”, discusses the origin and the process of enregisterment of the MLE dialect, and MLE features (lexical, pragmatic and morphosyntactic). Chapter II, “Overview of UK Rap Subgenres and Analysis of MLE Features in Rap Song Lyrics of 2015-2025”, includes an overview of the UK rap subgenres, methodology, and summary and discussion of results. The conclusion reviews the core theoretical and practical results of the paper and assesses the formulated research questions.

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INTRODUCTION

MLE Persona

According to Ilbury (2024), each dialect or language has a certain characteristic personality type with which this language or dialect is associated. Such personae are endowed with a certain social status, norms of behavior, and linguistic features that clearly reflect the stereotypical user of the dialect with which this persona is compared (Ilbury, 2024). The MLE dialect also has its own persona, with whom the dialect is associated – Roadman (Ilbury, 2024). Ilbury (2024) notes that the term originates from Caribbean and British African communities and can refer to either a person of status on the streets of a city (mainly for young people) or someone who leads a criminal lifestyle (most often both).

As mentioned by Ilbury (2024), the creation of the Roadman character implies a “recontextualization” of Multicultural London English. Ilbury (2024) clarifies that recontextualization occurs when one concept of a phenomenon is replaced by a new one. For instance, while the MLE dialect was once the language of working-class communities in London, it is now considered an integral part of Black British street culture (Ilbury, 2024).

According to Ilbury (2024), Roadmen are usually presented online as Black (usually with racially discriminatory undertones), heterosexual, overly masculine, dominant men who are directly involved in crime, wear trendy streetwear (in all weather conditions), and listen to British rap, specifically drill and grime.

Characteristics and Functions of MLE

Gerwin (2024), and Fox and Kircher (2021) state that MLE dialect users are often associated by non-users of the dialect with specific locations of use, origins (of both language and speaker), societies, ages and genders.

Starting with origin, Gerwin (2024) notes that the MLE dialect and its speakers are most frequently considered to originate from Caribbean (such as Jamaican), Asian (Sri Lankan, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi), Arab, African, American or South American regions. Many people also believe that MLE speakers have roots from predominantly White countries, immigrant communities, non-English speaking communities, former Cockney users who have switched to MLE, or indeed from any region or community (Gerwin, 2024).

According to Gerwin (2024), most often, MLE dialect is spoken in working or middle-class cities and mostly used in schools (when children talk to each other), on the streets, playgrounds, and at bus stops. Moreover, Gerwin (2024) adds that the MLE dialect is very actively used on social media, and sometimes on television and pirate radio stations.

Regarding specifically the users of MLE, Gerwin (2024) says that the MLE dialect is used mainly by young people, teenagers, or even younger children from middle- or working-class regions, regardless of gender; it is very rare to hear the MLE dialect spoken by people over 25. Gerwin (2024) adds that MLE speakers are also associated with certain social groups, such as gangsters, Jihadists, rappers, rioters, drug dealers, criminals, DJs, disadvantaged people, navy sailors and thieves.

Gerwin (2024) states that speakers of the MLE dialect are also often compared to various famous personalities who speak this dialect, such as actors, musicians, movie characters, popular TikTok or YouTube bloggers, or even fictional personalities. Although the MLE dialect is also used and promoted by celebrities with more positive background, such as the actor Idris Elba, or the rappers Stormzy and Dizzee Rascal, this dialect is still associated with more scandalous and negative characters, such as Ali G (a movie character played by the actor Sasha Baron Cohen), whose image is used by journalists to convey to a wider audience the image of MLE carriers, emphasizing their absurdity, foolishness and foreignness (Gerwin, 2024). Based on characters like Ali G, journalists have developed their own name for MLE users, which they use to smear people who speak the dialect – “Roadman” (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) remarks that, most often, this term refers to a young man wearing a hoodie and low-slung pants, spending time outside, participating in some kind of unlawful activity.

The Role of Media in Recontextualization

Ilbury (2024) states that internet users play a huge role in redefining dialects and the personalities associated with them. Media users are adding new features to established phenomena and ensuring that as many people as possible are aware of these changes (Ilbury, 2024).

Ilbury (2024) asserts that the image of the typical MLE user, or Roadman, is well represented in online parodies, although they are often exaggerated and presented in very comical situations. In them, people adopt some features of a dialect (in this case, MLE) and try to create an image of a stereotypical dialect user (Ilbury, 2024). Ilbury (2024) says that such parodies may be created to highlight the speakers of a dialect or to demonstrate one's affiliation with a given culture. However,

parodies can also ridicule both the dialect itself and its users (Ilbury, 2024). For example, in some parodies, Roadmen are presented in situations that are completely unimaginable for native speakers of the dialect, such as in the role of a doctor or a policeman (Ilbury, 2024). Also, on TikTok one can find many AI-generated videos that depict entire schools and universities, in which both teachers and students are Roadmen.

Ilbury (2024) notes that, while these videos were originally created to make people laugh, their sheer number can inadvertently create new impressions about the dialect and its speakers in people who know little about the culture. Ilbury (2024) adds that the images and speech patterns depicted in their videos may be greatly exaggerated or even completely inaccurate. Therefore, the real image of Roadman and the image of Roadman created in the parodies are not consistent (Ilbury, 2024). Another major problem is that such videos often compare American English and British MLE dialect, which is why the image of Roadmen and the characteristic features of MLE are transferred to the whole of Britain and its inhabitants (Ilbury, 2024).

Moreover, Ilbury (2024) warns that such videos could also harm users of the MLE dialect. Ilbury (2024) argues that Roadman parodies link Blackness and the MLE dialect, and create anti-poor and anti-Black sentiments towards MLE speakers. Moreover, stereotypical Roadmen traits such as excessive masculinity, cruelty, and criminal underworld affiliation are transferred to all MLE users at once (Ilbury, 2024).

However, Ilbury (2024) states that the image of Roadman can also become a role model for young people, and for people who admire African-American culture or associate themselves with this culture. Such people will readily adopt the linguistic features of the MLE dialect and behavior, listen to music that actively uses MLE, and also wear clothing typical of people from the MLE communities (Ilbury, 2024).

Areas of MLE Usage

The MLE dialect is used to varying degrees in different regions of Britain, but is most prevalent in areas near London, which are less affluent and less privileged, and which have large populations that identify as Asian or Black (Ilbury et al., 2024).

Ilbury et al. (2024) provide the example of the use of the word *paigon* (opponent/ enemy) in different regions of Britain. Ilbury et al. (2024) tell that the word is most commonly used in the Southern England (most commonly London), and in more urban and multicultural cities such as Birmingham, Luton and Northampton. In predominantly rural regions that are both culturally and

geographically distant from London, the use of the word *paigon* is much less common (Ilbury et al., 2024). According to Ilbury et al. (2024), such regions include, for example, Scotland, Southwest England, and Northern Ireland. A similar example is found by Ilbury et al. (2024) with the word *leng* (pretty/attractive). This word is also most often found in the Southern England (predominantly London) and in urban cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Northampton, and Nottingham (Ilbury et al., 2024). Ilbury et al. (2024) adds that it is less frequently heard in areas further afield, such as Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.

However, Ilbury et al. (2024) note that this pattern does not apply to all words. For example, the words *butters* (ugly) and *famalam* (family or friend), on the contrary, are more common in Wales and North/South West England, and least common in South East England and London (Ilbury et al., 2024). The same thing happens with the word *dench* (attractive), as it is rare in the South-East England and the capital as well, and is heard mainly in Bristol, Norwich and Southampton (Ilbury et al., 2024).

Ilbury et al. (2024) mention that words directly borrowed by the MLE dialect from other dialects were also examined. For example, the word *gyaldem* (meaning group of females), borrowed from Jamaican Patois (Ilbury et al., 2024). Although *gyaldem* is used as frequently as *leng* and *paigon* in Luton, London and Birmingham, the word is also found in areas not typical for these two words, such as Leeds and Bristol (Ilbury et al., 2024). Ilbury et al. (2024) clarify that this may happen due to the fact that these two cities have some of the largest concentrations of Black population in the United Kingdom. This is confirmed by the fact that the word *gyaldem* is less common in cities with smaller Black populations (for instance, Norwich) (Ilbury et al., 2024). From this it can be concluded that words borrowed from Jamaican Patois are more often used in societies with a large number of dialect speakers living in the area (Ilbury et al., 2024).

According to Ilbury et al. (2024), the frequency and range of use of 47 of the most common words in the MLE dialect were also studied. Most surprisingly, only one consistent pattern was found for all of these words (Ilbury et al., 2024). Ilbury et al. (2024) describe that these 47 words are most commonly found in London, namely Croydon, Enfield, Ilford and North London, and also occur in Luton. Ilbury et al. (2024) note that these figures also indicate that the MLE dialect is more likely to have originated in London and then spread to other cities (mainly near London or north of it).

In London specifically, the use of MLE also varies across different regions (Ilbury et al., 2024). Ilbury et al. (2024) note that MLE is used more frequently and actively in East and North London,

as these are multicultural, working-class areas, unlike other boroughs. Cities where MLE is also frequently used include Bristol, Luton, Southampton, Slough, Birmingham, Milton Keynes, Northampton, and other multi-ethnic cities in South-East England, as well as in the central and South Britain (Ilbury et al., 2024). Ilbury et al. (2024) say that the cities where MLE is heard least often, with the exception of Bradford, Leeds and Huddersfield, are Liverpool and Manchester, as well as other northern areas of England. Last but not least, Ilbury et al. (2024) underline the contradiction in the use of MLE in Glasgow, which is a multicultural urban city, yet the dialect is rarely used there. Ilbury et al. (2024) clarify that this may be due to its great distance from London.

It is also worth noting that the regions with the highest number of MLE words used are home to a large number of ethnic groups, particularly Asian and Black British (Ilbury et al., 2024). Ilbury et al. (2024) add that in more remote territories with a strong agricultural focus and a more uniform culture than London, such as the Outer Hebrides, Motherwell, Shetland and Kirkwall (all Scotland), MLE is used most rarely.

Attitudes Toward MLE in British Society

When a new dialect appears in a language, people also begin to form a certain attitude about the dialect (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) clarifies that in this situation people are helped by “language ideologies”, which are, in fact, a collection of people’s opinions and understandings about a particular dialect or language, as well as explanations of how and why this dialect is used. Thus, a certain attitude is created towards the emerging language or dialect in society, and the dialect itself is attributed with certain social status, values and political direction (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) notes that these “language ideologies” appear in evaluative texts and newspaper articles written by linguists or journalists, in which they express their attitude towards a new language or dialect.

