

Individual dialect attrition as an outcome of mobility: A methodological case study

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When people migrate to an area where a different dialect is spoken, they may accommodate their speech towards their new interlocutors (Giles 1979). Over time, these individual acts of short-term accommodation can become *long-term accommodation* (Auer & Hinskens 2005). Such adaptation of a speaker's native dialect—even when they are not conversing with the group they have been accommodating towards—can be considered *L1 attrition* (Schmid & Köpke 2017): changes to an adult L1 grammar obtaining when a speaker receives extensive exposure to a variety distinct from the one they acquired as a child. Attrition may involve suppression of forms from the first dialect, or acquisition of forms from the second dialect (Auer & Hinskens 2005); both have been attested in phonology (e.g. Barden & Grosskopf 1998), but more rarely in morphosyntax (e.g. Otheguy & Zentella 2012, Domínguez & Hicks 2016). How can we best investigate the questions of what syntactic phenomena are more amenable to attrition, and why?

In this talk we introduce a multimethod study investigating potential grammatical attrition in 30 Standard Southern British English (SSBE) speakers who settled in Belfast 15+ years ago. Specifically, we investigate possible acquisition of the Northern Subject Rule (NSR), a feature of Belfast English (Henry 1995) where *-s* agreement is permitted with 3rd person plural DP subjects, but not 3rd person plural pronominal subjects.

1. The boys go/goes out.

2. They go/*goes out.

Following Hicks & Domínguez's (2020) model of grammatical attrition, we predict attrition—in this context, acquisition of NSR—to be possible, due to existing features shared by the grammars of both varieties, assembled differently onto lexical items (Adger & Smith 2010). We present results from two tasks, with all stimuli recorded by an SSBE speaker.

1) A self-paced listening task (Ferreira et al. 1996): an aural version of a self-paced reading task, designed for cases where written stimuli are inappropriate. The time it takes a participant to aurally process each individual word in a sentence is measured, with anomalous information (e.g. agreement mismatches) expected to increase processing time. If participants have undergone attrition, we predict no increase in processing time for verbs exhibiting NSR agreement, as compared to a group of SSBE speakers in England.

2) An acceptability judgment task: participants hear sentences and judge their acceptability on a 1-5 scale (Schütze 1996). If participants have undergone attrition, we predict higher rates of acceptability for NSR examples as compared to a group of SSBE speakers in England.

We also incorporate a network score, combining % of participants' self-reported close Belfast contacts with a network density measure (Evans 2004), and a measure of participants' attitude, developed from Keijzer's (2007) sociolinguistic questionnaire for language attrition. In taking these methods together, we present a test case of a methodology for exploring potential long-term changes to individuals' dialect grammars following migration. In doing so, we tap into an understudied dimension of (bi)dialectal variation, adding to understanding of the potential linguistic outcomes (Britain 2009) of increased social and geographic mobility in the 21st century.

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