



Stuart-Smith, J. (2017) Variationist approaches to the influence of the media on language. In: Perrin, D. and Cotter, C. (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Media*. Routledge. ISBN 9781138014176

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Deposited on: 07 November 2016

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Variationist approaches to the influence of media on language

1. Introduction¹

On July 19, 2015, a minor media panic erupted. *The Sunday Times*, a UK newspaper with national distribution, published an article by Robin Henry entitled, “Media makes Scots throw the R away”. The text begins: “Scottish nationalism may be in the ascendant, but the country is beginning to lose one of its most distinctive features: its accent. For centuries, Scots have pronounced the "R" in words such as car, farm and sort but it is starting to be inaudible for some speakers north of the border, according to research by Scottish linguists. Some blame the Anglicising influence of the media, including BBC broadcasters, who adopt English pronunciations. To use the technical term for the vanishing "R", it is the battle of postvocalic rhoticity”.

The following day, a flurry of articles and interviews appeared in the UK national and Scottish press, with headlines such as: “Young Scots are losing their accent” (*Daily Mail*), “Rrrr we really losing our accent” (*The Metro, Scotland*), and the emotive “Scottish accent doomed to extinction - and the Queen's English and BBC could be to blame”; *Daily Express*. By 22 July, the story had crossed both the Channel (“L'accent écossais se meurrrrrrrrt” in *Le Monde*) and the Atlantic, where it appeared as a feature in the American public radio show, PRI's *The World*.

The research reported in this story was on a long-term gradual change in Scottish vernacular pronunciation that took off in the 1980s (Lawson et al. 2014, Stuart-Smith et al. 2014). The weakening of /r/ was first noted at the turn of the 20th century, and confirmed in recordings made from Scottish soldiers in 1916/17 during the First World War (Stuart-Smith and Lawson 2016), but likely to have started in the middle of the 19th century or perhaps even earlier, and certainly well before the advent of the broadcast media in the early 1920s. The example illustrates some of the core issues at the heart of sociolinguistic approaches to language and the media. One assumption made by the media themselves is that the media play a key role in language change (Moschonas 2014) or its conservation in some cases (see Cotter's (2010) discussion of journalism's self-appointed role as “protector” of language in its standardized iterations). The suggestion that the media might influence something as personal and culturally significant as everyday talk seems both obvious and unlikely, given exposure and uptake. While the headlines and articles listed above talk of a powerful media forcing speakers to lose their accents and identities (when this is clearly at odds with personal experience), linguists have another view.

This chapter focuses on sociolinguistic studies about this media-language dynamic, and especially a recent study from Scotland, UK, which reveal a different perspective. There is no good evidence to suggest that watching television or films, or listening to the radio, causes direct behavioural change in terms of linguistic practices, or causes speakers to sound the same (Chambers 1998). But there is evidence that shows that the broadcast

¹ This chapter is revised and updated from a version appearing in R. Lawson (2014).

media can offer speakers models for other varieties which enable dialect speakers to shift to standard dialects, and/or minority languages to be maintained and revitalized (Cotter 1996, 1999a, 2001; Charkova 2007; Androutsopoulos 2014). The media can and do offer speakers additional stylistic resources in terms of words, phrases and ways of speaking, which they can and do incorporate into their own interactions in creative ways (Ayass and Gerhard 2012; Androutsopoulos 2014). And media use of language, or media representations of language can also offer new social meanings for existing linguistic features, such as particular pronunciations, or grammatical items (Coupland 2007; Coupland 2009). There is also now robust evidence that strong engagement with specific TV programmes can help accelerate language change in progress even to structural language change, such as shifts to pronunciation and/or grammatical features (e.g., Naro and Scherre 2014; Stuart-Smith et al. 2013).

The key link between the different kinds of language change associated with the media and studied by sociolinguists, or noted anecdotally, is that the aspects of language that are thought to be changing in response to the media in some way are also always special in terms of social meaning and language style (cf. Eckert 2016). These processes are complex, usually below the level of conscious awareness. But conceptually, the interconnections between style and social meaning, and language and the broadcast media, bridge the conceptual gap between what appear on the surface to be different kinds of phenomena at different levels of language (Stuart-Smith 2016), an operation that sociolinguistics, in particular, with its decades of research on social and structural linguistic variation, can shed light on. (See Chapter XX Jannis for an extended discussion of language change and the social and structural components that linguists examine in that regard.) The key concepts are addressed in Section 2 and expanded on in Section 3. The Scottish example– the case study from Glasgow that shows how a variationist sociolinguistic approach can reveal insights into language and media study – is discussed in Section 4; and the critical issues that can be applied more generally and set the stage for future research are presented in Sections 5 and 6, following by conclusions in Section 7.

