Does watching TV change the way we speak?

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Language Variation and Change lectures

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catchphrases?  

words?  

sounds?  

grammar?
Two Glaswegian adolescent boys speaking to each other...
Two Glaswegian adolescent boys speaking to each other...

R have you been watchin’ *EastEnders*?
L Phhhh, uuh.
R Do you watch it?
L Aye ah watch it but.
R Brilliant man
L No’ saw it *(inaudible)*
R They two nearly got caught aff ay,
L Aye
R Sam was it?
L Sam, an,
R *(laughs)*
L She hid behind the couch.
R Aye. *(laughs)*
L That’s the last one ah saw ah think.
R Ah know she wants tae break it up now an’ he doesnae.
L *(laughs)*
R Pure shockin’ innit?
L Aye, ‘cause he’s
R Mad Barry’s left in his cell man, pure makes, things for him an’ aw that. So he does, ‘s quite shockin’
Two Glaswegian adolescent boys speaking to each other...

R: have you been watchin’ *EastEnders*?
L: Phhhh, uuh.
R: Do you watch it?
L: Aye ah watch it but.
R: Brilliant man
L: No’ saw it *(inaudible)*
R: They two nearly got caught aff ay,
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L: She hid behind the couch.
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R  Aye. *(laughs)*  *[h]*
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R  Ah know she wants tae break it up now an’ he doesnae.
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R Aye. *(laughs)* *(h)*
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a ‘problem’
Rapidly accelerating sound changes in UK accents

• certain consonant changes, e.g. [f] for (th), TH-fronting, in e.g. *think*, tooth, typical of Southern English, and stereotypically London Cockney, are spreading across the UK

  (e.g. Foulkes and Docherty 1999; Kerswill 2003)
• also in Glasgow, 450 miles north of London, non-mobile working-class adolescents are leading in the rapid adoption of consonant features associated with London and South East England (e.g. Stuart-Smith et al, 2007)
Gorblimey accents in the Gorbals as EastEnders alters Scots’ speech

GLASWEGIANS are beginning to speak like Cockneys because of the influence of EastEnders.

Almost 30 per cent of Glaswegians who watched the BBC soap had adopted ways of speaking more usually heard within the sound of Bow bells.

Linguists funded by the Economic and Social Research Council looked at how EastEnders is altering features of the Glaswegian dialect among those who regularly watched the programme.

The speakers tended to use “l” instead of “th” in words such as “think” (fink) and “tooth” (toof) and a vowel sound like that in “good” in place of “l” in words such as “people”.

These changes provide the first evidence that viewing habits accelerate changes in language, which are also well below the level of conscious awareness.

In particular this study was investigating why certain linguistic factors normally found within the Cockney dialect in London were gradually entering into Glaswegian.

Although this trend was apparent in people who had contact with friends or family...
rapidly accelerating changes in Glasgow

- the media themselves blame popular soap dramas set in London apparently featuring Cockney dialect (‘Mockney’)

  ... leading to Jockney (‘Jock’ = Scot)

- *EastEnders* very popular soap drama set in London, broadcast continuously since 1985
because watching TV does not involve live interaction, we might not expect it to be able to have an effect on language variation and change.

‘[a]ll of the evidence generated in this volume and elsewhere points to the conclusion that language is not systematically affected by the mass media, and is influenced primarily in face-to-face interaction with peers’. Labov (2001: 228)
but…

- TV is prevalent, and some programmes constitute social phenomena (e.g. *EastEnders* in UK) (e.g. Buckingham 1987)

from mass communications research:
- broadcast media are assumed to affect social behaviours, but along with other social factors (e.g. Klapper 1960: 8; McQuail 2010)
sociolinguists recognize that TV may

• increase awareness of linguistic varieties, and/or affect attitudes towards and ideologies about other varieties (e.g. Milroy and Milroy 1985; cf Agha 2003)

• provide linguistic models and resources, e.g. in contexts of dialect standardization (e.g. Lameli 2004; Naro 1981, Carvalho 2004)

• provide resources for stylistic variation, e.g. appropriation of media fragments for use in talk (e.g. Rampton 1985; Coupland 2007; Ayass and Gerhardt 2012)
a project (and some subsequent work...)
The Glasgow media project

Is TV a contributory factor in accent change in adolescents? (2002-5)

ESRC R000239757

Does TV play a role in the appearance of ‘Cockney’ accent features in the speech of Glaswegian adolescents?


