

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA29</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> The History of London English</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)          This case study provides an example of impact on cultural life and cultural heritage underpinned by research undertaken by Dr Laura Wright on the history of London English. She has been broadcasting fortnightly talks devoted to this topic on BBC London 94.9 from 1999 to the present. The very considerable feedback from listeners testifies to the range and significance of its impact on their lives, substantiating a sense of their own history, in and through language.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)          Since 1996, Laura Wright has been a Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and (since 2009) Reader in the Faculty of English. She works on the history of London English, and the history of Standard English – the two are often conflated but are, and have always been, demonstrably different. Her <i>Sources of London English: Medieval Thames Vocabulary</i> (1996) recovered lost English word-stock used in Medieval Latin and Anglo-Norman French manuscripts, and paved the way to establishing historical code-switching as a subject of study in itself. Code-switching (the practice of routinely mixing two or more languages) is probably more frequent world-wide than monolingualism, but until Wright's work it had been almost entirely absent from historical enquiry, despite a vast amount of (mainly unpublished) manuscript evidence. Wright's chapters and articles from the 1990s prompted Prof Herbert Schendl (University of Vienna) to join her in studying historical code-switching, and together they co-edited <i>Code-switching in Early English</i> (2011), causing English to become the most intensely-studied language from this point of view. They are now leaders in this burgeoning field, which has attracted scholars working in Medieval Irish, Middle High German, Middle Low German, Medieval Latin, Classical Latin and Ancient Greek, amongst other languages. Wright's analysis of historical code-switching has shifted the terms in which the standardization of English is now studied, and her edited collection <i>The Development of Standard English 1300-1800</i> (2000) has become influential. Her work on Standard English analyses trade-documents written between the late fourteenth century and the mid-sixteenth century, a crucial period during which, Wright's research demonstrates, trading practices on the continent shifted and foreign merchants came to trade in London, causing dialectal variation in the capital to decline.</p> <p>Wright's work focuses on historical sociolinguistic enquiry; that is, what kind of person said what in what sort of social context. Her work on seventeenth-century London English is based on analysis of witness testimonies in the records of the Bridewell and Bethlehem hospitals (2004), and her work on eighteenth-century London English derives from newspaper advertisements and an unexamined archive: Hoare's Bank, Fleet Street (2010). The Hoare family has kept bills, trade-cards and receipts from shopkeepers, footmen, porters, window-cleaners, dress-makers, coachmen, and other semi-literate trades-people, and this data provides Wright with evidence of phonological and morphological variation amongst the working classes. She has published on the playground language of nineteenth- and twentieth-century London children (2008).</p> <p>As Londoners travelled the globe, they took their language with them. Wright's work on the diffusion of London English speech to the early American colonies, and also as it is recorded in the surviving archives of one of the earliest British colonies, St Helena, South Atlantic, shows the underpinning relation between London speech and early colonial English (2013). Wright discovered that the St Helena court-records contain data wherein seventeenth-century slaves are represented as speaking Pidgin English. This is amongst the earliest evidence for the speech of slaves anywhere in the world and contributes to knowledge of pidgin formation.</p> <p>The research underpinning the impact is Wright's far-reaching exploration of the history of London and Standard English, including the study of Middle English, Medieval Latin, and Anglo-Norman French in the medieval period.</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

1 Laura Wright, *Sources of London English: Medieval Thames Vocabulary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

'This is the first substantial strike in a major scholarly campaign: the follow-up will be worth watching.' (Review in *Urban History*, 25 (1998) pp 262-263)

2 Laura Wright (ed.), *The Development of Standard English, 1300-1800: Theories, Descriptions, Conflicts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; reissued in paperback, 2006).

'This is an important volume, particularly in its clear demonstration that techniques of corpus linguistics can lead to a resumption of interest in the historical evolution of English. Laura Wright (of Cambridge University) deserves particular thanks for having raised a major question and then pouring her considerable energy into the conferences and this volume that flows from them.' (Review in *Language in Society*, 31:3 (2002), pp 456-460)

3 Laura Wright, 'The language of transported Londoners: third-person-singular present-tense markers in depositions from Virginia and the Bermudas, 1607-1624', in Raymond Hickey (ed.) *Legacies of Colonial English: Studies in transported dialects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 158-71.

4 —————, 'The Playground Language of London Schoolchildren: Southern Voicing Revisited', in Matthew Davies and Andrew Prescott (eds), *London and the Kingdom: Essays in honour of Caroline M. Barron*. Proceedings of the 2004 Harlaxton Symposium. Harlaxton Medieval Studies xvi (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2008), pp. 366-83.