Gerwin (2024) testifies that in conservative newspapers it can be noticed that the attitude towards the MLE dialect is rather negative (52% of analyzed articles by Gerwin (2024)), and the journalists themselves often present the emergence of a new dialect in a negative light and are themselves rather biased towards it. They view MLE speakers as immigrants who do not fit into British culture, spread criminality in the country, and take British jobs (Gerwin, 2024). Moreover, Gerwin (2024) notes that journalists with more right-wing views until 2010-11 refused to use the more tolerant term “Multicultural London English” when writing about MLE, instead using the term “Jafaikan/Jafaican” (fake Jamaican). According to Gerwin (2024), the newspapers that have written most negatively about the MLE dialect are: The Daily Mail, The Times and The Daily

Telegraph. Journalists with more left-leaning views stopped using the term “Jafaikan/Jafaican” entirely by 2016, while conservative newspapers may still use the term (Gerwin, 2024).

According to Gerwin (2024), there are several reasons why journalists dislike the MLE dialect: firstly, this dialect is actively associated with the criminal world; secondly, this dialect is not suitable for communication in the work and educational environment, thereby implying that users of the MLE dialect are not very intelligent. Such conclusions immediately raise concerns among parents that their children may be left without a stable future if they use the MLE dialect (Gerwin, 2024). Thirdly, Gerwin (2024) contends that journalists simply consider the MLE dialect to be “unnatural”, “ridiculous”, “cruel” (especially towards women) and “lazy”. In addition, journalists think that MLE does not convey British values, draws excessive attention to issues of racism and lack of equality and justice, and simply sounds “alien” (Gerwin, 2024; Fox & Kircher, 2021).

Continuing the theme of concern for children, Gerwin (2024) emphasizes that journalists in their articles often act as parents who, manipulating the fear for the future of other parents’ children, try to convey their negative attitude toward the Multicultural London English dialect as an objective assessment. However, despite such harsh criticism of the dialect in the press, average Londoners regard MLE more as something new and unusual, which contributes to the development of English culture (Gerwin, 2024).

As mentioned above, users of the MLE dialect are often associated by journalists with criminals, drug dealers, rappers, gangsters, etc. However, journalists like to use two specific high-profile cases when they try to accuse the MLE dialect of cruelty (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) clarifies that the first incident occurred in 2014 in Syria, when a video went viral online showing four MLE speaking British terrorists (nicknamed “The Beatles”), brutally murdering James Foley, an American journalist. Also, according to journalists, the vandals who caused riots in 2011 in areas such as Tottenham and Brixton came from MLE-speaking communities (Gerwin, 2024).

It is also worth noting that sometimes, in an attempt to tarnish the reputation of the MLE dialect, journalists make critical mistakes when writing their articles. Firstly, Gerwin (2024) notes that in modern articles of some newspapers (usually more conservative ones) one can still find slogans from almost 20 years ago, in which MLE is presented as some completely new phenomenon, although it has been studied by linguists for many years. Moreover, these slogans are also often simply copied from older articles (Gerwin, 2024). This once again proves that journalists are not interested in covering the development of the dialect, but rather in turning MLE into a common enemy (Gerwin, 2024).

Gerwin (2024) makes it clear that this is not the first time that journalists have been inconsistent in their articles. The main complaint of journalists about the recently emerged MLE dialect is its “invasive” nature, which, like a virus, infects a sterile linguistic environment (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) adds that the MLE is accused of displacing the Cockney variant and taking its place, and the Cockney dialect itself is described as something harmless, unique, established and true. However, it is important to mention that in 19th century, Cockney dialect was also subjected to oppression and criticism from journalists for the same reasons as MLE (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) notes that the Estuary dialect, although not subject to ethnic discrimination, was also treated at one time as something foreign that could harm the English language.

Last but not least, Gerwin (2024) mentions that, although Ali G is frequently cited as an example of MLE users in articles (20% of analyzed articles by Gerwin (2024)), today’s younger MLE users are unlikely to know who he is. This directly points to the incompetence of some journalists and their desire to insult MLE speakers rather than to introduce the new dialect to the masses (Gerwin, 2024).

Moving to other assessments of the MLE dialect, scholar articles have taken a more neutral (42% of analyzed articles by Gerwin (2024)) view of MLE, noting that it is a new phenomenon in the English language that heralds a significant change in British speech (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) reports that linguists defend MLE, believing that this dialect arose in Britain through the mixing of various dialects and languages, and that the foreign sound of MLE is due to the slang used in it. Linguists also acknowledge that MLE has had a strong influence on the English language, and the use of this dialect in English rap indicates its rapid spread and development (Gerwin, 2024).

Gerwin (2024) affirms that only a very small number of journalists (6% of analyzed articles by Gerwin (2024)) have a positive attitude towards the MLE dialect, claiming that this dialect is something bright, unusual and unique, and that it makes the English language more diverse.

Sources of MLE Dialect Acquisition

It is also important to understand how and why the MLE dialect is acquired and stabilized in children's speech. According to Oxbury et al. (2025), it is generally believed that a child acquires a particular manner (or several, for formal and informal communication) of speech from his parents or guardians and adheres to the dialect used at home as he gets older. This process is called

“incrementation” and lasts until about age 17 (Oxbury et al., 2025). However, Oxbury et al. (2025) state that this scenario only works in societies where there is one dominant language or dialect.

In the case of MLE, this process goes differently, as already from an early childhood (around two years old), a child begins to notice the difference in pronunciation between his parents and peers (Oxbury et al., 2025). Since a child needs to communicate with peers, he needs to interact with people from different cultures and ethnicities (Oxbury et al., 2025). Each of these children will have their own unique pronunciation, and the child will be more likely to adopt some of the phonetic features of these children than of his parents (Oxbury et al., 2025). Thus, by about eight years of age, a child begins to focus more on the speech characteristics of his peers than on his household members (Oxbury et al., 2025). However, researchers also know of cases where children from multicultural areas of London, as young as four years old, begin to adopt vowel sounds from their peers (for example, instead of “house” they begin to pronounce “hoose”) (Oxbury et al., 2025).

Oxbury et al. (2025) say that among MLE dialect users, there are also some differences. Young people pronounce certain words and sounds differently depending on their status, gender, age and ethnicity (Oxbury et al., 2025). Oxbury et al. (2025) provide the example that White British boys and girls with more diverse ethnic backgrounds are more likely to use new pronunciation variations in their speech, while White British girls prefer to use standard variations. Another example by Oxbury et al. (2025) is that teenagers use more monophthongs than children, and children themselves do not have differences in pronunciation between girls and boys. Oxbury et al. (2025) also add that children's speech will still be more similar to that of their parents than that of teenagers, since teenagers are more willing to adopt the latest changes in language or to modernize it themselves. However, Cheshire et al. (2017) clarify that teenagers who use MLE in their speech were not always aware of all the features of the dialect they were using and, in general, did not always understand that they were speaking in a certain dialect, as for them they were speaking “normally”.

According to Oxbury et al. (2025), for children who communicate in one language at home and in English with their peers, the language of their parents can become a “second language”. An example is given in a study of the speech of three Lebanese children (one was five, the second seven, and the third ten) (Oxbury et al., 2025). Oxbury et al. (2025) note that researchers found that these children preferred the speech patterns of their peers over their parents when communicating in English, even without using their native accent. However, when speaking in Arabic, children still used the phonetic peculiarities of their native language when switching to

English (Oxbury et al., 2025). Oxbury et al. (2025) suggest that this may have been done as a compromise that would allow the children to use their preferred language, English, while at the same time satisfying the mother's wish that the children speak more Arabic.

As was also noted by Oxbury et al. (2025), when communicating, young people of different ethnic groups try to use the most neutral pronunciation possible for the most convenient and efficient communication with each other. Some researchers call this neutral communication “Multicultural English” or “Multicultural Urban British English” and note that each society has its own unique variety of this universal sub-dialect (Oxbury et al., 2025). Oxbury et al. (2025) suggest that the use of the MLE dialect in various British cities outside of London may be due to both the analogous ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds of local residents, as well as the spread of a young people youth style in both music and culture.

Problems with MLE Dialect Usage

The obstacles that MLE speakers must overcome should not be forgotten as well. Gerwin (2024) mentions that newspapers raised the problem that MLE would cause children to lose the ability to communicate normally in formal settings, so some schools introduced public speaking lessons and forbade specific slang phrases and words (for instance, in Manchester in one of the secondary schools in two thousand and eight), including those from the MLE dialect. Some more conservative journalists immediately came out in support of such measures, as they consider Standard English to be the ideal and universal dialect that everyone should speak (Gerwin, 2024).

According to Cheshire et al. (2017), the MLE dialect may encounter discrimination in more formal settings, such as oral exams, job applications, or in court. Negative attitudes towards certain dialects and high levels of poverty in regions where multi-ethnic dialects are spoken may also hinder people's awareness of the linguistic and multi-ethnic diversity of the English language (Cheshire et al., 2017).

Moreover, Gerwin (2024) asserts that a major problem with the even faster process of the MLE dialect enregisterment is the denial of the roots of this dialect by the population. Black activists have expressed the view that the term “MLE” (Multicultural London English) is offensive to the Black population, as it demeans the dignity of African and Caribbean dialects in the development of the MLE dialect (Gerwin, 2024). According to Gerwin (2024), the same Black activists even accused the White British media of belittling Black culture and declared that MLE should be

renamed BBE – “Black British English”, since it was the Black population of Britain that gave impetus to the development of the MLE dialect.

To prevent such situations from arising in the future, it is necessary to explain to children from the elementary grades in which situations which dialect is better to use and why, as well as to show children the diversity of dialects and the differences between them (Cheshire et al., 2017). Cheshire et al. (2017) clarify that priority should be given to learning the Standard dialect, but this teaching should be explanatory, introductory and motivational, not coercive, and the child should not be prohibited from communicating using MLE in appropriate situations. Otherwise, children will perceive learning the Standard dialect as a punishment and the learning process will proceed extremely slowly (Cheshire et al., 2017).

As mentioned by Cheshire et al. (2017), some educational institutions in England and Wales run the GCE (The General Certificate of Education) program, which allows children to learn about the different varieties and dialects of the English language, as well as their characteristics and the identities of their speakers. In more multiethnic areas, a course called English Language A Level has become popular, introducing students to the linguistic diversity of the English language (Cheshire et al., 2017). Students from multicultural areas find this course appealing because their own linguistic background is valued and explored, and, as a result, students are more willing to learn the Standard dialect (Cheshire et al., 2017).