(we think it does...)
Methodology

• variationist sociolinguistics (e.g. Labov 1972)

assumes that aspects of language: linguistic variables, e.g. pronunciation

can be correlated with

aspects of society: extra-linguistic variables e.g. social class, age, gender etc.
Phonological variable

varying aspect of pronunciation,
  e.g. /t/ in butter [t] or [ʔ] (glottal stop)
  e.g. /th/ in think: [th] or [f] or Scottish [h]

  is correlated with

  e.g. social class, age, gender, etc.
Methodology

• sample
  – 36 adolescents; 12 adults (working-class)
• data
  – speech: wordlist and spontaneous
    – questionnaire; informal interviews
• design
  – correlational study; experiment
• analysis
  – auditory transcription (consonants)
  – acoustic analysis (vowels)
  – all instances in wordlist
  – all/first 30 instances in spontaneous speech
Analysing speech acoustically…
rolling real-time spectrogram
Mark Huckvale UCL:
http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/resource/sfs/rtgram/
Phonological variables

• rapidly diffusing consonant changes

• (?) stable vowel variation

• vernacular change in progress
Phonological variables

- TH-fronting: [f] for [ðθ] in e.g. *think*, *both*
- DH-fronting: [v] for [ðh] in e.g. *brother*
- L-vocalization: /l/ vocalized to high back (un)rounded vowel e.g. *people*, *milk*, *well*

- CAT (cf Southern English TRAP/BATH/PALM)
- BOOT (cf Southern English FOOT/GOOSE)
- erosion (derhoticisation) of /r/, in e.g. *car*
Ultrasound Tongue Imaging
Ultrasound Tongue Imaging
qualitative articulatory analysis with ultrasound
Covert (delayed) gesture in derhoticising speaker
http://seeingspeech.ac.uk

The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland

and also http://dynamicdialects.ac.uk
Phonological variables

- **TH-fronting:** [f] for [θ] in e.g. *think, both*
- **DH-fronting:** [v] for [ð] in e.g. *brother*
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- **CAT** (cf Southern English TRAP/BATH/PALM)
- **BOOT** (cf Southern English FOOT/GOOSE)

- erosion (derhoticisation) of /r/, in e.g. *car*
(1) Variation and change in Glaswegian
• For all three diffusing consonant changes, in wordlists and conversational speech
  – apparent-time change: adolescents use more ‘new’ variants than adults
  – real-time change: we find more ‘new’ variants in 2003 than in 1997

• no apparent- or real-time change in erosion of /r/
Fine phonetic variation and sound change: A real-time study of Glaswegian

http://soundsofthecity.arts.gla.ac.uk/

Oct 2011-Dec 2014
## Corpus for a real-time study of Glaswegian Vernacular

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade of Recording</th>
<th>Old 67-90 (Decade of Birth)</th>
<th>Middle-aged 40-55 (Decade of Birth)</th>
<th>Young 10-15 (Decade of Birth)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1890s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1920s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1960s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1900s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1930s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1970s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1910s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1940s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1980s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1920s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1950s)</td>
<td>6 f, 6 m (1990s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlled-access, force-aligned, fully searchable, electronic corpus, available for academic researchers, covering 100 years of Glaswegian in apparent- and real-time
boot 1 = elderly speakers recorded in 1970s, born in 1890s
boot 2 = elderly speakers recorded in 2000s, born in 1920s
boot 3 = adolescent speakers recorded in 1970s, born in 1950s
'BOOT' from 70-Y to 00-Y

boot 4 = adolescent speakers recorded in 2000s, born in 1980s
Recap: variation and change in Glaswegian

- Consonant innovations have spread rapidly since the 1980s, but have been observed sporadically in Glaswegian since 1950s.

- Erosion of /r/ is a long-term, dialect-internal change, not connected with Anglo-English.

- BOOT is lowering, quite unlike Anglo-English (CAT is stable).
(2) TV and the community: comparing *EastEnders* and Glaswegian
TV practices

Our informants reported access to 3+ TV sets at home, and said that they watched TV every day, with average exposure of around 3 hours/day.

London-based programmes were rated highest for soap (*EastEnders*), comedy (*Only Fools and Horses*), and police drama (*The Bill*).