2. Definitions and key terms

The term “sociolinguistics” covers a range of possible theoretical and methodological ways of looking at the relationships between language and society, from the broad or “macro” level – *how society relates to language* (Fasold 1990) – to the smaller or “micro” units of language production – *how language relates to society* (also see chapters IV.6 Jannis & I.5 Colleen Diana). This can include national language policies and overt attempts to, for example, revitalize languages or establish language standards; at the “macro” level, for example, the influence of the broadcast media is viewed as a positive active strategy to maintain and revitalize minority languages (e.g., Cotter 1996, 1999a, 2001, Moriarty 2009; Androutsopoulos 2014). Looking at language on the “micro” level and how it relates to society has two main frameworks: interactional sociolinguistics and variationist sociolinguistics. A key assumption of interactional sociolinguistics is that the context of interaction is instrumental and determines how language and social meaning

constitute human communication. The methods of interactional sociolinguistics are qualitative, often using conversation and discourse analytic tools, and requiring ethnographically informed knowledge of the social context in which interaction occurs and language patterns emerge. (See Chapter I.5 for a more extended discussion of context-based, sociocultural approaches and Chapter X Loeb & Clayman for their discourse-structural examination of the broadcast interview.) The interpretative and context-situational nature of interactional sociolinguistics means that the linguistic alternatives cannot be quantified in the way that variationist linguists might do, although determining pattern and distribution, particularly in diachronic or longitudinal studies, is part of their remit (Gumperz 1982).

Variationist linguistics (e.g., Labov 1972; Tagliamonte 2012) observes and accounts for the systematic relationships between linguistic variation and aspects of society captured as social factors. Language shows systematic variation at all levels, from vocabulary (e.g., *kid*, *wean*, *child*) to syntax (*She put her hair up*, *She put up her hair*), morphology (e.g., *cannot*, *can't*, *cannae*) to pronunciation (e.g. wa[t]er, wa[ʔ]er; [th]ink, [f]ink, [h]ink). Such variation depends on many different factors, from larger social categories such as regional dialect to socioeconomic background, age and gender to finer differences which relate to specific local groups with which we socialize. Variationist approaches assume that it is possible to quantify aspects of language (the linguistic variable) with aspects of society (the sociolinguistic variable). The approach allows for the identification of sociolinguistic patterns at different levels, and has also developed key methods of tracking language change in progress (Labov 1994; 2001).

3. Disciplinary perspectives

The disciplinary perspectives that comprise sociolinguistics in general and variationist frameworks more specifically, as this chapter will focus on, have also evolved and bring more than one perspective together. In this way, more recent or “third wave” approaches to sociolinguistic study take a more nuanced view of the development and interpretation of language variation and social meaning (Eckert 2008; Eckert 2012; Eckert 2016; Coupland 2007; 2009; 2014). This development also offers important theoretical vehicles for reflecting on the influence of the media on language (see discussion in Section 5 below), particularly when research tries to account for language change and media’s role in it.

A broader theoretical view challenges the “dualism” underlying conventional sociolinguistic approaches to language change, which somewhat artificially separates the “community” from “language,” and suggests that language and society are seen as mutually constitutive processes (Coupland 2014b). Language change is part of social change and vice versa. For example, ways of talking in the 1960s or the 1940s are simply different than in the 2010s; as society changes, so does language, and vice versa. Within this broader view, “mediation” refers to the “cultural, material, or semiotic conditions of any communicative action” (Androutsopoulos, 2014: 10): All language is mediated, not just what is shown via the news media. (The separation of community language and

media language, a necessary routine for some analysts, is a strong abstraction, and far from the complex connections that actually pertain.) And “mediatization” is the complementary notion, which “emphasizes the proliferation of media communication in all areas of social life” Androutsopoulos (2014:10). The example of the “battle of postvocalic rhoticity” media story in Section 1 is a good example of mediatization in practice, how the media themselves play a role in the ideological interpretation of what /r/ weakening might mean for Scottish English speakers. Another contemporary example of mediatization can be found in *The Lego Movie* and its opening song, “Everything is awesome!”. Even beginning to consider where to start unpicking the referents and the references of this sophisticated film gives some indication of just how difficult it is for a sociolinguist to try to tease apart separate analytical levels of “media” and “community” for any speaker (cf. Livingstone 2009 in Androutsopoulos 2014).

This challenge began with the development of radio at the turn of the 20th century, when experiencing speech without being able to interact with the speaker (or speakers), as when listening to the radio or watching television or film, only became possible. It is almost redundant to point out that the majority of documented – and reconstructed – language changes have taken place without the broadcast, or even printed, mass media, being available. This has understandably led to a consensus that the actuation and transmission of language change in individuals and communities primarily take place between speakers during everyday interaction (Labov 2001; Labov 2007; Auer and Hinskens 2005). But can the broadcast media influence language change beyond this?

There have been different responses to this question, which – as we might expect – at least partly depend on the particular language situation under consideration, and the kind of features under investigation (Stuart-Smith 2011). Most would agree that the media may contribute to the adoption and rapid spread of lexical items and catchphrases (Trudgill 1986; Charkova 2007), including the acquisition of words by small children from explicitly educational television shows such as *Sesame Street* (e.g., Rice et al 1990). Interactional sociolinguists looking at discourse-level and pragmatic features also report the appropriation of elements of media language into everyday conversations (e.g., the studies in Ayass and Gerhardt 2012). Larger chunks of language appropriated from the media often show some kind of prosodic quotation marks, indicating their provenance, though this can also be rather subtle and not easily discernible to the analyst (Branner 2002). However, at the level of core grammatical and phonological features, variationist sociolinguistic surveys of English since the 1970s have not provided evidence for widescale shifts towards the standard varieties found in news broadcasting (Milroy and Milroy 1985; Labov 2001). The influence of the broadcast media on systematic aspects of language has developed the status of a “language myth” (Chambers 1998).

