In moving to a new community, migrant speakers need to acquire not only the syntax, phonology and lexis of a new language, but also the sociolinguistic norms of their new environment. A growing body of research details the processes that non-native speakers go through in acquiring the complex patterns of variation found in native speech (e.g. Goldstein 1987; Wolfram et al 2004; Drummond 2010, Adamson & Regan 1991; Regan 1995; Meyerhoff & Schleef 2014). However, the results differ from community to community and across individual speakers. What does the acquisition process look like in Glasgow, Scotland, in a community where the majority of speakers use a variety of English which differs radically from more mainstream varieties?

In this paper I contribute to this research through a two-year long ethnography of Polish adolescents now living in Glasgow, and compare their use to adolescents born in this community. I focus on a widespread vernacular variable in the UK, glottal replacement - the replacement of [t] by [ʔ] as in (1) – which is subject to a range of sociolinguistic constraints in native speech.

1. And you had a thermomeʔer and there was meʔal to hold iʔ up.

Mixed-effects logistic regression of over 4000 contexts of use demonstrates that the Polish learners’ rates of glottal replacement are in line with the very high rates used by the native Glaswegians at over 80%. The learners also replicate a number of constraints, including phonological context and syllable number. However, a number of constraints not found in the native speaker data are evident in the Polish data. For example, the Polish speakers have higher rates of glottal replacement with high frequency words, an effect which is not significant for their Glaswegian peers. I suggest that this arises from lexical diffusion effects in the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation (e.g. Wolfram et al 2004); when phonetic variation is being acquired in an L2, it is initially linked to those lexical items which occur most frequently in the native input. In addition, examination across a range of contexts show that the Polish speakers styleshift in more formal contexts; while native speakers styleshift for other variables, they do not for glottal replacement. I interpret this result as a type of hypercorrection (e.g. Eckman et al 2013), where the Polish group are more ‘careful’ with their use of glottal replacement than the Glaswegians. This may stem from linguistic insecurity due to their precarious social position in the school and the heightened scrutiny on their language use.

These results show that language learners replicate a number of constraints found in native speech, but also innovate a number of others. These innovations may arise from either social or linguistic pressures on the language system. I discuss how the results inform on the acquisition of variation in a new language, and what this reveals about the sociolinguistic pressures that operate in different communities of use.
Bibliography