5 —————, 'Eighteenth-Century London Non-Standard Spellings as Evidenced by Servants', Tradesmen's and Shopkeepers' Bills', in Nicholas Brownlees, Gabriella Del Lungo and John Denton (eds), *The Language of Public and Private Communication in a Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 161-90.

6 —————, 'The Language of Slaves on the Island of St Helena, South Atlantic, 1682-1724', in Marijke J. van der Wal and Gijsbert Rutten (eds), *Touching the Past: Studies in the Historical Sociolinguistics of Ego-Documents*, Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2013), pp. 243-76.

7 Herbert Schendl and Laura Wright (eds), *Code-switching in Early English* (Berlin: Mouton, 2011).

'Edited by Herbert Schendl and Laura Wright, without doubt among the foremost researchers in the field, *Code-Switching in Early English* contains an impressive array of research by a number of major contributors to the growing field of historical code-switching studies.' (review in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*; Winter 2013, Issue 1, pp 121-124)

All outputs have been peer reviewed.

All outputs can be supplied by the University of Cambridge on request.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dr Wright presents research findings to the public through fortnightly twenty-minute radio programmes on BBC London 94.9 on the topic of the history of London English. The term 'London English' covers grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, place-names, personal names, names of products, shops and buildings, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and because Londoners colonised much of the globe, speech from remote English speaking areas retain features of London English which are now lost in the city. Dr Wright prepares a talk which she presents as a conversation with BBC London programme presenter, Robert Elms. She began broadcasting in 1999 and has done so continuously since then, apart from six months when she was on maternity leave. Dr Wright has now outlasted five producers and three station re-brands. Each broadcast stimulates emails and calls to the BBC.

## Impact case study (REF3b)

The nature of this impact involves: (i) preserving, conserving, and interpreting cultural heritage for audiences external to the academy; (ii) contributing to continuing personal and professional development.

The programme is well-received by the public, who listen both locally (London-wide) at the time of broadcast on the radio, and internationally for about a week subsequently on the BBC Iplayer. The audience measurement system in the UK showed that BBC London 94.9 audience reach for the first quarter in 2013 was 504,000. [1] Dr Wright receives emails from listeners around the world. A BBC Radio London spokesman reported: 'Laura is one of our most popular contributors and we probably get more calls and emails responding to her time on-air than we do of any other contributors, because of her subject and how she presents it.' [2] In January 2012 Dr Wright asked listeners for their comments on her broadcasts and received over 100 replies (the norm for such requests is 20-30), including:

'I'm a 45 year old stay at home Mum. The radio is my companion & my educator & I split my listening mostly between Radio London, Radio 4 & ... I'm not well educated in the usual sense - a CSE in English & a certificate for a width of the local baths are all I possess, but I have a quest for knowledge so have educated myself. Your programme is part of that. Your slot feeds my passion for language; of how words work, the history of our language & all the quiriness that comes with it.' [3]

'If you need any evidence that you are value for money I am someone who is now 52 and at school was probably a nightmare, I am sure the trouble I used to get in made me my teachers live time hobby [sic]. It was only a few years ago I found Robert's show and being a London boy rekindled my interest in London and found a want to learn. Your piece is the one I wait for most.' [4]

'I've always found your talks on the show fascinating & I think a lot of people who normally would have avoided anything marked 'linguistics' due to fears of the dry academic nature of the subject will have been drawn in by the interesting & relevant way that you present the subject. ... I am wondering if there are any books that you would recommend for a beginner like me to do some home study.' [5]

'Your piece on stagecoaches and all aspects of their history in London and elsewhere – including their idiosyncratic names – in May 2010, was particularly brilliant. I know it was May 2010 because I laboriously transcribed it for future reference, word for word, from the iPlayer at that time!' [6]

The listenership is extremely varied: replies were received from, amongst others, midwives, chartered accountants, cameramen, NHS workers, drivers, baggage-handler, photographers, banker, poets, students, advertising workers, animation designer & illustrator, pensioners. Listeners reported repeating information from Dr Wright's broadcasts to customers (particularly taxi-drivers), patients and clients (counsellor, youth-worker), family and friends, tourists (blue-badge tour-guide) and buying linguistics books as a result of listening.

There is no precedent for broadcasting historical linguistics, let alone on a stigmatised urban dialect. The popularity of the radio broadcasts indicates the appetite among listeners for a sense of living history, of where their own language comes from and the way it resonates across space and time. The detailed audience feedback reveals a live, ongoing, committed interest in the history of the voice which cuts across class, age, gender, education level, and region. Many respondents reported listening from abroad, and over a long duration — ten years or more.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] <http://www.rajar.co.uk/>

[2] Email from person 1 (Producer, BCC)

[3] Email from person 2 (listener).

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

[4] Email from person 3 (listener).

[5] Email from person 4 (listener).

[6] Email from person 5 (listener).