At the same time, there seem to be two exceptions. First, there are numerous studies on languages of different genetic heritage which report shifts to standard norms following the introduction of, or in association with, the broadcast media (e.g., Lameli’s 2004 study of radio broadcasting on a regional German dialect), but which are also recognized to be promoted by widespread changes in geographical mobility and social

demography following the Second World War, as well as the implementation of national education through standard varieties (e.g., Japanese, Takano and Ota 2007). In South America, the popular *telenovelas*, portraying cultural sophistication and prestigious forms of Brazilian Portuguese, also attract linguistic orientation, both actual (e.g., Naro 1981; Naro and Scherre 2014) and intended (Carvalho 2004). And the broadcast media are actively used to implement and maintain indigenous minority languages, such as Irish (Cotter 1996, 1999a, 2001; Moring et al. 2011). In these cases, the sociolinguistic context involves dialects or varieties which are recognized to be systematically distinct, and whose differences – in both directions, local and standard – are often strongly enregistered (Agha 2003), and available for comment.

Second, some linguistic features appear to have travelled so fast and so far that it is difficult to exclude the possibility of the broadcast media as a factor in their propulsion through time and space, if only at the level of “weak transfer” of linguistic form, given clearly locally-governed constraints on grammatical conditioning and social meaning (Buchstaller and D’Arcy 2009). The example par excellence is the quotative *be like* through national and international varieties of English (e.g., Tagliamonte 2012), but there are other forms travelling fast through other languages (e.g., phrasal tone in Japanese, Stuart-Smith and Ota 2014). The rapid diffusion of consonantal changes in British English constitute another example, and as the “throw the ‘R’ away” example earlier shows, their restricted social and geographical distribution have been taken as indications that the media are playing a role in their spread. These “off the shelf” changes (Milroy 2007, after Eckert 2003) are intriguing because they seem at once to be so accessible and to act as points of intersection between locally salient social meanings and supralocal language ideologies. Sometimes these connections are available to the speakers themselves, and can be overtly associated with social types and/or places (e.g., *be like* and “Valley Girl”, “California”, Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2007). But the fact that social meanings for some diffusing variants enjoy wider currency than the immediate local context does not mean that they are always overtly recognized (Stuart-Smith et al. 2007).

These two groups of “exceptional” changes – in that the broadcast media have been readily mentioned as possible catalysts – are also linked together sociolinguistically. They both concern aspects of the grammar, aspects which also carry particular kinds of social or stylistic meaning. Contexts of dialect standardization and/or dialect shift are also sites of linguistic variation: Carvalho’s (2004) informants can articulate the elegance afforded by particular linguistic variants of Brazilian over their own lower-status Uruguyan Portuguese; Cotter’s (1996, 2001) media practitioners allowed non-native Irish forms on the radio to challenge macrosocial understanding of how the Irish language can be used in public discourse and to mitigate against embedded linguistic insecurity – factors that are embedded within the media context and “learner Irish” a generation later. Many diffusing linguistic variants also extend the possible stylistic repertoires for speakers, enabling them to perform elements of their everyday talk, leading to increasingly blurry boundaries between represented media varieties and the mediation of colloquial language itself (Coupland 2007: 185f.). But although the media are often mentioned in changes of this kind, it is difficult to find evidence that they are

(Sayers 2014). Variationist studies to date have provided contradictory findings: Naro (1981; Naro and Scherre 1996; and Naro and Scherre 2014) find statistical correlations between more standard morphosyntactic usage and reported exposure to popular dramas; Saladino's (1991) study of a southern Italian dialect does not. Intriguingly, Carvalho's (2004) informants state that they try to "sound like the guys on TV", but she finds no statistical corroboration.

This final observation encapsulates one of the core tensions about the role of the media for sociolinguistic theory, as Krauss 1992 claimed about television and minority language death (cited in Cotter 1996). We might expect the media to have a general pervasive influence on linguistic variation, and/or that people would simply copy media models, but across the range of sociolinguistic investigations, this is difficult to establish. Rather what emerges is that some linguistic levels appear more accessible than others; awareness of social meanings experienced from both community and the media somehow relates to these levels; and those few structural shifts which seem to be linked to media usage are strongly anchored to speakers' own locally salient social-symbolic functions (see also Kristiansen 2014).

4. Current contributions and research: The Glasgow Media Project

In this section we use the methods and findings from the first systematic study on the influence of the media on language, from Glasgow, Scotland, to show that for language we need to adopt a more nuanced understanding of the notion of media influence. In particular, the findings reveal the hastiness of concluding that "the media is doing things to language" although this idea holds only at the most general level of description. The key mechanisms lie in how Glaswegian dialect speakers (unwittingly) parse or interpret the media, and how this aligns, or not, with their existing social and linguistic knowledge.