However, Cheshire et al. (2017) note that for such a system to work, teachers need to be informed about the existence of certain dialects, as well as their functions, characteristics and features, and what are the differences between Standard English and other dialects. With such knowledge, teachers could guide students in using certain dialects in certain life situations, for instance, through small performances during lessons (Cheshire et al., 2017). For example, in one Manchester school, teachers organize mock work interviews where students practice using Standard Dialect (Cheshire et al., 2017).

In the future, children who are taught the peculiarities of dialects could explain to younger generations where and which dialects are correct to use (Cheshire et al., 2017). Cheshire et al. (2017) add that outside of school, special organizations should also be established to help educate people about the diversity of language and the existence of a large number of different dialects. Cheshire et al. (2017) also argue that dialogue with other multi-ethnic countries would be useful, so that the British authorities could learn from them how to address the problem of low public

awareness of the large number of different dialects of the English language. All these measures would help prevent linguistic discrimination (Cheshire et al., 2017).

The present research focuses on the evolution of MLE features as exemplified in British rap lyrics and is guided by the following research questions:

1. How have MLE features (grammar and lexis) evolved from 2015 to 2025 as exemplified in UK rap songs?
2. How do the themes of UK rap songs reflect the socioeconomic and sociocultural issues associated with MLE users in the British society and how has the representation of those in rap songs changed through the years?

CHAPTER I OVERVIEW OF THE MLE DIALECT

1. Origin and Enregisterment of MLE

According to Oxbury et al. (2025), researchers believe that changes in language and the emergence of new dialects are primarily facilitated by immigration and the mobility of multilingual people. Oxbury et al. (2025) also add that a new dialect spreads especially quickly thanks to diverse communities, in which representatives of other immigrant cultures significantly outnumber people who speak the local dialect. As a result of communication between different ethnic groups in society, they demonstrate their speech patterns to each other (Oxbury et al., 2025). Thus, the absence of any one dominant dialect and the active mixing of languages and dialects lead to the fact that children in the next generation acquire not any specific languages, but a mixture of different features of the languages used in society (Oxbury et al., 2025; Cheshire et al, 2024). Oxbury et al. (2025) and Cheshire et al. (2024) utter that this phenomenon is called a “multiethnolect” and implies that a particular dialect is spoken not exclusively by one ethnic group, but rather by individual representatives of different cultures in a particular society, including local residents whose families have lived in that society for several generations, provided, of course, that such families actively communicate with representatives of other ethnic groups.

The same principle applies to MLE – a new multiethnolect, first noticed by the British media in 2006, which, like Cockney (which MLE is replacing), is actively used by people (especially young people) in working-class communities of London and beyond (Gerwin, 2024). According to Oxbury et al. (2025), MLE is currently considered to be the most widely spoken dialect in the English capital among children and adolescents.

Ilbury et al. (2024) argue that the MLE dialect began to emerge in London after the Second World War, when native residents began to leave London for neighboring areas, and migrants from British-friendly Asian and Caribbean countries began to arrive to replace them (to fill the labor shortage). Gerwin (2024) adds that the dialect developed independently in London, but was heavily influenced by many different dialects, such as West African Pidgin English, Jamaican Patois, African American English, and many other dialects and vernaculars of the Asian, Caribbean, and African communities that have lived, or are living, in the British capital.

Gerwin (2024) notes that when a new dialect appears in society the process of the dialect “enregisterment” plays an important role. The enregisterment process implies that the dialect is used in specific contexts and situations and has distinctive characteristics and linguistic features,

begins to be associated with certain social status and values, and that people begin to form certain impressions about the dialect (Gerwin, 2024).

What helps MLE dialect to take root is contrasting it with other dialects (for example, MLE is often compared with Cockney and Standard English) – this helps to determine the boundaries of the dialect and show how it differs from others (Gerwin, 2024). Gerwin (2024) adds that creation of dictionaries and glossaries with expressions, concepts and linguistic shibboleths used by speakers of MLE also entrenches the position of the dialect in society. Furthermore, the term “MLE” has become increasingly common online and in news articles in recent years (Gerwin, 2024). Additionally, some celebrities use the MLE dialect, which also facilitates a more favorable enregisterment process (Gerwin, 2024).

1.1. MLE Features

As Oxbury et al. (2025) say, MLE dialect is distinguished by innovative changes in the English language. Gerwin (2024) clarifies that new features or “linguistic shibboleths” of MLE dialect emerged mainly in lexis (69%), phonology (17%), pragmatics (7%) and both morphology and syntax (6%). This paper considers only lexis, pragmatics and morphosyntactics.

1.1.1. Lexis

According to Palacios Martinez (2021), the MLE dialect consists of many specific words and expressions, and despite the fact that most of them were created within the dialect, MLE also contains borrowings from other variants. Palacios Martinez (2021) adds that most of these lexical elements are directly connected to the ethnic, social and geographical backgrounds of the MLE users. People speaking the MLE dialect actively use shortenings in their speech and also often change the meanings of existing words (Palacios Martinez, 2021). These and other lexical aspects of the MLE dialect will be discussed in this subchapter.

1.1.2. Borrowings

First, it is worth mentioning that the MLE dialect has been heavily influenced by Jamaican Patois and Afro-Caribbean English (Palacios Martinez, 2021). The table below presents the most commonly used words and expressions in the MLE dialect according to Palacios Martinez (2021), borrowed from these two varieties.

Table 1. *The most commonly used words and expressions in the MLE dialect, borrowed from Jamaican Patois and Afro-Caribbean English*

Term	Meaning
Ackee	A local fruit from Jamaica
Alie	Expression of agreement with what was said earlier
Badman	Antisocial teenagers
Bashment	Reggae dancehall genre (musical)
Ba(t)ty or ba(t)tie	An offensive term meaning “gay”
Bludclart or bloodchart	A curse word used to emphasize something
Bumbaclat	An expression of puzzlement, amazement, or repulsion
Chav	A white man from a working-class community with a poor lifestyle and cheap clothes
Cotch	To unwind with your friends or at home
Creps	Training shoes
Deya(h)	Used to say “here” or “I am here”
Duppy	Physically harm somebody
Dutty	Unattractive/Unappealing
Frass(ed)	Under the strong influence of alcohol or drugs
Pickney	Kid or kids
Safe	Hello/ talk to you later/ greeting
Skeen	Okay
Sket or sketel	Loose female
Wah gwam or wahgwam	A greeting meaning “How are you doing?”
Woyless	Negligent
Yardie	Jamaicans who live somewhere abroad (predominantly in the United Kingdom) or crew/gang
Yute or yout	Kids or children

The other common lexical words and expressions are: bare - a lot of something/very; sick - good; endz/ends - neighborhood/area; blud/blad and bruv/bredren/brud - all mean mate; peng - pretty/attractive; nang - cool/good; wasteman - bad man; yard - home; low batties - low-slung

pants; nuff - very/really; jamming - hanging around; mandem - group of males/friends; begging - talking nonsense; chat - contradict/ talk back; buff - attractive man or woman; hype - to get excited/excitement/exciting (Gerwin, 2024).

Palacios Martinez (2021) says that the plural suffix “dem” (for example, *boydem*, *peopledem*, *mandem*, *galdem*) also has its roots in Jamaican Patois and Afro-Caribbean English. As a matter of fact, London youth describe gang members or policemen by the word “boydem” (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Palacios Martinez (2021) adds that the MLE dialect also contains words from other languages, such as Arabic (akh – meaning brother), African-American English (bling – elaborate and costly jewellery; brap(p) – expression of approval; crib – home), Spanish (amigo – friend; adios – goodbye; loco – crazy, hasta la vista – see you later), French (chic - fashionable or stylish; coup – car), Italian (bravo – expression of pleasure; mafia – a group of criminals), and even Yiddish (schmuck – foolish or stupid). Since the MLE dialect is spoken by representatives of many different ethnic groups and cultures, the number of borrowed words from other languages or dialects is very large (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Furthermore, young users of MLE are very willing to include these borrowings in their speech (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.1.3. Shortenings

Palacios Martinez (2021) asserts that abbreviations are primarily used by young people to pronounce long words more quickly. Moreover, abbreviations are usually similar to words used in dialect, and also provide young people with a sense of uniqueness and belonging to a single group of MLE users (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Table 2. *The most popular shortenings in MLE dialect*

Shortening	Full version
Aggro	Aggressive
Alkie	Alcoholic
Cuz	Cousin or close friend
Diff	Different
Div	Divider
Fam	Family (also used as a form of address)
Garms	Garments

Hack	Hackney (place in the UK)
Marvy	Marvellous
Ped	Moped
Peo	People
Perf	Perfect
Po(s)	Police
Prob(s)	Probably
Ques	Question
Regs	Regular basis
Sis	Sister
Totes	Totally

1.1.4. Changes in meanings of words

Palacios Martinez (2021) reports that such changes are widely used by young people and are most often found in adjectives. Typically, the change in meaning consists of replacing the originally negative meaning of a word with a positive one, and vice versa (Palacios Martinez, 2021). For instance, *sweet*, *sick*, *heavy*, *wicked* or *rude* mean something good or cool, *mould* takes the meaning of a period or a stage, *crew* now means a gang or bunch of friends, and *beef* denotes an argument or confrontation (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Additionally, Palacios Martinez (2021) gives an example when many different words in MLE can denote the same term. Thus, *mashed*, *zoned*, *drugged*, *pissed*, *frassed* and *stoned* mean being under the strong influence of drugs or alcohol.

Also, according to Palacios Martinez (2021), sometimes younger MLE users create metaphors by changing the meaning of words. For instance, words *manor*, *yard*, *bits*, *turf* and *ends* altogether denote the region or area where the speaker lives (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.1.5. Lexis from marginal areas

Very often, the MLE dialect contains words that are associated with the areas of interest of young MLE speakers, such as fashion, computer games, music, technology, and sports. For example, the theme of music contains words and expressions such as bars (text of the song), to spit bars (to rap), jam (adored song) (Palacios Martinez, 2021). In clothing, the word c/kreps is used to refer to training shoes, bally refers to a balaclava or other fabric item that covers the face, and low batties

refer to low-waisted pants (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Palacios Martinez (2021) notes that there are special terms for money as well, such as doe, bill (note), pea, dosh, sterling and dough. Since British rap songs, which heavily use MLE, often deal with themes of drugs and weapons, particular words and expressions have also been coined to refer to these topics (Palacios Martinez, 2021). For example, to bun (to smoke weed (marijuana)), cats (people who obtain drugs), ganja or draw (cannabis), stick or leng (a gun), shank (to stab someone using a knife or just a knife) and lick off (to shoot with a gun) (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Also, due to the aggressiveness of British rap, the MLE dialect also includes insulting words that are aimed at somehow offending the opponent (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Palacios Martinez (2021) describes that to point out the opponent's bad appearance, words such as butters, grim or clapped are used; in order to offend the social status of the addressee MLE speakers use words such as badman, rotter, wasteman, dutty and roadman; and to point out a person's sexual orientation, words such as battie (gay) or bizzle/sket (loose woman) are utilized.

