

It's worth listening to 'Hoots' - for 'manny' reasons

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■ Chris Hughton speaks like a true east Londoner – with some Irish quirks.

'many' like Londoners or Norfolk people do. We say 'menny'. He pronounces it 'manny', to rhyme with 'canny'.

That was the original pronunciation of the word in older forms of English – which is why it's spelt with an 'a'. But why would Chris use this older form? You can pick up a clue to this puzzle from someone else associated with the Canaries. If you listen, as you should, to the excellent Radio Norfolk football coverage, you can hear Paul McVeigh using exactly the same pronunciation as Chris. Paul is from Belfast. People all over Ireland still use this original pronunciation.

Chris Hughton is about to lead our team to another year in the Premiership. Norwich City supporters posting on the Pink'Un website with their hopes for the season have been calling him Hoots.

Hoots is a nickname people from other areas might not understand, because they don't go in for the Norfolk speciality that linguists call 'yod-dropping', made famous by Bernard Matthews's 'bootiful'. We don't have a 'y' sound after the 'b' in beautiful, or after the 'd' in due, which we say the same as 'do'. And we pronounce 'Hugh' the same as 'who'.

But there's something else linguistically interesting about Chris. We use the term Cockney rather loosely round these parts to refer to anyone who sounds vaguely like they might come from the Home Counties. But Chris is a true Londoner – he grew up close to the West Ham football ground.

It's always worth listening to what he has to say, because he speaks very articulately about football and our football club. But you might just notice there's one little thing about the way he speaks which isn't Cockney. He doesn't pronounce the word

Chris isn't from Ireland, even though he played for the Republic of Ireland national team 53 times. He qualified to play for them because his mother is Irish – from County Limerick, they say.

Mother tongue isn't a very good label. Children don't speak like their mothers – or fathers. They speak like their peers – the friends they grow up with. But, occasionally, just a little something from the language of the first person you ever heard speaking may stick.

Let's hope Norwich City will be playing football in the Premier League for many, many years to come.