

Ethnic orientation without quantification: How life “on the hyphen” affects sociolinguistic variation

Luiza Newlin-Lukowicz (*New York University*)

The effect of ethnicity on sociolinguistic variation has been studied quantitatively from multiple angles, including social networks (Dubois & Horvath, 2000; Sharma, 2011), ethnic orientation (Hoffman & Walker, 2010; Nagy et al., 2012), ethnic lifestyle (Wong, 2010), and transnational ties (Sharma, forthcoming). This methodological range has uncovered that ethnicity is reflected in various aspects of social life. However, the diversity of existing measures has i) prevented a direct comparison between studies and ii) relied on subjective quantification of social data. This paper introduces a novel methodology that unites previous measures and removes the need for (subjective) quantification. Specifically, I apply hierarchical cluster analysis to social and linguistic data to assess the impact of multiple social factors on regional variation for Polish New Yorkers (N=35; 20 generation two; 15 generation one; gender-balanced). The analysis identifies the presence of transnational ties as a predictor of linguistic variation and reveals speakers’ “hyphenated” (Polish-American) identities.

The effect of Polish ethnicity on regional variation was analyzed using social and linguistic data. The social information was collected through an ethnographically-informed ‘Polish-orientation survey’ that included 26 questions pertaining to different aspects of speakers’ lives:

- I) *Polish lifestyle*, e.g. Do you shop at Polish delis? Did you attend Polish supplementary school?
- II) *Polish community involvement*, e.g. Do you attend the Polish parade? Do you read Polish-American newspapers?
- III) *Transnational ties*, e.g. Do you visit Poland? Do you watch Polish TV?

Responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale, indicating frequency/quantity. The linguistic data were derived from sociolinguistic interviews and word lists, and included regional features of New York City English (NYCE): TH-stopping and /ɔ/-raising, analyzed acoustically for stopping rates and height, respectively. Social and linguistic data were then subjected to independent hierarchical cluster analyses, using Ward’s method and Euclidean distances. This method grouped speakers into clusters based on the *similarity* of their survey answers/realization of dialect features, rather than on an average score, revealing the optimal factors for divisive clustering.

Transnational ties were identified as the most robust factor for clustering survey data: Polish New Yorkers’ answers consistently fell within two ranges: high or low. Second generation speakers with strong ties to Poland additionally formed sub-clusters characterized by high or low *community involvement*. Speakers’ linguistic data (mean TH-

stopping rate and mean F1 for /ɔ/) were clustered using the same technique. Speakers with high TH-stopping rates tended not to raise /ɔ/. The social and linguistic cluster solutions were then compared, revealing that the factor of *transnational ties* accounted for high rates of TH-stopping and a lowered /ɔ/. These results additionally reflect the “hyphenated” or “hybrid” identities of Polish New Yorkers: TH-stopping serves as an ethnic marker for Poles in NYC (Author, 2013), while a non-raised /ɔ/ is characteristic of white NYCE (Becker, 2010). Broadly, this paper has implications for studies of ethnolinguistic variation, suggesting that simultaneous consideration of multiple social factors is crucial to understanding the source and scope of linguistic variation in diverse communities.

(word count: 486)

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