1.1.6. Vague language

According to Palacios Martinez (2021), in the MLE dialect there are also several general words and expressions – general extenders and placeholders, that replace certain things. Palacios Martinez (2021) tells that placeholders are generic lexical elements that do not denote anything semantically and are not addressed to anyone, since the meaning of the words must be interpreted by the listener. Palacios Martinez (2021) describes that they can refer to specific nouns or people, and include words such as: thingy/thingie, whatnot, stuff, whosit, thingummy(bob), whatitsname, thing(s), whasit and thingybob. What is most surprising is that these words are used more often by older MLE users than by younger ones (Palacios Martinez, 2021). However, teenagers are more diverse in their use of placeholders (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Altogether, 14 such words were identified in the speech of MLE speakers of all ages, with the most frequently used being thing(s), thingy, stuff and so and so (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Palacios Martinez (2021) says that placeholders can be used as specific communicative elements, for example when unable to name a specific term, to avoid making a statement sound arrogant or pretentious, to soften some unpleasant expressions, or to disparage or insult something or someone. Moreover, they can be used in society to identify oneself to others as an MLE user (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

According to Palacios Martinez (2021), general extenders typically serve as conjunctions (or/and) or noun phrases (or something/and stuff); they are divided into two types: primary general extenders (and stuff; or whatever; and things; or anything; and so on; or so; and all that/this stuff; and everything; or something) and secondary general extenders (and so on and so forth, or

anybody, and what not, or whoever, and crap, or somebody, and shit, or wherever, and this and that, or somewhere, and blah blah blah, and so on, and what have you). General extenders, as opposed to placeholders, are used more often by young people than by adults, with the exception of a few words (or so, and things, or anything like that) (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Other general extenders, however, are more commonly used by younger (and stuff, and that, or something, and everything) (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Palacios Martinez (2021) mentions that general extenders typically appear last in a sentence and signal the end of the speaker's remark to the interlocutor. They also serve to indicate the utterer's stance on the subject of the conversation or on the interlocutor(s) (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.2. Pragmatics and Morphosyntactics

1.2.1. Quotatives

In English, a reported speech is typically expressed using verbs such as: talk, ask, think, shout, say, and tell (Palacios Martinez, 2021). However, in the MLE dialect, teenagers replace these variants by the verbs “(be) like” and “go” – She was like “let’s go” (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Palacios Martinez (2021) reports that there is another expression in common use among young MLE users – “this is + speaker”. Teenagers aged 12 to 19 use this expression to convey reported direct speech, while children aged 8 to 9 use “this is” to express direct speech, as well as gestures, sounds, and non-lexicalized words – “this is me ‘bruh” (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

It is also worth noting the difference between “go” and “say”; “go” is used to tell a story in the present tense in a more realistic and vivid manner – “he goes ‘this is extremely dangerous so we need to be really careful’”, while “say” is used to tell a story in the past tense in a more serious way, without much emotions – “she said ‘have you finished your work?’ I said ‘yes” (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Palacios Martinez (2021) notes that “go” is also a more modern variant than “say”, as MLE speakers more often choose to use the present tense; moreover, “go” is a more convenient option, as it is also more frequently used to convey non-lexicalized words other than reported speech.

1.2.2. Address Terms

The MLE dialect is also rich in various forms of address terms, especially those that indicate close ties between speakers (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Among younger MLE users, the most popular terms are: boy, brother, man, mate, and bro (blood, blud, bruv, blad) (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Among adults, the most common terms are: baby, man, brother, and guy – “what are you guys doing here?” (Palacios Martinez, 2021). In fact, Palacios Martinez (2021) says that address terms are used primarily by young people.

Regarding the position in the sentence, address terms usually appear at the end of the sentence, although they can appear both at the beginning and in the middle (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Palacios Martinez (2021) clarifies that the position of the address term in the sentence plays an important role, since, for example, if the address term is at the beginning of the sentence, it most likely means that it is aimed at attracting the attention of the interlocutor – “blad believe me”, and if it is at the end of the sentence, then this already indicates that the interlocutors are strengthening their relationship – “I miss you so much blad”.

Palacios Martinez (2021) mentions that teenagers speaking the MLE dialect also often use offensive and taboo address terms in their speech; the most popular of these are: cunt, bastard, fool, dick/cock(head), stupid, and idiot. Palacios Martinez (2021) adds that adult MLE speakers generally do not use such expressions in their speech. Often these address terms refer to sexual terms (chopper, batty, arsehole), a person's abnormal state or behavior (idiot, fool, dumb), racism (black, paki), or animal comparisons (chicken, cow, pig(head)) (Palacios Martinez, 2021). What is most surprising, is that the address terms do not always imply an insult, sometimes they can even have a positive meaning and denote the strengthening of friendly ties – “you are freaking handsome you idiot” (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.2.3. New Pronoun “Man”

In the MLE dialect, the form of address „man” is used very often; it lost over time (grammaticalization process) the designation of “a person of masculine gender” and became a new pronoun. This pronoun can mean first person plural or singular, third person singular, second person plural, or can denote “people” or “you” - “I didn’t go to school, man (I) was at home” (Palacios Martinez, 2021). According to Palacios Martinez (2021), this pronoun is used to add credibility to one's statements and to evoke empathy in the interlocutor. There is also a claim that the pronoun “man” cannot be classified as either a personal or impersonal pronoun, due to the large number of ways in which this word is used and the lack of certain characteristics of the pronoun “man” (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.2.4. Negation *Ain't*

As was said by Palacios Martinez (2021), MLE speakers usually use the negation “ain't” as a negative form of the verbs “have” and “be” (as auxiliary or as copula) in the present tense in negative, positive and interrogative sentences. Palacios Martinez (2021) adds that, sometimes, the negation ain't can be used by MLE users instead of the negations do not and did not – “He ain't had no problems”.

1.2.5. Never (negation is past tenses)

Palacios Martinez (2021) mentions that the MLE dialect also has a negation that is intended to indicate the denial of some specific instance in the past – “never” (also known as “punctual never”), which is used instead of the negation did not – “He had a gun in his hand, but he never done nothing”.

1.2.6. Double negations

According to Palacios Martinez (2021), in the MLE dialect, double negations are also very common, most notably among teenagers (43,8% among teenagers versus 14,4% among adults) – “She ain't does nothing during her classes”. In addition to frequency of use, teenagers (6 – no one/nobody, n't (not, dunno), nothing, ain't, hardly and never) also use more different variations than adults (3 – n't (not, dunno), never and ain't) as 1st negators (Palacios Martinez, 2021). As a rule, double negations are equivalent to single ones, and can serve as refusals or denials, to strengthen a negative expression, or to give a line more realism and persuasiveness (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.2.7. Don't (third person singular)

In MLE, young people are more likely to use the third person singular “don't” (51,2%) than the standard “doesn't” (48,8%) – “He don't want to do this every day” (Palacios Martinez, 2021). At the same time, a completely different pattern is noticeable among adults, as the form “doesn't” (71,6%) is used much more actively by the older generation than the form “don't” (28,4%) (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Among youngsters, these negatives (doesn't and don't) are mainly used with the pronouns “she” (with doesn't - 28.06%, with don't - 35.38%) and “he” (with doesn't - 37.41%, with don't - 35.38%); less often they are used with the pronoun “it” (with doesn't - 20.3%, with don't - 22.15%); to the

least extent with “full noun phrases” (with doesn't - 14.19%, with don't - 7.07%) (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Besides age, the use of the negation “don't” is also influenced by gender (although it is used equally frequently by males and females) and ethnic background (ethnic British people are more likely to use the negation “don't” than people with foreign ethnic backgrounds) (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.2.8. Pragmatic markers

According to Palacios Martinez (2021), in the speech of MLE speakers (especially teenagers), one often encounters pragmatic markers such as: huh, okay, you know, eh, you got me, right, you know what I mean and yeah. However, the most used marker in the recent years has been “innit” (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Palacios Martinez (2021) asserts that the pragmatic marker “innit” can be used instead of the verbs “do”, “be”, or “have” (as a lexical or auxiliary verb), or instead of many modal verbs. “Innit” also differs significantly from other interrogative tags, as it can be used not only at the end of a sentence (“That’s cool, innit?”) but also at the beginning (“Innit, that’s really expensive!”) and in the middle (“He is, innit, always sleepy”) (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Palacios Martinez (2021) also notes that “innit” also performs some textual functions that are not typical of standard pragmatic markers. For instance, “innit” can be used to indicate the speaker's attitude toward the subject of communication, expressing emphasis (“A: He ain’t doing nothing; B: Innit? And, still, he’ll get and A.”), surprise, or distrust (“A: I think that sounds good; B: Innit? I don’t think so.”) (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

Palacios Martinez (2021) adds that this pragmatic marker can indicate aggression (“Go away innit”), softening (“leave him alone innit”), or convey a meaning similar to “you know”, “like”, “so you know what I mean” (“A: What do you study? B: Phonology and that innit. Some scientific stuff.”).

As for the rest of the MLE pragmatic markers, options such as “(do) (you) know what I mean”, “you get me” and “(do) you know what I’m saying” are increasingly gaining popularity (they were especially actively used from the 1990s to the 2000s) (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Some other markers, such as “right”, “you know”, “OK”, “yeah”, on the contrary, are used less and less; and regarding the marker “innit” it is noted that the differences in its use then and now are minimal (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

1.2.9. Intensifiers

According to Palacios Martinez (2021), in MLE, intensifiers in the form of adverbs and adjectives are more frequently used by young people, and the most popular phrases are: really, so, pretty, and the informal fucking and bloody. Adults use intensifiers less frequently in their speech, but the most popular options are: so, really, and very (Palacios Martinez, 2021). Also, Palacios Martinez (2021) mentions that older people are more willing to use adverbs ending in -ly (for example, totally or absolutely) than teenagers.

Palacios Martinez (2021) tells that young MLE users also frequently use the intensifier “well”, which can be used with both more positive adjectives (nice, good, easy, fit,) and more negative ones (rough, scary, naughty, confusing, weird, dumb, upset, pissed). Palacios Martinez (2021) adds that young MLE speakers also often use the intensifiers “proper” and “bare”; these are considered distinctive features of the MLE dialect and are found exclusively in the speech of young people.

