

"I sound Irish, like": Implications of immigration for the future of Northern Irish English

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Research on the acquisition of local variants by young migrants in England, Scotland and the Irish Republic by Verma et al. (1992), Schlee et al. (2011), Migge (2012) and Nestor et al. (2012) *inter alia* has generated interesting findings. Ethnic minority speech can pattern differently from that of indigenous peer groups and the variation observed depends on numerous factors. This paper presents new research exploring the dialectological consequences of Northern Irish immigration.

A sample of Catholic adolescents in Armagh, Northern Ireland were interviewed in 2012-2014. One sub-sample represents the indigenous population whose repertoire consists of local features such as the utterance final *like* discourse-pragmatic marker in the title. Kallen (2013) suggests that although this variable is readily available in other Englishes, Irish English is distinctive regarding its dominance in clause marginal positions and the extent to which it is tolerated stylistically and socially. This propensity may well be a result of the fact that Ulster Irish, which acted as the substrate, permits a wider range of discourse-pragmatic markers in such contexts than the donor language does.

This token, however, was produced by a speaker in the non-indigenous sub-sample who had come to Armagh from Poland five years before and expresses very positive attitudes towards his new speech community. The study sub-sample to which he belongs consists of adolescents representing recent migrants arriving from elsewhere in the EU. Their English has been learned through immersion and this research examines the extent to which these young migrants have acquired native-like sociolinguistic competence in Armagh English. This is achieved by comparing the constraint hierarchies for typical local features between the native and non-native sub-samples. The results indicate that several factors - including attitudinal disposition - are implicated and will have a bearing on the future development of this and other Northern Irish dialects.