

## **Attitudes towards varieties of English among Polish immigrants in the UK**

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Many studies have investigated the attitudes that native speakers of English hold toward standard and non-standard varieties of English. In Britain, a recent, large-scale study (Coupland and Bishop 2007) explored the attitudes of 5010 native-speaker judges towards 34 standard and non-standard accents, broadly confirming findings from earlier research, i.e. ‘standard’ varieties are perceived as more prestigious, while urban vernaculars are regarded as less prestigious but are rated more highly in social attractiveness.

The attitudes of non-native speakers towards varieties of English have been less extensively researched. This is perhaps surprising since the attitudes that learners hold towards the target language can play a crucial role in acquisition (Dornyei, Csizer and Nemeth 2006). This is particularly relevant in the UK as the number of non-native speakers has increased dramatically since 2004: “the largest single wave of foreign in-movement ever experienced” (Bauere, Densham, Millar & Salt 2007: 11). Polish families accounted for 64.4% of immigration from the “new” (A8) EU nations to the UK in 2004. Despite this recent influx, little is known about the type of English being acquired by new Polish immigrants or about the attitudes that they hold towards varieties of English. In an on-going project we investigate teenage migrants’ acquisition of the local variety, and the extent to which they acquire similar evaluations of UK accents to their locally-born peers. In the interests of time, this paper addresses only the attitudes data, asking:

- (a) What are the attitudes of Polish adolescents living in the UK towards varieties of British English?
- (b) To what extent are these similar to the attitudes held by native-speaker adolescents?

The data were collected from verbal guise experiments and sociolinguistic interviews with 16 Polish adolescents living in Edinburgh. We can compare the Polish students’ responses with those of 21 native Edinburgh adolescents from the same school who also undertook the verbal guise test.

Subjects evaluated 8 varieties of English on 10 traits which pilot studies had shown to be salient among younger speakers of UK English. T-tests showed no significant differences in mean evaluations between the two adolescent groups. In other words, both Polish and Scottish adolescents display broadly similar evaluations of the 8 guises. However, a more detailed ANOVA reveals that there are some significant differences in the evaluation of certain traits. Scottish adolescents evaluate the RP guise as significantly more educated ( $p= 0.003$ ), intelligent ( $p= 0.003$ ), rich ( $p= 0.001$ ) and posh ( $p= 0.000$ ) than Polish adolescents do. Scottish adolescents also evaluate the Birmingham guise as significantly less-well educated ( $P=0.008$ ) than Polish adolescents do. For native speakers of British English, the RP and Birmingham accents represent the extremes of social attractiveness and prestige (Coupland and Bishop 2007). These results therefore suggest that while these Polish adolescents have acquired a broad understanding of the social evaluation of varieties of British English, they have not yet acquired the more extreme social stereotypes and prejudices that are associated with certain varieties of English for native speakers