Palacios Martinez (2021) clarifies that the intensifier “proper” can be used with positive adjectives (good or confident), but it is used more with negative adjectives (pissed, rude, upset). Palacios Martinez (2021) adds that, in terms of gender and ethnicity, MLE users use the “proper” intensifier similarly.

The intensifier “bare” is most often used as a quantifier, denoting a large quantity of something or someone (bare noise, bare people, bare friends). Palacios Martinez (2021) also mentions that, like the intensifier “proper”, it is used with both positive and negative adjectives, but is more common with the second. Despite its association with people of Jamaican ethnicity, no differences in “bare” intensifier use by gender or ethnicity were found among MLE users (Palacios Martinez, 2021).

CHAPTER II ANALYSIS OF MLE FEATURES IN UK RAP SONG LYRICS OF 2015-2025

This chapter provides an overview of rap genres that originated in the UK (drill and grime) and their connection to the MLE dialect. Next, it presents a detailed analysis of the grammatical and lexical features of the MLE dialect as found in the lyrics of UK rap songs from 2015-2025.

1. Overview of the UK Rap Subgenres

1.1. Grime

According to Adams (2018), the grime genre originated in London at the beginning of the 2000s and later spread throughout Britain. Adams (2018) notes that grime artists' lyrics typically focus on the difficult inner-city life, and the performers themselves demonstrate their rapping skills by insulting their opponents and using complex rhymes and metaphors set to a faster beat. The grime genre is primarily associated with people from poor neighborhoods, who are often appear to be black youth, but grime is not considered as exclusively black music (Adams, 2018).

1.2. Drill

Johnson (2025) mentions that the drill genre, like grime, originated in London, but in the first years of 2010s. Johnson (2025) explains that the drill genre is a result of mixing three larger genres: Chicago drill, grime and UK hip-hop. Drill's signature style is a blend of beats with complex, syncopated hi-hats, low-pitched samples (808) and dark synth-based soundscapes (Johnson, 2025). Drill genre resonated with black youth living in poor neighborhoods, as drill artists' lyrics also address the difficult challenges of life on the city streets (Johnson, 2025). Johnson (2025) clarifies that, unlike grime, drill is heavily associated with black youth, as well as knife crime and participation in gangs.

1.3. Connection of Grime and Drill with MLE

As noted by Adams (2018), in the 1980s, a huge number of multi-ethnic communities emigrated to London, and the grime genre was closely associated with the dialects these communities spoke. Adams (2018) asserts that various dialects, Creoles, and African-American culture in general predominated in this genre, and over time, multi-ethnolects and other urban dialects began to proliferate within this musical genre. MLE soon became the most widely spoken dialect in the UK among performers of the grime genre (Adams, 2018). As mentioned above, the drill genre is a successor to the grime genre, so MLE is also the most used dialect within the drill genre. Like

grime and drill, MLE dialect is also very popular among teenagers from poor areas, thus forming a close connection with these rap genres (Adams, 2018).

2. Methodology

For this study, the “Official Charts” website was selected as the basis for song lyrics choice, as it displays the UK’s biggest songs of the week in its weekly “Official Singles Chart Top 100”, based on audio and video streams, downloads, CDs and vinyl. This website was chosen for the study because each song in the chart includes the information about its title, author, cover, how many weeks it spent in the top 100, and the places it occupied at the top. The most convenient feature is that it is possible to listen to a sample of almost every song in the weekly chart, which allows to immediately determine whether it is suitable for this study based on its genre. As part of the study, all weekly charts for each year from 2015 to 2025 were reviewed and two UK rap genre songs that appeared in the top 100 as often as possible and ranked as high as possible in the top 100 were selected. The following songs will be analyzed on the basis of lexis, pragmatics and morphosyntactics (Tables 3-13). It is important to mention that for this research exclusively the drill and grime genres were chosen, since they originated in Britain and are most associated with the MLE dialect. Also, songs where non-British singers participated were not chosen, as well as repeating songs.

The most popular UK rap tracks of 2015 were “Fester Skank” (with dancehall elements) by Lethal Bizzle and Diztortion, and “Shut Up” by Stormzy.

Table 3. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2015*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“Fester Skank”				
	Borrowing	“Fester Skank” – here “skank” (Jamaican origin) means “dancing/dance/to dance wildly”;	Pronoun “man”	“Ten man one bottle, you're on them ones”; “You man are bankrupt, Fazer”
	Meaning shift	“It's a new dance, no tango Anywhere I go, I make the gang go” – here “gang” means a close group of friends, who are dancing		

		together, earlier it meant group of criminals; “Stay gassed up, petrol” – here “gassed up” means “stay excited”, previously it meant “drunk”.		
“Shut Up”				
	Shortening s	“State your name, cuz” - Cuz = cousin/close friend; “Repping, innit? Yeah, fucking repping, innit?” - repping = representing;	Pragmatic marker “innit”	“It's Stormzy, innit?”; “Repping, innit? Yeah, fucking repping, innit?”
	Borrowing s	“Oi, rudeboy, shut up How can you be better than me?” - “rudeboy” (Jamaican origin) means “a gangster”; “everybody go home Apart from the girl dem, you lot stay” - “girl dem” (Jamaican origin) – group of women; “Dare one of you man try get loud All of my mandem move so foul” - “mandem” (Jamaican origin) refers to a group of friends/gang members; “Food in the ends like there ain't no drought” - “ends” means home territory; “Smooth on this ting, start locking up daughters” – “ting” here means a girl (Jamaican origin); “Yeah, so shut your fucking stupid mouths Chatting bare fucking shit”;	Pronoun “man”	“Man try say he's better than me Tell my man, shut up” - here “man” means “an opponent”; “I set trends, dem man copy”; “I'm not a gangster, I'm just about But you see my man over there with the pouch?” - here “man” means “close friend”; “Dare one of you man try get loud All of my mandem move so foul”; “Man were upset about the MOBO Awards”

				“Dem man still go halves on a quarter”;
	Meaning shift	“Army comes everywhere I go” - here “army” means “gang/friends”; “They roll deep, I roll squaddy” - here “roll squaddy” means going somewhere with group of gang members or friends who are ready to fight, since squaddy also means ‘a soldier’; “Yeah, I was gassed at the MOBO Awards”; “Wait, he wants beef? Let me make that two” – “beef” usually means meat, but here it refers to an argument or confrontation;	Address term “blud”	“Headline tour, yeah blud, sold out”; “Dead MCs, blud, leave me alone”; “Best my age, yeah blud, look”;
			Quotative “like” and Pronoun “man”	“Tell a man like I’m K to the A”
			Negation “ain’t”	“Why? ‘Cause I ain’t won a MOBO before”; “Food in the ends like there ain’t no drought”;
			Intensifier “bare”	“Chatting bare fucking shit” - here bare (Jamaican origin) means “a lot”;

The most popular UK rap tracks in 2016 were “Man” by Skepta, and “Hype” by Dizzee Rascal ft Calvin Harris.

Table 4. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2016*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“Man”				

	Shortening	“Back then you was a real top boy But right now fam, nobody cares” – fam = family (close friend);	Pronoun “man”	“I don't know why man's callin' me family all of a sudden” - here “man” is referred to an opponent; “Man talk slang so the feds can't work out what I just said to a man”; “Now she wants to be with a man”; “It's like them man have got an obsession with my style of expression”;
	Borrowings	“You are not mandem, you are not gang”; “They wanna see me drown, tryna hold the mandem down”;	Pragmatic marker “you get me?”	“Meridian, bad blocks London boys, active boys You get me?”;
	Meaning shift	“Meridian, bad blocks London boys, active boys” - active usually means “ready to do some physical activities”, like sport, but here it means “ready to commit crimes”;	Negations	“Nah, I don't wanna do no sessions” – here is even triple negation;
	Lexis from marginal areas	“And I got bars like Camden Town” – “bars” here are “lines of the song”;		
“Hype”				
	Meaning shift	“They say I go mad for the paper” – paper started to mean money; “Touchdown and the crowd gets hyped Straight gassed, got the whole place hype”;	Negation “ain’t”	“Them boys ain't even on my radar”;

As for the 2017, the most prominent UK rap songs were “Did You See” by J Hus and “Bestie” by Yungen ft Yxng Bane.

Table 5. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2017*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“Did You See”				
	Shortenings	“Come let me try some, sittin' you can climb on” – sittin' = something; “Out here's windy, yana, you're the one that I'm into, yana Don't you wanna see the interior?” – yana = you know;	Pragmatic marker “you know”	“Out here's windy, yana, you're the one that I'm into, yana Don't you wanna see the interior?”;
	Borrowings	“Shake her bunda just like I taught her” – “bunda” (African origin) means big female buttock; “Lickle spice for the winter season Your chicken needs a lickle season (Yeah)” – “lickle” (Jamaican origin) means “little”; “Gyaldem thinkin' I'm awesome” – “gyaldem” (Jamaican origin) – group of women; “Mandem approach with caution” – “mandem” (Jamaican origin) – here “group of men opponents”; “True say we came with the bonsam” – “true say” (Jamaican origin) means “that’s true”; “But true say we came for the bunda”; “Some round ting that I can put my paws on” – “ting” (Jamaican origin) here implies “bunda”;		
	Lexis from marginal areas	“Came looking like a ganja farmer” – “ganja” (Indian origin) means “marijuana”;		
“Bestie”				
	Lexis from marginal areas	“Yo, I got notes, I get P (get doe)” – “notes”, “P” and “doe” all mean money;	Pronoun “man”	“Man I'll come and take their wife away”;

		“She got wasteman on her case that be spending the P”;		
	Borrowings	“Her friend yeah, pree dem a pree” – “pree” (Jamaican origin) means watching closely; “She got wasteman on her case that be spending the P” – here “wasteman” means a rich gangster; “You'd have thought I was ace, the way I'm giving her wood She knew I was Paid in Full from the juug” - “juug” (Caribbean origin) means making profit from illegal activities; “I see most my old tings loved up”; “They block me on Insta, so I can't pree”;		
	Shortenings	“Pretty boy fam I'll take a boy's babes (how ya mean?)”;		

The most popular UK rap tracks of 2018 were “Jumanji” by B Young and “Barking” by Ramz.

