/gizəskɪfi/ (Give Me a Clue) - Linguistic Features of Scottish Accents and Dialects

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/gizəskɪfi/ (Give Me a Clue) – Linguistic Features of Scottish Accents and Dialects

Sarah Knudsen
Linguistics Colloquium Fall 2012
Short History Lesson

• History of Scotland and England
  – Britain
  – Wars, exploitation, changing royalty, Highland clearances

• Use different currencies (Scottish pound and English pound) that are “mutually” accepted

• Scottish Independence in 2014 vote
  – “…post 1997, with the establishment of a parliament with limited jurisdictions in Scotland...” (Vincent and Harrow 377)

• “In general, the Scottish people do not particularly like the English” (Hoyer 11)
Linguistic Geography of Scotland

• Geography of Scotland
  – Scotland split into many regions – ie. West coast, East coast, Highlands region, Borders region, the Islands, Doric, Kingdom of Fife, Lowlands
  – Even towns 10km apart have differences in speech
  – Gaelic in the Highlands (Alba)
    • Trying to revive it through schools, television
  – Broad Scots
    • A distinct language, though many words and sounds are mixed into Scottish dialects
    • Has its own dialects
    • Ie. “braw cleeds” = “handsome/nice clothes”
According to Studies, Common Linguistic Features of Scottish Accents and Dialects

• Duration of Vowels
  – Tend to be shorter in duration
    • Aitken’s Law - “...all vowels and diphthongs are long in stressed open syllables, before voiced fricatives and /r/ and before morpheme boundaries; and short elsewhere; with the two exceptions...which are invariably short” (McClure 10)
    • The rules and analyses for this Scottish Vowel Length Rule are argued by Carr
  – Pre-rhotic vowels tend to be neutralized
    • /r/ pronunciation variations responsible for the neutralization of pre-rhotic vowels, especially in Middle Class speech (Lawson, Scobbie, Stuart-Smith 265)
More Features of Accents

• Post vocalic /r/
  – Post vocalic /r/ tends to be realized as a one or two tap trill (McClure 11)
  – Bunched articulations (Middle Class) and tongue-tip/tongue-front raised variants (Working Class) articulation of /r/ (Lawson, Scobbie, Stuart-Smith 256)
    • Middle Class using strongly rhotic postvocalic /r/ so that it almost becomes retroflex /ɻ/, while Working Class is often derhoticising /r/, making it almost vowel like (Lawson, Scobbie, Stuart-Smith 257)

• TH Fronting
  – Using /f/ for /θ/, especially in Glaswegian adolescents (Stuart-Smith, Timmons, Tweedie 222)
More Features of Dialects

• General Scots-specific words and features (Hoyer 18)
  – Aye – meaning “yes”
  – -nae – negative suffix
  – /jɛ/ - meaning “you”
My Research

• Voice recorded interviews
  – Native Scottish people
  – Non-native people who had lived in Scotland for at least 1 year
• Asked demographic, linguistic, and sociolinguistic questions
• I recorded their answers to my questions, as well as noted their own speech patterns that they may not have realized they used
  – Most people reduced their accents so that I could understand
Dialects: Scottish People’s Views

• “Relatively quick speakers, and a quite expressive language”
  — Dreich and Blether
• Lack of /t/, especially word-finally
• Loch vs Lake (/χ/ vs /k/)
• “Harsh” vowels
• /ɛ/ and /eɪ/ instead of /aɪ/
  — If you hear these “you know they must be Scottish”
• A twang, varying levels of “broadness”
• Scottish drawl – dragging out vowel sounds
• Differ from English dialects with /h/ and /r/ pronunciation
Dialects: Other People’s Views

- “Definitely the /r/ sound”
  - Trilled and rhotic vowels
- /t/ glottalization and/or not releasing
- Shortening of long vowels
- /eɪ/ and suffix –ae
- The filler /ɛm/ (equivalent to “uh”)
- Contains relic sounds and words
Personal Observations

• Outwith
• Aye – meaning “yes”, Wee – meaning “little”, mum – meaning “mom”, em – used instead of the filler “um”
• /t/ glottalization
• Suffix –nae for “not” ie. Cannae – “cannot”
Possible Reasons for Distinctions

• What the people in my study thought
  – Some developed due to nature of surrounding environment (ie. Jute industry in Dundee caused high, nasal pitch to be heard over machinery)
  – “I’d say it’s more of a class thing than a locale based thing”
  – Upbringing – got thwacked if used “lower-class” broader slang-type speech
  – Code of belonging – can talk in “code” and show solidarity with each other
  – Non-Native thought – “working class people” have a Scottish accent. More educated do not
Article Hypotheses for Distinctions

• Class

  • “...social stratification of /r/ at the articulatory level...” (Lawson, Scobbie and Stuart-Smith 256)
  • “In Scottish English, such articulatory variation is in some way perceptible and can be exploited by speakers to index socio-economic class...” (Lawson, Scobbie, Stuart-Smith 266)
  • The different classes want to linguistically separate themselves from each other (Stuart-Smith, Timmons, and Tweedie 254)
  • “...the use of standard and non-standard accents often is correlated subjectively with social class” (Abrams and Hogg 202)
    – Middle Class and RP speakers rated higher than Working Class and Cockney speakers
Article Hypotheses for Distinctions

• Separation from England/Scottish Solidarity
  • Middle class speakers, because they tend to have more connections with the English, want to maintain their “Scottishness” by using stereotypically Scottish features; Working class speakers want to use “non-local” features (Stuart-Smith, Timmons, and Tweedie 221)
  • In-group favouritism – many Scottish people preferred Scottish accents to English accents, and their own accent above other Scottish accents (Abrams and Hogg 201)
  • High level of identification with Scotland
    – Scottish regional accents rated “lower on status, but higher on solidarity than English regional accents” (Abrams and Hogg 203)
  • When real status and power differences are not as relevant, loyalties and preferences shift towards the accent closest to the in-group accent (Abrams and Hogg 210)

• With possibility of Scottish independence, may be trying to emphasize “Scottishness”
Limitations

- My research was conducted on a very limited population, typically residing in the Stirling area or Dundee area
  - Not much age variation, small sample size
  - As accents and dialects are highly varied, cannot be exhaustive of all features
- Previous studies tend to focus on dialects and accents in Central Scotland (Edinburgh and Glasgow) (Lawson, Scobbie, Stuart-Smith 257)
  - Creates a limited scope and decreases generalizability
- Rapid accent change in urban accents (Stuart-Smith, Timmons, and Tweedie 222)
  - Research cannot keep up
- Adolescents seem to show more accent change (Stuart-Smith, Timmons, and Tweedie 223)
  - Accents and dialects vary within geographic groups based on age/sex, not necessarily represented in the research
Works Cited