➢ What are the media models like, and how do they compare with Glaswegian?
e.g. vowel qualities in EastEnders (2003)
and with Glaswegian (2003)

- vowels of Glaswegian are quite different from those of *EastEnders*
e.g. TH-fronting in EastEnders (2003)
e.g. TH-fronting in EastEnders (2003)
TH-fronting in Glaswegian (2003)

Glaswegian children show more TH-fronting

Social patterning of TH-fronting is different
linguistic constraints: TH-fronting

Glaswegian (2003)
linguistic constraints: TH-fronting

EastEnders (2003)

Glaswegian (2003)

➢ different linguistic patterning
Recap: media models and community norms

- Glaswegian kids can show more diffusing consonant variants than in *EastEnders*
- different social and linguistic constraints (cf Buchstaller and D’Arcy 2009)

- if TV influence involved
  - only certain features of speech are affected
  - not obviously taken ‘off the (media) shelf’ (Eckert 2003; Milroy 2007)

- difficult to infer media influence from this evidence (cf Dion and Poplack 2007; Sayers 2014)
(3) the view from the group: linguistic and social factors
Regression study – each linguistic variable

with:
  – linguistic factors

and
  – dialect contact (beyond and within Glasgow)
  – attitudes to accents
  – social practices/identity
  – music (incl. radio)
  – computers (incl. internet)
  – film (incl. video/DVD)
  – sport
  – TV
Results

innovative consonants (TH/L-vocalization)

• **strong effect for linguistic factors** (cf. Labov 2010: transmission)

• **a number of social factors are significant together including**
  – **social practices** (cf Eckert 2000)

• **dialect contact** (cf. Labov 2010: diffusion)
  – **psychological engagement with TV** (*EastEnders*)

(Stuart-Smith, Timmins, Pryce and Gunter, 2013)
Results
erosion of /r/ in read speech

- strong effect for linguistic factors
- a number of social factors are significant together including
  - social practices
  - psychological engagement with TV (*EastEnders*)

(Stuart-Smith, Lawson and Scobbie 2014)
Results
vowels, and erosion of /r/ in spontaneous speech

- strong effect for linguistic factors
- almost no evidence for social factors at all

(Stuart-Smith, Lawson and Scobbie 2014)
Recap: linguistic/social factors and the group

• Only certain variables show significant link with TV
  – TH; L-vocalization
  – erosion of /r/ in read speech
• Speech style difference: better fitting models for reading the wordlist (more performative)
• Local linguistic constraints show strongest effects
• TV:
  – engagement not exposure (cf parasocial interaction; attention to media)
  – one of several social factors (cf media effects)
What have we learnt from the Glasgow study?
• Glaswegian accent is changing: new diffusing consonant variants alongside long-term dialect changes

• The new changes don’t look as if they have taken ‘off the (media) shelf’ (erosion of /r/ has been underway since turn of 19th century)

• Only certain sound changes are linked with engagement with TV

• Speech style is a factor for those changes
• Glaswegian accent is changing: new diffusing consonant variants alongside long-term dialect changes

• The new changes don’t look as if they have taken ‘off the (media) shelf’ (erosion of /r/ has been underway since turn of 19th century)

• Only certain sound changes are linked with engagement with TV

• Speech style is a factor for those changes
  + Individual traits constrain adoption of innovations
  + No evidence that diffusing changes are due to imitation
modelling media influence...
media effectively scatter seeds to discontinuous communities, taking root through parasocial interaction, differently according to different local conditions

Sayers (2014)
some (a few) existing speech variants, which may already have become associated with particular social meanings, and be spreading through a community, are reinforced through parasocial interaction with media for some people

(Stuart-Smith 2014)

‘filtering/resonance’
words + some word-like linguistic elements, e.g. *be like*

- children can acquire lexis from TV (e.g. Rice et al 1990)

- some shifts associated with media, e.g. from structurally distinct dialects towards standard, often incur substantial lexical shifts (e.g. German: Lameli 2004; Japanese: Ota and Takano 2014)
phonological variation

- infants cannot acquire primary phonological contrasts without social interaction (Kuhl et al. 2003)

- no study to date has shown media involved in sound change which was not already (very slowly) in progress

- cognitive modelling of media influence presumes real-world experience – this may be even more important for speech
Speakers parse media speech through a filter of being an active member of a dialect community. Existing features may be enhanced when they are similar in terms of social meaning and linguistic structure.
style and social meaning of language variation
Thank you!
And thanks to all our collaborators and our funders...

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