Table 6. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2018*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“Jumanji”				
	Borrowings	“Ring ring pon the hands free” – pon (Jamaican origin) = on; “Piff ting called Ashanti”; “And them tings extra fancy” “Big batty girl you got my attention” – “batty” (Jamaican origin) means girl’s big buttock; “Do a likkle someting with a vibe” – likkle (Jamaican origin) = little;	Pragmatic marker “you know”	“From the hips to the waist y'know”;

		“I swear that big batty frightening”; “Might have you swapping your main with your side ting, ouh”		
	Meaning shift	“Piff ting called Ashanti” – “piff” usually means high- quality cannabis, but here means “good looking girl”		
“Barking”				
	Borrowings	“I might link my ting from Barkin”; “I got a Portuguese ting, not wifey”;	Negation “ain’t”	“You see them guys over there? They ain't like me”;
	Shortenings	“Cause I'm makin' P's and they see these clothes”;		
	Lexis from marginal areas	“Cause I'm makin' P's and they see these clothes”;		
	Meaning shift	“I might link my ting from Barkin” – “link” meant to become connected, but here means “to meet with somebody”;		

The most popular UK rap tracks in 2019 were “Ladbroke Grove” by AJ Tracey, and “Vossi Bop” by Stormzy.

Table 7. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2019*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosynt actic features	Examples
“Ladbroke Grove”				
	Shortenings	“Tek time, everyting's live and that” – tek = take;		
	Vague language (general extender “and that”)	“I said bubble, vibes and that (Vibes) Cruise like a four-wheel drive and that Tek time, everyting's live and that Because AJ T's on the mic and that”;		
	Borrowings	“I said bubble, vibes and that (Vibes)” – bubble (Jamaican origin) means to dance;		

		“Had a likkle beef but it's done now (It's done)”; “Peng ting lookin’ like a touchdown (Gorgeous)” – “peng” (Jamaican origin) means “pretty or attractive”; “I get the yattie love like a popstar (Woo)” – yattie (Jamaican origin) – attractive woman; “And when I'm in my ends, I'm a block star”; “I got my friends and my fam on my shoulder”;		
	Meaning shift	“Had a likkle beef but it's done now (It's done)”; “I went up, then my kettle got bust down” – “kettle” originally meant a “metallic pot for boiling water”, but here it means “a watch”;		
“Vossi Bop”				
	Borrowings	“My bruddas don't dab, we just Vossi bop” – bruddas (Jamaican origin) means “mates or friends”; “Gyal say I'm bougie (Word), way too exclusive (Word)” – gyal (Jamaican origin) means a woman; “So tell these likkle fishes back up off my name (Ayy, ayy)”; “Fake bruddas, man, your mandem all pretend (Yeah)”; “Man a droppin' bangers on your baby mums” – “baby mum” (Jamaican origin) means a woman; “Gyal say I'm rude (Word), they wanna see me nude (Word)”;	Negation “ain’t”	“You ain't got a clue, let's be honest”; “I ain't gotta be a rapper with a chain”;

	Meaning shift	“I tell your girl to link me at the coffee shop”;	Pronoun “man”	“Man, I wouldn't even try my luck with her”; “Fake bruddas, man, your mandem all pretend (Yeah)”; “You man are so insecure, man, it's a joke (Man, it's a joke)”; “Man a droppin' bangers on your baby mums”;
	Lexis from marginal areas	“I'm a villain, killin' when I'm barrin” – “barrin” means “delivering bars”;		
	Shortenings	“Cah the rules are kinda different when you're baddin' up the game (Straight)” – cah (Jamaican origin) = because;		

As for the 2020, the most prominent UK rap songs were “Dinner Guest” by AJ Tracey ft MoStack and “Rain” by AJ Tracey & Aitch.

Table 8. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2020*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“Dinner Guest”				
	Shortenings	“Member when we touched in my bed? I'll never say” – member = remember; “One of dem man got a touch, mandem, own up” – dem = them;	Negation “ain't”	“Got a dog up in the club, I ain't bring a pet”; “Covered in the ice, I ain't tryna sweat (Bling, blaow)”;

				“I ain't back and forthin' on the internet (No, sir)”; “It ain't over 'til the fat lady sings, tell your mum, "Grab a mic"”; “Blud, I ain't even married, but I kissed a bride”; “But I'm not gonna do her, I ain't with all that”; “I ain't goin' back and forth 'cause I'm never listenin”; “If you ain't gettin' money keep the social distance”;
	Borrowings	“Ay, rudeboy, you messing with a bigger fish”; “One of dem man got a touch, mandem, own up”; “Posh girls wanna take me back to their yard” – “yard” (Jamaican origin) means “home”; “We put bricks up on the strip and now there's bricks in the yard”;	Pronoun “man”	“One of dem man got a touch, mandem, own up”;
	Lexis from marginal areas	“Stop the drillin' in my merch, you're a doughnut” – doughnut is an insult and means “stupid”;	Address term “blud”	“Blud, I ain't even married, but I kissed a bride”;
“Rain”				
	Meaning shift	“First class flight to LA As soon as I land, bill a paper plane (Uh)” - paper started to mean money (paper plane can also stand for a marijuana cigarette);	Pronoun “man”	“No drip, when I flick this, man hurry (Ching)”; “All up on the pitch, Kante, man shovin”;

				"I've spent man's drip on the jail, take credit (Brr)"; "Yo, what can I say? Man, the brain's insane (Ah-ah)"; "Two-two peng ones giving man stress"; "Next gyal tryna attack man";
	Borrowings	"Soon touch back in the ends"; "She said, "Wagwan, what's going on?" – "wagwan" (Jamaican origin) means "what's going on?"; "Why am I wet?" Gyal, that's rain"; "Gyal on curry, neck McFlurry (Bling-blaow)"; "I got the gyal of your dreams on her knees"; "Suh it guh, let's get it (Yeah)" – suh it guh (Jamaican origin) = so it goes; "I'm wit' ya gyal on some 'yak in the gaff" – gaff (Irish origin) means house; "Two-two peng ones giving man stress"; "Next gyal tryna attack man";		
	Shortenings	"Cuh, when we run down, it's rain" – cuh = because; "I'm wit' ya gyal on some 'yak in the gaff" – wit = with, yak = cognac; "Got smoke for the opps, but they think";		

	Lexis from marginal areas	“Your jeans say p's, but your bank says bummy (Ah)”; “No drip, when I flick this, man hurry (Ching)” – “ching” means “a knife” or “to cut somebody with a knife”;		
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The most popular UK rap tracks of 2021 were “Body” by Russ Millions & Tion Wayne, and “Clash” by Dave & Stormzy.

Table 9. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2021*

Track “Body”	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
	Borrowings	“Big batty girl, name Abiola (Mm-mm)”; “(Vi-Vi-) Vida loca (Bullet)” – Vida loca (Spanish origin) in English means “crazy life”; “Badman persona Badman alone can control her (Trol her)” – “badman” (Jamaican origin) means here “respected person on the streets/gangster”; “Big Russ fuck up the punani” – punani (Caribbean origin) means female genitalia; “Pum-pum turn up, I hit that raw” – pum-pum (Caribbean origin) means female genitalia; “Buss my nut in your gyal like crud (Yo, mm-mm)”; “Pum-pum wet up, everything mad (Yo, yo)”; “If I ever get caught by the paigons (Woo, woo)” – paigon (Caribbean roots) means opponent or enemy;	Pronoun “man”	“Man, I'm still up on the roads, could've left (Bah, bah)”; “Fuck that, man, I don't give a F (Boom, boom)”; “But when I punch man, it's grievous (Boom)”; “When I banged him, man, the defence said “Jesus””; “Leave my man, he's too innocent”; “(On s-, on s-) On sight man are just chinging him”; “Pull up on who man?”; “Man, buss off my hand ting”;

		“Out my nank just wavin” – nank (Jamaican origin) means a knife; “But with my shank (Ayy), that's a combination (Ayy)” – “shank” (Jamaican origin) means a knife; “Gyal with a big back's my weakness (Weakness)”; <i>“Wizzy-Wizzy, Wizzy get a drilly 'pon any (Ayy)”</i>; “Copy, copy, opps copy the mandem (Yo)”; <i>“Man, buss off my hand ting”</i> – “buss” (Caribbean origin) here means “to shoot”;		
	Meaning shift	“Buss my nut in your gyal like crud (<i>Yo, mm-mm</i>)” – “buss” usually means to kiss, but here means “to penetrate a woman”; “But you can still get shaven (Bow)” – “shaven” means “cut by knife”; <i>“Wizzy-Wizzy, Wizzy get a drilly 'pon any (Ayy)”</i> – “drilly” means “to attack someone”; “Stickin' 'em, none of my niggas are innocent (On s-, on s-) On sight man are just chinging him” – “stickin” and “chinging” means “stabbing”;		
	Lexis from marginal areas	“Man, I'm still up on the roads, could've left” – “on the roads” means “being active on the streets” (criminal actions); <i>“Man, buss off my hand ting”</i> – here “ting” means a gun; “Out my nank just wavin”; “But with my shank (Ayy), that's a combination (Ayy)”;		
“Clash”				

	Shortenings	“Man are talkin' war, don't know 'bout war 'til you end in one” – bout = about; “Needed a hit, could have penned him one cah you're pendin' one”; “Them man are talkin' bare, but it's cool cah”; “She got the wap and a WAP, what are you thinkin'?” – wap = weapon;	Pronoun “man”	“Man are talkin' war, don't know 'bout war 'til you end in one”; “Them man are talkin' bare, but it's cool cah”; “Mans on simpin', I'll buy her a car like a pair of”;
	Lexis from marginal areas	“Stick him up with a stick-stick, he drew the shorter one” – “stick-stick” is “a gun with a long barrel” and “stick up” means to “be robbed at gunpoint”; “My guys on ridin' mode, zombies, survival mode” - “zombie” stands for “a knife”; “She got the wap and a WAP, what are you thinkin'?”;	Intensifier “bare”	“Them man are talkin' bare, but it's cool cah”;
	Borrowings	“Lighty, the shortest one, on my mind, Jorja one” – “lighty” (African origin) is a girl with a light skin; “Crocodile bag, I bought her one, vegan ting, I slaughter one”; “I need a ting, thirty plus, Blackberry and Walkman 1's”; “Them man are talkin' bare, but it's cool cah”; “I got my ting so I'm more than good, anytime that I walk my hood”; “Don't get caught for puss, don't die for nyash” – “nyash” (Nigerian origin) means “ass”;		

As for the 2022, the most prominent UK rap songs were “Starlight” by Dave and “BMW” by Bad Boy Chiller Crew.