The study was carried out in Scotland's largest city, Glasgow. The focus on the media, and particularly television, as a factor (or bundle of factors) in language change, arose coincidentally from an initial variationist study into phonological variation and change in Glaswegian. Glaswegian vernacular continues a variety of West Central Scots, with dialect mixing and levelling towards (Scottish) Standard English (Macafee 1983). It is substantially different from English English accents, phonologically and phonetically (Wells 1982; Stuart-Smith 2004). It also has well-established local non-standard variation deriving from Scots. The results contained some surprising discoveries, concentrated in the speech of working-class adolescents: TH-fronting, e.g., [f]ink as well as local [h]ink, DH-fronting, bro[v]er beside bro[r]er, and L-vocalization to high back (un)rounded vowels in e.g., fill, despite the pharyngealized quality of Glasgow /l/, as more than sporadic in the speech of working-class adolescents (Stuart-Smith 1999; cf. Macafee 1983). There were some equally surprising shifts in existing local features in the same speakers, such as merger of /m/ and /x/ with /w/ and /k/ and erosion of postvocalic /r/, though this occurred alongside vigorous maintenance of other non-standard local variants, e.g., hoose (house), fitba' (football) (Lawson and Stuart-Smith

1999; Stuart-Smith 2003; Stuart-Smith et al. 2006). The adolescents leading the changes were living in an inner-city area of multiple deprivation from which people are keen to leave, and to which inward migration is minimal. Explaining the changes solely in terms of processes taking place during dialect contact with Southern English speakers was even trickier in Glasgow than it was elsewhere (e.g., Trudgill 1986).

As for the weakening of /r/ discussed above, the notion that the media might be responsible for the Scottish changes was first raised by the media itself, e.g., “Could Glesga’ drown in the English Estuary?” (*The Times*, 19.2.99). London-based dramas, such as the extremely popular soap drama, *EastEnders*, running since 1985, were identified as the culprit. But quite apart from uncertainties surrounding the influence of the media on language change, and the fact that the informants sound Glaswegian, the difficulty was that it was not known if Glaswegians watched, never mind, liked, TV programmes set in the capital of England. Scotland is a different country within the UK, with distinct education, legal and health systems, even different bank notes. The social, cultural and political contexts are substantially different from those of the (south of) England, and enhanced notions of “Scottishness” were especially prevalent given the decision to establish a devolved Scottish Parliament. London is also geographically distant (450 miles), and socially less relevant. And in Glasgow, personal contact with English English is low, with less than 4% of the population born outside Scotland (Stuart-Smith et al. 2007).

The main aim of the project was to investigate the possible role, if any, of the broadcast media on language variation and change, by specifically considering the effect of televised representations of popular London accents (“media-Cockney”) – as in soaps, crime dramas, or comedies (e.g., *EastEnders*, *The Bill*, *Only Fools and Horses* respectively) – on Glaswegian vernacular. At the same time, the relationships between media language and community language were also investigated (cf. Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005; Dion and Poplack 2007) together with the evidence for media-induced attitudinal shifts (e.g., Milroy and Milroy 1985); and the extent to which informants were able to overtly imitate media language (Chambers 1998).

A variationist sociolinguistic study of Glasgow dialect was carried out, revisiting the working-class area reported on by Stuart-Smith (1999). In the spring of 2003, wordlists and casual conversations were recorded from self-selected same-sex pairs, from 36 adolescents, aged 10-11 years (final year of primary school), 12-13 years (second year high school), and 14-15 years (fourth year high school), and from twelve adults aged 40-60. The sample was divided equally into boys and girls. The study was not ethnographic in design, but during the data collection the researcher spent a good deal of time in the schools and with the informants, and took detailed observations of social relationships, groupings, and social practices, providing a rich base of social information which was essential for later analysis.

Narrow auditory phonetic analysis was used to investigate the three innovating consonant “London” variables (TH-fronting, L-vocalization, DH-fronting), all advancing but at different stages, for which media had been mooted as a catalyst.

Analysis was also done on four variables never previously associated with London English or the TV, namely the ongoing derhoticisation or “loss” of postvocalic /r/, in e.g., *car*, and the apparently stable, but socially stratified variation in the vowels /ɪ a u/ (Macaulay 1977), using acoustic phonetic analysis of the first two formants.

The overall design was informed by media effects research (e.g., Gunter 2000). In the media effects paradigm, media influence is investigated using two main methods: (1) the correlation of reported/observed media exposure and/or engagement with reported/observed social behaviours over time (e.g., Lefkowitz et al. 1972; Bushman and Huesmann 2001); and (2) experiments comparing responses after exposure to televised representations of particular kinds of behavior (e.g., Bandura et al. 1963; Gunter 2000). Our project included both of these methods.

A substantial demographic, social, attitudinal, and media exposure/engagement questionnaire was devised followed by an informal discussion of issues arising from the questionnaire. Both were conducted with each informant individually. This information, together with that from participant observation, provided the numerous independent variables which were then entered as predictors for dependent variables representing consonantal and vocalic variation, within a large-scale multifactorial regression analysis. The experiment was embedded into a filmed TV quiz show, in the format of *Question of Sport*, one round of which involved the informants watching televised clips and then providing a joint narrative about what might happen next. Interestingly the results of the experiment showed very few indications of shifting to consonants (only L-vocalization in a few speakers), and the clearest effects on the acoustic variation in the /a/ vowel, which is not thought to be changing. (See Stuart-Smith et al. 2011 for the first experiment comparing the effects of experiencing live interaction vs. pre-recorded speech on film.) The quiz show also provided an opportunity to imitate media language: the final round was an “acting” round in which the informants had to act out a scene they had just watched. This supplemented an imitation task given during the informal interview, which considered the role of stored or remembered representations of media-Cockney, by using not an audio-visual recording, but simply a photograph to elicit imitations (cf. Preston 1992). Glasgow is both a large city and a small village in terms of rapid information flow across the community; a media embargo was secured for the first 18 months of the project to distract from its main purpose.

