

Polish teenagers speak English like locals, study shows

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A team of linguists studying Eastern European youngsters in the UK have found they learn to speak English like locals.

The linguists at The University of Manchester, Auckland and Lancaster say that even though Polish [teenagers](#) hadn't been in the UK for long, they always adopted non-standard pronunciations in the city they had moved to.

They also found that language attitudes and accent acquisition seemed to be interrelated: Polish teenagers who like the local accent tend to sound more like local teenagers.

The research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, compared the use of standard and non-standard features in the English spoken by local and Polish teenagers in Edinburgh and London.

The researchers tested how they acquire English and non-standard features such as g-dropping, as in singin'.

Dr Erik Schlee from The University of Manchester said: "In recent years, the UK has experienced unparalleled numbers of migrants from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland.

"To help understand how they integrate into the UK, we decided to investigate if Polish teenagers use the same form of non-standard speech as their same age British peers - and the answer seems to be yes.

“After all, in order to achieve full native-like competence in a second language, speakers must acquire, at the very least, an awareness of non-standard features.

“So we would expect to find this within other groups of migrants as well.”

The data is based on reading passages and interviews conducted in London and Edinburgh. Non-standard features were counted, and the results for Polish teenagers and British peers were compared.

While conducting his PhD thesis at The University of Manchester, fellow linguist Dr Rob Drummond also investigated the acquisition of non-standard features among Polish adults living in Manchester.

Dr Drummond, who is now at Manchester Metropolitan University, found a strong correlation between the use of the Polish influenced ‘ing’ pronunciation and a desire to return to Poland.

He said: “Those speakers who planned to return to Poland and who had a strong desire to hold on to their Polish identity were using this pronunciation to signal that allegiance.”

“Even those speakers who had high levels of English but who intended to return to Poland were more likely to use -ing than other speakers.”

He also investigated the Northern English vowel sound in words like ‘bus’ and ‘fun’.

Most speakers arrived in Manchester using a vowel sound closer to that used in Southern [English](#), but over time, the vowel changed to become more local, especially among those [speakers](#) who showed a more positive attitude to living in Manchester.

More information: To download a copy of the paper visit the Universe's open access database of research at www.manchester.ac.uk/escholar/uk-ac-man-scw:121380

Provided by University of Manchester

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