Table 10. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2022*

Track “Starlight”	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
	Borrowings	“Nuff man hate with the lies instead” – “nuff” (Caribbean origin) means “a lot of”; “Nuff pollution in the ends, I flew back yard cah I wanna see starlight”; “Nuff girls datin' their biggest haters, how her boyfriend don't want her to win?”; “Like, rah” – “rah” (Caribbean origin) is an interjection and here states for expressing disbelief;	Pronoun “man”	“Nuff man hate with the lies instead”; “I do know my man, but I don't trust him”; “I know dem man talk on the kid, but”; “See her ex man, she got no taste, hip dip, she got no waist”;
	Lexis from marginal areas	“Trust that, P's in the trap, disgustin”; “Stick with the stick, PVA, PDA, kiss that in public”;	Negation “ain't”	“And why my girlfriend never wanna see me have a good time out if she ain't there? (Fly-fly me to the moon)”;
	Shortenings	“Nuff pollution in the ends, I flew back yard cah I wanna see starlight”; “I know dem man talk on the kid, but”;		
“BMW”				
	Shortenings	“Raving, hit ya town n get wavey” – n = and; “Got ma guns up everytime we roll out” – ma = my; “Good times good vibes good times what lifes bout”; “She gon tell me she gon leave” – gon = going to;	Negation “ain't”	“Yo you ain't nothing like these ladies”; “Yo I ain't gonna lie girl I feel ya”; “A list, I ain't yet but I'm nearly”; “Yo you ain't nothing like these hoes”;

				“Yo she ain't no fool to be messed with”; “Am all bunged up I ain't tryna slow down”; “Fuck these, your mine you ain't number 2”; “I ain't gonna lie if I pull up outside all eyes on her”; “Am a different man, now the tables turned”; “Yo you ain't got to hide what your feeling”; “Yo you ain't got to lie when you're speaking”;
			Pronoun “man”	“Five man deep gonna run man down”
	Borrowings	“Five man deep gonna run man down” – “Five man deep” (Jamaican origin) means “group of 5 people”; “she don't wanna go yard”;	Double negation s	“Yo she ain't no fool to be messed with”; “Yo I don't wanna to fight no more”;

The most mainstream UK rap songs of 2023 were “Sprinter” by Dave & Central Cee, and “Us Against The World” by Strandz.

Table 11. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2023*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“Sprinter”				

	Borrowings	“The mandem too inconsiderate, five-star hotel, smokin' cigarette”; “Now this gyal wan' me in her uterus, fuck it, I'm rich, let's do it (Fuck it)”; “Bare snow in my hood, no Aspen, can't get rid of my pain with Aspirin”; “I just put nine gyal in a Sprinter (Uh)”; “I got too many gyal, too many-many gyal, I got”; “Sprinter, two gyal in a van, Inter, two man in Milan”; “Heard one of my tings datin' P. Diddy, need twenty percent of whatever she bags”; “Man livin' for nyash and dyin' for nyash”;	Negation “ain't”	“We ain't got generational wealth”; “This ain't stainless steel, it's platinum”; “We ain't playin' exclusives”; “Fire for a wife beater, can't rock with that, I ain't wearin' a vest”;
	Shortenings	“Now this gyal wan' me in her uterus, fuck it, I'm rich, let's do it (Fuck it)” – wan = wants; “The way that I ball, no yellow, the ref haffa give me a black card” – haffa = have to; “If bro let the drumstick beat, then somethin' gon' leak”;	Intensifier “bare”	“Bare snow in my hood, no Aspen, can't get rid of my pain with Aspirin”
	Lexis from marginal areas	“If bro let the drumstick beat, then somethin' gon' leak” – “drumstick” here means “firearm”; “AP baby blue, paper's pink, I'd probably hate me too” – paper = money;	Pronoun “man”	“More time, man build a line and trap, spend like I don't even like my stack”; “Man have to send her therapy, she got the E-cup bra, a lot on her chest”; “I love chillin' with broke bitches, man book one flight, and

				they're all impressed (Alright)”; “Man livin' for nyash and dyin' for nyash”;
“Us Against The World”				
	Shortenings	“T'ma slide when it's over cah we die for the closure”;	Negation “ain't”	“I ain't hit another sale”; “I ain't bought another shell”; “There's so many weirdos, but you ain't gotta fear those”;
	Borrowings	“But I got mon chéri, Julio Don Peri', pricey boss lady” - mon chéri (French origin) means “my dear”;		

The most popular UK rap tracks of 2024 were “BACKBONE” by Chase & Status & Stormzy and “Embrace It” by Ndotz.

Table 12. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2024*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“BACK BONE”				
	Lexis from marginal areas	“I got P's and M's and K's and O's” – m's = millions, k's = kilos (drugs); o's = ounces; “Said you got the mash, but you never let it squeeze” – “mash” here means “a gun”;	Negation “ain't”	“Ten toes I ain't gonna do”; “You ain't got no backbone”; “I get it out the trap, I ain't got a trap phone”; “This is Chase & Status, this ain't all that fuckin' house shit”;
	Borrowings	“I'll buck that one finger for the trigger <i>Grrah</i> ” – grrah (Jamaican	Double negation	“They never gave me nothin', so it's fair I take the piss, pussy”

		origin) is an onomatopoeic word used to describe automatic gunfire; “The smoke's with the mandem, but the joke's on you”; “Diamonds on my Patty, do the Bogle when I linger” – “patty” (Caribbean origin) means “princess (woman)”, “Bogle” (Jamaican origin) is a dance technique;		
	Shortening s	“Don't tell my brothers cah we'll spin the whole block”; “Don't tell my brothers cah they'll spin the whole block”;		
	Meaning shift	“Uh-oh, who's on greaze?” – “greaze” meant “dirty/oily” earlier, but now in slang it means “bad intentions”;		
“Embrace It”				
	Borrowing s	“Ayy, gyal, move your waist and wine like this”; “Miss, if you got a bumper, then twerk it” – “bumper” (Caribbean origin) means “a butt”; “Miss, if you got a bumper, then shake it (Then shake it)”; “First date, throw it back, throw it back pon me (Pon me)”;		

As for the 2025, the most prominent UK rap songs were “Cops & Robbers” by Sammy Virji & Skepta and “CRG” by Central Cee & Dave.

Table 13. *The most popular UK rap tracks of 2025*

Track	Lexical features	Examples	Pragmatic and morphosyntactic features	Examples
“Cops & Robbers”				

	Borrowings	“DJ, play one for the badman”; “Make a gyal bend over like half-past three”; “But she givin' me a pass, I'm a raasclaat G” – “raasclaat” (Jamaican origin) is a very offensive insult;	Negation “ain’t”	“Clash me, it ain't wise, okay”; “I don't know what they told you, but I ain't the one and”;
	Shortenings	“Try get the number if you wan' see” – wan = want to; “She don't wanna chat to ya cah you're nasty”;	Pronoun “man”	“Only man I'm preein' is the HMRC”;
	Meaning shift	“As I don't sit around twiddlin' thumbs, greaze”;		
“CRG”				
	Borrowings	“Poles out on a bait ting on a date night” – “ting” (Jamaican origin) here means “a person”; “My fam hatin', they say that I got favourites”; “We sold sweets in school, made sense that the mandem grew up and sold flavours”; “I'm drivin' on a ban, true say, I got disqualifications”; “My white ting said she only listen to house”;	Negation “ain’t”	“Now it's acres, I ain't even got neighbours (Yeah)”; “Mummy ain't gotta stress, now the rent get paid”; “And they wonder why they ain't gettin' blessed same way”; “Cause they ain't on takin' the risk that we—”; “And I got marble floors, I ain't got damp any more”; “I ain't snapped it once 'cause I'm not gassed”; “Tell her, "Ride this dick", she ain't done enough steps”;
	Shortenings	“My fam hatin', they say that I got favourites”; “ZK knife sit right on the waistline” – ZK = zombie knife;		

	Lexis from marginal lareas	“ZK knife sit right on the waistline”; “My uncles had no papers”; “Twenty bags for the sofa and one lamp” – bags = thousands;	Pronoun “man”	“I don't care if the next man lose, I just wanna see us man win”;
	Meaning shift	“Poles out on a bait ting on a date night” – “bait” usually means a “trap”, but in MLE it means “something obvious”; “TSG had me in the back of the van and prang” – “prang” meant “crash/collision”, but in MLE it means “stressed/panicked”; “I ain't snapped it once 'cause I'm not gassed”;		

3. Summary and Discussion of Results

One of the most recurring themes in the lyrics of British rappers using MLE was “luxurious life” (occurring in 10 of the 11 years studied). The most popular words on this topic were “paper” (money) - occurred once in 2016, then disappeared and returned in 2020, 2023, and 2025, and “p” (money) - occurred twice in 2017, as well as once each in 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024. Less common word was “gassed” (staying excited) – appeared twice in 2015 and only once in 2016 and 2025. The least frequently used words were: “notes” and “doe” (both meaning money), “kettle” (a watch), “M’s” (millions), “bogle”, “skank” and “bubble” (all three meaning dancing), “yak” (shortening for cognac), “vida loca” (translated from Spanish – crazy life) and “wasteman” (meaning rich gangster) – all of these words emerged only once throughout the entire study.

Also, a very common theme in the analyzed songs was “passion for the female sex” (occurring, as well, in 10 of the 11 years studied), which was expressed both in simple mentions of women and in descriptions of specific parts of women's bodies. Thus, the most commonly used words in this category were “ting” (meaning girl) – occurred 6 times between 2015 and 2023, and “gyal” (also meaning girl) - appeared regularly from 2019 to the last year of the study, with the exception of 2022. Sometimes the texts contained words such as: “gyaldem” and girldem (a group of women) - once each in 2015 and 2017, link (to meet a girl) - once each in 2018 and 2019, peng (beautiful/attractive (girl)) - once in 2019 and 2020, batty (a girl's buttocks) - twice in 2018 and once in 2021, and nyash (also a girl's buttocks) - once in 2021 and twice in 2023. The least common words were: “ting” and “bumper” (meaning a girl’s buttocks), “yattie”, “patty” and “baby mum”

(all three meaning a beautiful woman), “piff” (beautiful/attractive), “punani” and “pum-pum” (both meaning girl’s genitalia), “buss” (having sex with a woman), “lighty” (a girl with a light skin), and “mon cheri” (translated from French – my dear) - all these words were found only once.

A very popular topic was “taunting and threatening opponents (enemies)” – this theme, with the exception of 2018, was present throughout the entire study. Although the research did not reveal any frequently occurring words on this topic, this theme has the greatest diversity in vocabulary. Periodically, British rappers’ lyrics included words like: “beef” (confrontation) – occurred once in 2015 and 2019, “ching” (to cut someone with a knife) – once in 2020 and 2021, “stick”/“drumstick” (firearm) – 4 times in 2021 and once in 2022 and 2023, “greaze” (bad intentions) – once in 2024 and 2025, “ZK”/“zombie” (type of a knife) – once in 2021 and 2025, “rudeboy” (gangster) – twice in 2015 and once in 2020, and “badman” (also gangster) – twice in 2021 and once in 2025. Besides, the lyrics contain the following words, but only in a single copy: “doughnut” (insult meaning stupid), “roll squaddy”/ “x (number) man deep” (attack in a group), “opps”, “paigon” and “ting” (all three meaning enemies), “nank” and “shank” (both meaning knife), “hand ting”, “wap” and “mash” (all meaning firearm), “buss” (to shoot), “shaven” (cut with a knife), “get a drilly” (attacked by someone), “grrah” (onomatopoeic word for shooting sound), “raasclaat” (offensive insult), “army” (gang/crew), “active” and “on the roads” (both meaning doing criminal activity).