The key findings are summarized here under four themes (see also Stuart-Smith 2012; 2014; Stuart-Smith et al. 2013; Stuart-Smith et al. 2014):

Glasgow accent is changing Evidence for the three consonant changes was consistent with both apparent and real-time change. TH-fronting and L-vocalization were indeed rapidly spreading through Glaswegian vernacular, and DH-fronting was more advanced than the initial traces noted in 1997. Derhoticisation of postvocalic /r/, in e.g., *car*, was still gradually progressing but there was no evidence for change in the vowels. Two aspects of the consonantal changes were interesting:

1. There was a marked difference in the use of innovative and derhoticised variants according to style, but not in casual spontaneous speech, only in wordlists. It was concluded that the task of recording the wordlists showed aspects of performance (cf. Coupland 2007). In fact, without the wordlist data, DH-fronting would be represented by only a handful of instances in the entire corpus of spontaneous speech. This change can only be charted because it appears to be associated with the stylistic repertoire provoked by the wordlist recordings, a factor that can be taken into account more robustly when this method is employed.
2. The integration of the “new” variants into Glaswegian vernacular is constrained by existing local variants, but only insofar as they occur in conversational speech. Unlike many English urban varieties experiencing these changes, [f] does not replace the standard [θ] in e.g., *think, tooth*, but becomes a third alternative alongside non-standard Scots [h] (e.g., *Ah [h]ink* for “I think”). Thus the integration of [f] as a variant of /θ/ is limited by [h], which is both vigorous and lexically restricted, occurring mainly word-initially. Incoming [f] is most likely in word-final position, where [h] cannot occur. This usefully extends the range of non-standard variants (local and supralocal) to all positions in the word, especially when local non-standard variants which are found in spontaneous connected speech, are blocked by a reading task. The changes are thus creeping into the system at instances of particular stylistic opportunity and/or performance.

Attitudes, imitation and media influence The attitudinal study showed that the Glasgow informants liked their own accent best, followed by that of Newcastle in northern England. Popular London accents were overall not rated highly. There was no statistical evidence for exposure and/or strong engagement with media-Cockney leading to overtly positive attitudes towards informal London accents (Stuart-Smith 2006; cf. Trudgill 1986, 1988). Whilst all informants recognized that media-Cockney accents were different from their own, their overt evaluations before the imitation test in the informal interview were diverse, some thinking that the character’s accent was “pure English” or “posher”, others that “he talks more tough”. There were no indications of the kind of explicit orientation found by Carvalho (2004), or reported by Naro (1981). One boy even stated overtly that he would not like to talk in the same way as the character. Imitation in the informal interview was uniformly found to be extremely difficult (“Ah cannae talk like him!”), though fine-grained phonetic analysis showed subtle shifts in most speakers’ actual productions.

The only change in accent when acting out media-Cockney TV characters during the quiz show was not to a London target, but to a form of “stage Scots”, typically found in theatrical representations of Glasgow “patter”. Overall there was no evidence for overt shifts in attitudes (cf. Kristiansen 2009), awareness, or of an ability to imitate the features undergoing change (e.g., Stuart-Smith 2006). Moreover, the changes themselves do not appear to be evaluated as anything other than thoroughly local (cf. Stuart-Smith et al. 2007). As observed by Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2003), incoming variants identified by analysts as “innovations” and “new” are simply part of the existing vernacular for this community.

Community norms and media models An important consideration for any study of media influence is also the sociolinguistic nature of the models which are thought to offer possible resources and/or social meanings for existing resources (Coupland 2007; Dion and Poplack 2007). At the same time, it is clear that the actual relationships between community and media are rather dynamic and reciprocal, with media language both reflecting and innovating community norms (Cotter 1996, 1999b, 2010; Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005). Phonetic variation in five vowels and the consonants undergoing change in Glaswegian was compared with that occurring for the same/similar phonological features in a sample of the media-Cockney dramas which were broadcast whilst the speech recordings were being made. Not surprisingly, given the substantial differences between Glaswegian vowels and those of London English, there was little overlap between the phonetics and the phonology of the vowels. The consonantal results showed that Glasgow adolescents used more innovative variants than *EastEnders*' characters, and with rather different social and linguistic constraints (compare to Dion and Poplack's (2007) comparison of Francophones in Quebec with American scripted and unscripted media for *be like*). Thus a comparison does not support the inference that the changes are taking place either through copying a media model, or even through typical mechanisms of first language acquisition via the media, if indeed this could actually happen (see Chambers 1998).

TV is a mixed factor in sound change in Glasgow The vowel measures for both read and conversational speech, and /r/ in conversational speech, showed strongly significant patterning according to phonetic and linguistic factors (e.g., adjacent segment) but negligible or only weakly significant links with social factors. No factors of media exposure or engagement were significant. The consonant variables showed a different pattern: the strongest predictors of the innovative variants were the linguistic factors, then engaging in social practices, specifically orienting to very local Glasgow forms of street style and dress, and then with engaging with TV, especially *EastEnders*. ("engagement" was captured through several responses to the questionnaire: rating *EastEnders* as their favourite programme, rating characters from the soap as their favourite TV characters, liking the show very much, and showing the kind of "para-social interaction" (e.g., Rubin et al. 1985) with the characters and the story to the extent that they reported criticizing their actions and storylines.) Contact with friends and family in England was significantly related to using innovations, but only for TH and L-vocalization in read speech. Derhoticisation of postvocalic /r/ also showed significant links with social factors in read speech, but specifically with social practices and engaging with *EastEnders* (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013).

