Talking Local: Polish teenagers’ acquisition of English variation in Edinburgh and London

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Polish immigration to the UK

• In 2004, ten new members were admitted to the EU.

• Poland was the largest ascension state.

• Poland has contributed most to a recent wave of immigration to the UK.

• Language contact situation between Polish and English throughout the UK.
Why Polish teenagers?

- The adolescent generation of Polish migrants can afford us some insight on who immigrants become in the initial stages of contact.
- They are adaptable and in constant contact with native school-age population.
- Migrant children exist in a ‘research void’ (Ackers and Stalford 2004).
- What do Polish teenagers do with (sociolinguistically constrained) variation in their L2?
Sociolinguistics and second language acquisition

• Adamson & Regan (1991) – first look at variable acquisition of native speaker patterns; (ing) variation among Vietnamese and Cambodian learners of English in the US.

• The majority of research on this question examines the acquisition of variation in French (esp. in Canada)
  • Uritechu et al. (2004); Mougeon et al. (2004); Nagy et al. (2004); Howard et al. (2006)

• L2 speakers can often display ‘partial mastery’ of the native-speaker norms of variation
Research question

• Are Polish adolescent immigrants acquiring the same constraints on variation as their local peer group?

• Possible outcomes:
  1. No.
  2. Yes, replication of significant constraints and ordering of factors within those constraints.
  3. Yes, replication of significant constraints, but different internal ordering of the factors.
Method

- Linguistic data (interview and reading passage) collected from
  - 16 Polish adolescents from Edinburgh
  - 21 Polish adolescents from London
  - 21 Edinburgh-born adolescents
  - 24 London-born adolescents
- Perception data collected using the verbal guise technique (Ladegaard, 1998).
- All linguistic data orthographically transcribed using ELAN (www.lat-mpi.eu/tools/elan)
- All instances of (ing) : [ɪn] ~[ɪŋ] were extracted and coded – 1833 tokens of (ing) in Edinburgh; 1556 tokens of (ing) in London.
Previous findings on (ing) variation in English

- Usual linguistic constraints on (ing)
  - Grammatical conditioning (Labov 2001)
  - Regressive homorganic assimilation (Houston 1985) [British English]
  - Progressive homorganic dissimilation (Houston 1985) [British English]
  - Priming (Abramowicz 2007)

- Usual social constraints on (ing)
  - Socioeconomic class
  - Style
  - Gender (Labov 2001)
### Constraints operating on (ing) among Edinburgh-born teens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual constraints</th>
<th>Local constraints</th>
<th>Missing constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Style</td>
<td>• Number of syllables in word</td>
<td>• Regressive assimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grammatical category</td>
<td>• Positive attitude towards Edinburgh accent</td>
<td>• Progressive dissimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Priming</td>
<td>• Ordering of factors within grammatical category</td>
<td>• Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Usual constraints**
  - Style
  - Grammatical category
  - Priming

- **Local constraints**
  - Number of syllables in word
  - Positive attitude towards Edinburgh accent
  - Ordering of factors within grammatical category

- **Missing constraints**
  - Regressive assimilation
  - Progressive dissimilation
  - Gender
### Constraints operating on (ing) among London-born teens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual constraints</th>
<th>Local constraints</th>
<th>Missing constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Regressive assimilation  
  • Style  
  • Progressive dissimilation  
  • Priming | • NONE | • Gender  
  • Grammatical category |
Frequency of variants of (ing)

- Edinburgh natives
- Edinburgh Poles
- London natives
- London Poles

- ingK
- ing
- in
Possible Outcomes

• Possible outcomes:
  1. No replication of what the local kids do.
  2. Replication of significant constraints and ordering of factors within those constraints
  3. Replication of significant constraints, but different internal ordering of the factors

• Result:
  • A bit of everything.
Significant constraints for Edinburgh-born teens (in order of effect size)

- Style
- Grammatical category
- Priming
- Number of syllables
- Positive attitude towards Edinburgh accent

Significant constraints for Polish-born teens in Edinburgh (in order of effect size)

- [style]
- Grammatical category
- Friendship network [Polish-specific]
- Number of syllables
- Regressive dissimilation
  - Progressive
- Priming
- [positive attitude towards Edinburgh English]

[GREY] = not significant
BLUE = significant but different ordering of constraints
RED = exact replication of constraints
GREEN = additional constraints for Poles
Grammatical category constraints in Edinburgh

Grammatical conditioning of (ing) among Edinburgh teens

-1.5  -1  -0.5  0  0.5  1  1.5  2  2.5

-1.5  -1  -0.5  0  0.5  1  1.2

Grammatical conditioning of (ing) among Polish teens in Edinburgh
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Significant constraints for Edinburgh-born teens (in order of effect size)</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Style  
• Grammatical category  
• Priming  
• Number of syllables  
• Positive attitude towards Edinburgh accent | • [style]  
• Grammatical category  
• Friendship network [Polish-specific]  
• Number of syllables  
• Regressive dissimilation  
• Priming  
• [positive attitude towards Edinburgh English] |

[GREY] = not significant  
BLUE = significant but different ordering of constraints  
RED = exact replication of constraints  
GREEN = additional constraints for Poles
### Significant constraints for London-born teens (in order of effect size)

- Regressive assimilation
- Style
- Progressive dissimilation
- Priming

### Significant constraints for Polish-born teens in London (in order of effect size)

- **[Regressive assimilation]**
- **[Style]**
- **Progressive dissimilation**
- **[Priming]**
- Grammatical category
- Gender
- Lexical frequency

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**[GREY]** = not significant  
**BLUE** = significant but different ordering of constraints  
**RED** = exact replication of constraints  
**GREEN** = additional constraints for Poles
Grammatical category constraints for Polish teenagers in London

Grammatical conditioning of (ing) (Labov 2001: 88)

Graph showing the percentage of (ing) usage across different grammatical categories among Polish teens in London.
Back to the research question

• Are teenage Polish immigrants acquiring the same constraints on variation as their local peer group?
• Yes, maybe...
  • Some constraints are replicated completely, some are altered and some are rejected/replaced
• BUT...
  • The most common tendency for Polish adolescents living in Edinburgh and London is ‘re-interpretation’.
Contact and variation

• Language contact and language variation
• Discrimination between different kinds of transfer type:
  • weak transfer
    • same factor groups are significant in both languages
  • strong transfer
    • same factor groups are significant, order of them is the same in both languages
  • internal ordering of constraints within each factor group also important
    (Meyerhoff 2009, Buchstaller & D’Arcy 2009)
• Short-term contact phenomena exhibiting the same sorts of outcomes as long-term language/dialect contact
Making your mark

- Emergence of friends and gender as significant constraints in Edinburgh and London
- Partly an artefact of what we coded for (cautionary note for quantitative work)
- Perhaps also an indication where longitudinal data might help
  - are these things more basic, more ‘visible’, more ‘envisionable’ as intergroup markers
Acknowledgements

• Thanks to:
  • ESRC for funding (RES-000-22-3244)
  • our participants in Edinburgh and London for kindly donating their time and voices
  • the staff at High Schools in Edinburgh and London for helping us organise the data collection during school hours
  • Maddie Appleton, Elsbeth Helfer and Dave Arnold for their transcription work on the corpus.
Selected references