A less prominent theme in the analyzed songs was “home and close friendship ties” – this topic emerged only 6 times throughout the research. However, this theme contains one of the most prominent words of analyzed rap song lyrics, namely: “mandem” (gang/group of close friends) – the word was encountered almost every year, “fam” (family/close friends) – appeared once in 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2015, and “ends” (home territory) – occurred once in 2015, 2019, 2020 and 2022. Least common words were: “gang” (group of close friends) – emerged once in the first 2 years of the study, “blud” (mate/friend) – occurred 3 times in 2015 and one time in 2020, and “yard” (home) – appeared twice in 2020 and 2022. The rarest words on this topic, which were encountered only once, were: “cuz” (cousin/friend), “bruddas” (brothers/friends) and “gaff” (home).

Despite the strong associations of MLE dialect users with drugs and drug trafficking, this topic became the least used in rap song lyrics – mentions were only made in 2017, as well as in the last three years of the study. The only words found on this theme were: “ganja” (marijuana), “juug” (profit from drug dealing), “K’s” and “O’s” (kilos and ounces of drugs).

Based on the analysis, it becomes clear that some characteristics of MLE users indicated in previous studies are confirmed, namely excessive masculinity (strong attraction to the female sex) and aggressiveness (taunts and threats towards enemies). However, some features of MLE speakers, such as a strong connection with drug use and sale, as well as describing a hard life on the streets, are still refuted. Quite the opposite, British rappers who speak MLE rarely mention the topic of drugs, but increasingly talk about their current rich life. Moreover, one of the themes identified in this study had not been remarked at all in previous studies. MLE speakers' attachment to their home, friends, and family had not previously been mentioned as a distinct characteristic of MLE, but it is clearly reflected in this study.

The most commonly used lexical elements of MLE in the lyrics of British rap songs were: borrowings and shortenings, as they occurred in every analyzed year of the research. The most striking examples of "borrowings" could be: "cuh"/ "cah" (because), "ting" (girl), "gyal" (girl), and "mandem" (group of friends) – all of them occurred in 6 or more different years of the study. As for the shortenings, the following could be highlighted: "p" (paper – money) and "fam" (family – close friends) – these words appeared in 5 and 4 different years of the study successively. The next popular lexical feature is lexis from marginal areas, this feature appeared in every analyzed year of the study, except for the 2015. Examples of this feature could be: "stick"/ "drumstick" (firearm) and "ZK"/ "zombie" (type of a knife) – they appeared 4 and 2 times throughout the study successively. Meaning shift was also encountered a lot, for example: "gassed" (means "stay excited", previously meant "being drunk"), "beef" (usually it is a type of meat, but in MLE it refers to an argument or confrontation) and "greaze" (meant "dirty/oily" earlier, but in MLE it started to mean "bad intentions"). In addition, another feature of the MLE was used in 2019 – general extender "and that".

The most common pragmatical and morphosyntactic MLE features throughout the research were: negation "ain't" (appeared every year, except for 2017 and 2021), pronoun "man" (occurred every year, with the exception of 2018 and 2024), intensifier "bare" (emerged in 2015, 2021 and 2023), pragmatic markers "you know", "innit" and "you get me?" (appeared from 2015 to 2018), double negation (occurred in 2022 and 2024), triple negation (appeared in 2016), address term "blud" (emerged in 2015 and 2020), and quotative "like" (appeared in 2015).

The study shows that all lexical features of the MLE, with the exception of the "vague language", are actively used by MLE speakers, confirming the data of previous studies. However, the data of this study on the pragmatic and morphosyntactic features of MLE diverge from the data of previous research. Thus, only the wide spread of the pronoun "man" and the negation "ain't" among MLE

users is confirmed. Other pragmatic and morphosyntactic features, such as quotatives, address terms, other types of negations (never, double, don't – third person singular), pragmatic markers and intensifiers are used much less frequently by MLE users.

Some notable differences include the word “paper”, which emerged in 2016, then disappeared, and only began to occur again in 2020. A more obvious example is the word “gassed”, which was present in the lyrics of British rappers in 2015-2016, but only reemerged in songs in 2025. A similar situation occurred with the topic of “drugs”, since after a one-time emergence in 2017, it disappeared from UK rap lyrics for many years and only reappeared in 2023, after which the topic began occurring regularly. Another interesting phenomenon is the word “gyal”, which did not appear in song lyrics until 2019, but since 2019 has begun to appear in almost every year studied. Also, many words from the “taunting and threatening opponents (enemies)” category began to appear only in 2020/2021, for instance, “ching”, “stick”/“drumstick”, “ZK”/“zombie” and “badman”. Similarly, double negations only began to occur in 2022. One of the MLE dialect's distinctive features, on the contrary, ceased to appear in song lyrics at a certain point; this concerns pragmatic markers, which last appeared in 2018.

It is also worth considering that the results of this research are not statistically and quantitatively significant enough to determine the exact frequency of use of certain themes, as well as lexical, pragmatic and morphosyntactic MLE features in the lyrics of British rappers.

CONCLUSION

The MLE dialect, which emerged in London in the 1950s due to large-scale immigration to London, has become extremely popular among young people and eventually spread throughout Britain. Children from poor, multicultural working-class areas actively interact with other children of different ethnic backgrounds, which, together with the study of the MLE dialect by linguists and the creation of dictionaries of this dialect, contributes to the successful enregisterment process of MLE.

On social media and in newspapers, the MLE dialect has been branded as alien, ridiculous, and harmful to the English language. MLE speakers themselves are denounced as cruel, lazy, and stupid, mocked in videos on social media. The MLE dialect is associated by ordinary British people with drug dealing, criminal activity, weapons and excessive masculinity. Despite all of the above, the dialect has still received widespread support among young people, who constantly supplement this dialect, linguists, who describe MLE as a new path in the development of the English language, as well as British rappers, who actively use and popularize MLE in their tracks.

The practical research aimed to examine the lyrics of the most popular drill and grime tracks from 2015 to 2025 in order to identify recurring song themes, as well as lexical, pragmatic and morphosyntactic MLE features.

The results of the practical study showed that, although MLE rappers do have a tendency toward aggression and excessive masculinity, they are still more focused on demonstrating their luxurious lives and close relationships with friends in their tracks, and, contrary to stereotypes and associations, they do not heavily use drug themes in their lyrics.

In addition, the practical research demonstrates that such lexical features of MLE as borrowings, shortenings, changes in meanings of words and lexis from marginal areas are commonly present in drill and grime songs, with the exception of the vague language. Of the pragmatic and morphosyntactic features of MLE, the pronoun “man” and the negation “ain’t” were very widespread, while quotatives, address terms, and non-standard negation types (never, double, don’t – third person singular), pragmatic markers and intensifiers were not that common in the analyzed song material.

Further research on this topic will help to more precisely determine socioeconomic and sociocultural issues associated with MLE users in the British society, as well as certain reoccurring lexical and grammatical MLE features in British rap songs.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Mitmekultuuriline Londoni inglise keel (lühendatult MLE), mis tekkis Londonis 1950. aastatel ulatusliku immigratsiooni tõttu Londonisse, on noorte seas muutunud äärmiselt populaarseks ja levinud lõpuks üle kogu Suurbritannia. Vaestest, multikultuursetest tööliklassi piirkondadest pärit lapsed suhtlevad aktiivselt teiste erineva etnilise taustaga lastega, mis koos keeleteadlaste MLE dialekti uurimise ja selle dialekti sõnastike loomisega aitab kaasa MLE edukale registreerimisprotsessile.

Sotsiaalmeedias ja ajalehtedes on MLE dialekti tembelatud võõraks, naeruväärseks ja inglise keelele kahjulikuks. MLE kõnelejaid endid peetakse julmadeks, laisadeks ja rumalateks ning neid naeruvääristatakse sotsiaalmeedia videotes. Tavalised Britid seostavad MLE dialekti narkokaubanduse, kuritegevuse, relvade ja liigse maskuliinsusega. Vaatamata eelnevale on dialekt siiski laialdast toetust leidnud noorte seas, kes seda dialekti pidevalt täiendavad, keeleteadlaste seas, kes kirjeldavad MLE-d kui uut teed inglise keele arengus, ning Briti räpparite seas, kes MLE-d aktiivselt oma lugudes kasutavad ja populariseerivad.

Käesoleva uurimistöö „Mitmekultuurilise Londoni inglise keele tunnuste areng aastatel 2015–2025 räpilaulude põhjal“ eesmärk oli uurida aastatel 2015–2025 populaarseimate drilli- ja grime-lugude sõnu, et tuvastada korduvaid lauluteemasid ning leksikaalseid, pragmaatilisi ja morfosüntaktilisi MLE tunnuseid. Praktilise uuringu tulemused näitasid, et kuigi MLE räpparitel on kalduvus agressiivsusele ja liigsele maskuliinsusele, keskenduvad nad oma lugudes siiski rohkem luksusliku elu demonstreerimisele ja lähedaste sõpradega suhetele ning vastupidiselt stereotüüpidele ja assotsiatsioonidele ei kasuta nad oma laulusõnades palju narkootikumide teemasid.

Lisaks näitab praktiline uurimus, et sellised MLE leksikaalsed tunnused nagu laensõnad, lühendid, sõnade tähenduste muutused ning marginaalsetest valdkondadest pärit leksika on drill'i ja grime'i lugudes tavaliselt esindatud, välja arvatud ebamäärane keel. MLE murde pragmaatilistest ja morfosüntaktilistest tunnustest olid asesõna „man” ja eitussõna „ain't” väga levinud, samas kui tsitaadimarkerid, pöördumisvormid ja mittestandardised eituse tüübid (never, kahekordne eitus, don't kolmanda isiku ainsuses), pragmaatilised markerid ja intensiivistajad ei olnud analüüsitud laulutekstides eriti sagedased.

Edasised uuringud sellel teemal aitavad täpsemalt kindlaks teha Briti ühiskonnas MLE seotud sotsiaalmajanduslikke ja sotsiaalkultuurilisi probleeme, samuti teatud korduvaid leksikaalseid ja grammatilisi MLE tunnuseid Briti räpilauludes.

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