The results show robust statistical support for the involvement of television as a factor in the rapid spread of the "London" innovations in Glaswegian vernacular. Strong psychological engagement seems to be important: overall media exposure variables were either not significant or negatively correlated with linguistic variation; only strong psychological engagement with programmes or characters showed significant links, as anticipated by media effects research (Gunter 2000). Also, the media are significant in regression models together with, but distinct from, other social factors, such as engaging in local social practices, and opportunities for dialect contact with those living in

England. This confirms engagement with TV as a contributory factor alongside other factors, as has been demonstrated by media effects research more generally (Bushman and Huesmann 2001). And the strongest factors in the models are those for linguistic factors, reflecting the observation that these changes may have been percolating through Glaswegian vernacular by regular transmission (Labov 2007) for a number of decades before they became attached to specific social meanings and took off (see Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2007). At the same time, only a few features show links with media engagement. This underscores the point that developing a nuanced model of media influence on speech needs to recognize not only what might be affected, but crucially why so much of the core linguistic system appears to resist. In the next section we consider critical issues, and in particular the role of sociolinguistic context.

5. Critical issues and topics: Linguistic detail and social context

In the Scottish study detailed in Section 4, the linguistic context emerged as crucial. Glaswegian vernacular shows some differences to media-Cockney. For example, it has fewer vowels with different realizations. There is also a vigorous system of non-standard Scots lexical alternation (e.g., *hoose/house*), which was attested in these data (Stuart-Smith 2003; Stuart-Smith et al. 2006). These differences are informative when we consider potential media influence on speech: the language system, and linguistic details, matter.

The consonantal changes have to integrate with the existing local pattern of non-standard variants, and close inspection reveals the dominance of the local pattern (Stuart-Smith and Timmins 2007). Scots [h] relegates “new” [f] to those positions in the word which [h] cannot occupy (word-final position), though [f] is starting to gain ground in word-initial position. These local, vernacular, structural constraints are also clearly apparent when comparing the distributions of [f] in Glaswegian and media-Cockney: the local pattern dominates. And forms such as /mʌf/ for *mouth*, with Scots /ʌ/ as well as innovative [f], also show how [f] is thoroughly embedded into a Scottish phonology. This evidence shows that the mechanism of media influence clearly involves integration, as opposed to imposition, of features (cf. Buchstaller and D’Arcy 2009). This is also consistent with early reports of the consonant variants in Glaswegian (Stuart-Smith et al. 2007).

The vowels showed no statistical links with social factors, or those to do with the TV, from which we also infer that there is no influence. In fact, this is not at all surprising. For example, the Scottish /a/ vowel is different both in showing a single vowel corresponding to two English vowels (/a/ and /ɑ/), and in having different vowel realizations. Perhaps more important, when thinking about the listener/viewer, is that stereotypical Cockney variants do not align in terms of social meaning. A raised fronted quality which is typically found for /a/ in media-Cockney, to a Glaswegian vernacular speaker indexes refined upper-middle class “ladies” and not that a native Londoner would conclude. There is no evidence of Hall’s (1980) “fundamental alignment and reciprocity” at the level of (socio)linguistic patterning.

Derhoticisation of /r/, highlighted in the introduction, is particularly intriguing. In spontaneous speech, derhotic variants show the same kind of statistical patterning as the vowels. But in the wordlists, social and TV factors show the same pattern of significant effects as for the consonant innovations. But unlike the diffusing changes, derhoticization is a long-term, apparently gradual vernacular change which shows many signs of being promoted by system-internal constraints. The statistical results demonstrate the importance of the speakers' local system for media influence: even if the phonetic outcome might appear to be very similar to that of London English, TV can only be regarded as an additional accelerating factor for derhoticisation because this change has been underway since at least the beginning of the 20th century, and likely much earlier.

The study demonstrates that TV does not “make people sound the same” (Chambers 1998). The local system of non-standard linguistic variation determines the integration of the “new” features such as [f] for /th/, even those whose use is linked with strong psychological engagement with a particular TV programme. The result is a richer phonological array for Glasgow dialect, not a bleached vernacular, or a cloned repertoire. Again, it does not look as if whole words are being copied, or as if media representations are being imposed wholesale on local representations (cf. Buchstaller and D’Arcy 2009). Rather it looks as if a few existing features are, as it were, bubbling up (cf. Cotter 2001, Meyerhoff and Niedzelski 2003), being accelerated and enhanced through engaging with *EastEnders* and its core characters. What we learn from this is the importance of taking into account the local linguistic system for media influence on language.

The Glasgow project also revealed the importance of the social context for starting to conceptualize how media “influence” may actually work in practice. The changes linked with *EastEnders* show particular kinds of local social meaning, which are below the level of conscious reporting. They are also particularly apparent in certain speech styles which entail some sort of performance or stance-taking (e.g., Jaffe 2009). The “social” aspect of media influence may lie in viewers' implicit recognition of variation which is socially-relevant or informative to their own interaction, as they engage with the interactions of the drama unfolding before them (Stuart-Smith and Ota 2014).

The imitation tasks showed that the Glasgow informants are not copying these features in an attempt to “sound like Londoners”. Rather, it seems that one non-standard, overtly stigmatized but covertly prestigious enregistered dialect, Glaswegian, is in indirect contact with another variety, media-Cockney, which shows a very similar social and ideological profile in London. Although the framing of the “story” in the local and national media has been in terms of Cockney swamping Glaswegian, this is not the view of the community, who regard the locally adapted realisations of these features as “pure Glaswegian” (Stuart-Smith et al. 2007; “pure” is a local intensifier). The Glasgow speakers do not think that they are actively seeking additional resources from elsewhere, and unlike the context in South America, they are not orienting towards London or

Cockney (contra Naro 1981; Naro and Scherre 2014; Carvalho 2004). Their own dialect is what matters.

The innovating pronunciation variants also showed a particular stylistic distribution. There were more links with factors to do with the TV (and better explanation of variance for the models) for this speech style, specifically reading the wordlist. Reading the wordlist blocked local non-standard variant [h] for /θ/ completely. This meant that “new”, non-local, non-standard [f] and [v] were useful because they extended the non-standard repertoire to word-final position (e.g., *tooth*, *smooth*) where local [h] and [r] for /θ/ and /dh/, respectively, are not possible. The wordlist recordings did not elicit careful or monitored speech from working-class adolescents. Aspects of these recordings, such as laughter, the speed of the reading, and comments on some of the words, suggested that the informants took a particular stance to the task and the fieldworker. This stance was expressed by using as many non-standard features as possible, leading to divergence between them and the persona of the university fieldworker, as well as a kind of performance of “their” speech repertoire (Coupland 2007). Interestingly, the task itself seems to show some of the “liminal/liminoid” properties discussed by Rampton (1995), being at a boundary, or on the edge of, the informants’ usual discourse practices. Rampton found that his West London teenagers exhibited “crossing”, including from media sources, at boundaries in their talk, for example at breaks between topics. Branner 2002 also observed that media-appropriated language was used to fill discourse gaps. Here there is a similarity between the stylistic distribution of larger media fragments and the stylistic deployment of phonetic variation. What we find is an unwitting shift in speech style engendered by having to participate in a less-usual speech activity of reading a wordlist and by speakers taking particular stances to this task (and to the fieldworker/other participants), which in turn increases the use of the three innovations, as well as derhoticisation. This increase in usage is also significantly correlated with engaging strongly with *EastEnders*.

The stylistic and stance-taking aspects of these results seem to be very important in uncovering the social mechanism for media influence in these changes. Specifically, it seems that Glaswegians who engage strongly with *EastEnders* parse media-Cockney through the filter of being Glasgow dialect speakers. This in turn seems to help enhance and validate existing features, like TH-fronting, thus accelerating this sound change. A way of conceptualizing these connections between language and social meaning is provided by Eckert’s notion of the “indexical field”. Eckert (2008: 453) defines the indexical field as “[a] constellation of ideologically-related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable. The field is fluid, and each new activation has the potential to change the field by building on ideological connections”. The indexical field is drawn from theories of indexicality which account for the linking of language with the social order. Indexicality with language begins with direct links (indexes) formed during interaction whereby “linguistic forms index interactional stances”, and develops into indirect indexicality when “these same forms become associated with particular social types believed to take such stances” (Bucholtz, 2009: 291, after Ochs 1992). Levels of indexicality also develop as links become accepted and are even available for metalinguistic commentary (Milroy 2004; Stuart-Smith et al.

2007). The acceleration of existing variants in the Glasgow speakers may be because their indexical fields, derived from real-world personal experience of interaction, overlaps with those of the stylized indexical fields constructed by the characters as they play out the drama (Stuart-Smith 2016). In other words, media influence translates into the intersection between actual social meanings of congruent linguistic features relevant in local interaction, and stylized social meanings portrayed by characters in the drama.

Overall, the evidence does not show that engaging with the media results in Glaswegian adolescents wanting to be or talk like an EastEnder. Rather their stylistic shifting suggests that they may be presenting personae of “Glasgow kids” which also draw on some of the drama’s matey, gregarious, slightly edgy personalities. This is also typical of cool, urban kids across the UK (e.g., Kerswill 2003). We suggest that the strong social and cultural differences between Glasgow and London facilitate this inference. The innovations still occupy a more peripheral place in the stylistic repertoire, although TH-fronting and L-vocalization are now making their way into more usual speech styles such as casual conversation. Even though the details are different, this is reminiscent of the role of stylistic variation in language change proposed by Labov (e.g., 1972). There are intersections of social meaning from those negotiated during everyday interactions through to much more abstract, more widely distributed social types (“posh”, “cool”) shared across the UK. Eckert’s (2008) notion of the indexical field enables the specification of this kind of overlap, or “bottom to top” connections in social meaning. Speaker/viewers’ own purposes, and own meaning-making in interaction, appear to be primary, just as in the appropriation of larger media fragments for discourse. In other words, the evidence for media influence from the Glasgow study also has an important social dimension which is fundamentally located in the speaker.

6. Future directions: Modeling media influence on language

Investigation into the potential influence of media on language is in many ways preliminary. To date, only a handful of variationist sociolinguistic studies have included independent variables to do with the broadcast media – and of these, the results are conflicting. In Italy and Uruguay, Saladino (1991) and Carvalho (2004) did not find correlations. In Brazil and Scotland, they did (Naro 1981; Naro and Scherre 2014; Stuart-Smith et al. 2013). A very large number of studies have accumulated to establish factors such as gender, social class, and ethnicity as relevant to our understanding of language in society (e.g., Labov 2001; Tagliamonte 2012). There is clearly considerable work left to do before we can appreciate the extent to which the results found in Scotland – pointing to the influence of the broadcast media on sound change – are typical or unusual. In particular there is an urgent need for variationist studies to include extra-linguistic variables which relate to media engagement, alongside other more usual social factors that linguists are familiar with.

Finally, much more evidence of all kinds is needed if we are to resolve the broader modeling of media influence. Sayers (2014) suggests a mechanism of “broadcast”, assuming that the media effectively scatter seeds across discontinuous communities,

taking root through “parasocial” interaction, different according to different local conditions. This seems to work for lexical items (e.g., *be like*, although see Tagliamonte 2014), and some shifts associated with the media, such as structurally distinct dialects towards the standard which also incur substantial linguistic shifts (e.g., Japanese, Ota and Takano 2014). This contrasts with the notion put forward in this chapter, that media influence is effectively “filtering/resonance”, that some (a few?) existing speech variants which may already have been associated with specific social meanings, and are spreading through a community, are reinforced through interaction with the media for some people (Stuart-Smith 2014). This view aligns with cognitive models of media influence which presume real-world experience is crucial for parsing media language. More systematic evidence may show that these kinds of processes are more congruent than they first appear. After all, at some level speakers must be using the same linguistic and social architecture to interact with the mediatized world in which they live.

7. Conclusions

The review of the literature suggests that actual media-induced changes on language are relatively unusual. This point also aligns with what has been discovered and theorized in different branches of mass communications research, namely that the media contribute to rather than impose, and that influence is mainly about what the viewer brings to the media. But despite this, there are some changes for which the media are involved, or are thought to be (including by the speakers themselves, e.g., Rindal 2010; Eckert 2003; Milroy 2007). Linguistic style and social meaning together play an important role in such changes. The closer investigation of the rapid diffusion of consonantal changes in Scotland shows that sociolinguistic context is key – points that interactional sociolinguists, noted earlier, pay attention to for other investigative reasons.

The media does not influence the local so much as the local negotiates the media. Occasionally, and probably imperceptibly, the speaker/viewer may resonate/enhance certain features which serve local interactional needs, and which connect local meanings with more widespread supralocal meanings. This can be seen in Scotland precisely because the sociolinguistic system is so different from that of the apparent donor. If these features were ever “new”, it is likely they arrived by thoroughly conventional forms of diffusion, e.g., by people from London interacting with Glaswegians. But it seems very likely that their explosion since the 1980s has been fuelled by more factors than direct contact alone, one of which is the influence of the broadcast media. This means that alongside more variationist research, the field also needs better-informed ethnographic and interactional sociolinguistic research to uncover how speakers/viewers talk together about the media, and especially as they watch, consume, and enjoy broadcast media experiences (cf. Holly et al. 2001; Cutbirth 2011). We also need to have a much better understanding of how variation linked with the broadcast media functions in interaction for speakers. This kind of analysis is now typical for discourse-level features, but we need such studies also for structural features of language too.

Even if the media might seem to act as some kind of a “shelf”, providing new resources or new meanings for existing resources (Eckert 2003; cf. Coupland 2009; Stuart-Smith and Ota 2014), the focus needs to stay with the speaker/viewer. Interaction entails continuous loops of production and perception (e.g., Kuhl 2010); and studies of linguistic accommodation in face-to-face interaction reveal the dominance of social types in the speaker’s inner sociolinguistic world (e.g., Auer and Hinskens 2005). For these reasons, if processing media information relies on existing real-world knowledge, then processing media language must surely do so even more.

x. Further reading

Chambers, J. (1998), ‘TV makes people sound the same’, in L. Bauer and P. Trudgill (eds), *Language Myths*, New York: Penguin, 123-31
[An account of why variationists have rejected the idea that broadcast media can affect structural features of language.]

Coupland, Nikolas. 2009. The mediated performance of vernaculars. *Journal of English Linguistics*. 37: 284-300.
[Discussion of the interface between vernacular talk in the community, its representation in the media, and its return to the community again.]

Stuart-Smith, J., Pryce, G., Timmins, C., and Gunter, B. (2013). Television can also be a factor in language change: Evidence from an urban dialect. *Language*, 89, 501-536.
[A key research paper providing the statistical evidence for influence of television on TH-fronting in Scottish English.]

Tagliamonte, Sali and Chris Roberts. 2005. So weird; so cool; so innovative: The use of intensifiers in the television series *Friends*. *American Speech*. 80: 280-300.
[A variationist study of the language of *Friends*.]

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[An argument for internal motivations for language change, discounting – eloquently – the influence of media.]

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