

Chapter 6

Conclusions

We now turn to the conclusions from the outcomes of the research. The international school in Spain provided a unique set up where Anglo children and adolescents from different dialect locations come together alongside Non-Anglos. The language and dialect contact situation has no stable dialectal norm. The speech community was ripe for the study of two quite distinct variables, the (t) variable and the BATH variable. As we saw, the linguistic landscape was messy, turbulent and very mixed in terms of languages and dialects. However, even with all these factors considered, dialect contact processes were still traceable.

I shall briefly discuss some of the most salient results for both variables here. For the (t) variable, it was found that there was a continuum of levels of T- glottaling amongst the sample, and that certain pupils were using intermediate levels, depending upon what age they joined the school. This is of theoretical importance, and could be applied to other dialect contact studies where newcomers are constantly joining. The result that girls glottalised the most showed that supralocalisation trends found in the UK may also be at work in this speech community. Age was a big factor for T- glottaling, with teen levels from all different ethnic groups markedly higher than those of the younger informants. There was evidence that friendship group had an impact upon T-glottaling, with some groups of informants who mixed in the same friendship groups having very similar levels. Type of primary education proved to be an important factor, with those informants who had had some primary education in England using higher levels of glottaling than those who had not. Bilingualism was also found to be important for (t) variation, a social constraint which is quite new in the field of dialect contact.

For the BATH variable, it was revealed that phonological constraints were important, perhaps more important than social constraints. We found some evidence of focussing for the BATH

vowel which increased with age. Ethnic group was an important factor for BATH, with teen Non-Anglos generally favouring the short vowel. The critical period for language acquisition (Chambers 1992) proved to be important for both variables. The study has been successful in demonstrating that there is a correlation between some social factors and linguistic variation in this very messy and turbulent speech community. The ethnographic fieldwork was vital in determining what social factors to explore.

I shall now refer back to the research questions that we saw in Chapter 2, and try to answer these with reference to both variables.

- To what extent does focussing occur within groups of speakers with no stable dialect model? Previous linguistic research has mainly investigated single, discreet acts of mobility. In this highly mobile speech community, can we still expect to find evidence of focussing?

With regards to the BATH vowel, the results suggest that focussing increases with age. The Varbrul testing showed that age was a considerably significant factor for variation. Age combined with ethnicity was very significant. Young informants of all ethnic groups were much more likely to be variable than teen informants. This finding was quite remarkable, given the turbulent and messy nature of the speech community with all the different dialects and ethnicities. It would be interesting to return to the field as these youngsters become teenagers, to see if they become less variable in their use of the BATH vowel over time.

The analysis of the (t) variable also produced some very interesting outcomes. Varbrul demonstrated that age, ethnicity and social network were all very significant factors for glottaling. Certain groups had very similar levels according to social factors. These outcomes were often consistent in different phonological environments. This may suggest that

according to factors such as friendship network and levels of contact, some informants are focussing in terms of their levels of glottalisation.

- To what extent does community of practice membership have an impact upon the patterns of usage of variants in dialect contact situations where there is no stable target model? To what extent is the community of practice approach a useful tool in dialect contact research?

For both variables, community of practice membership was a very important factor for variation. The binomial Varbrul statistical analysis showed several social factors for each variable, such as ethnicity, age, gender, social network, bilingualism and type of primary education to be very significant for variation, and very unlikely to occur by chance. Through the extensive fieldwork and subsequent analysis, grouping the informants in certain ways was very fruitful and produced correlations with variation.

The community of practice approach is an extremely useful tool for dialect contact research, as this study and other studies have shown (e.g Eckert 2000; Fox 2007; Mendoza-Denton 2008). As discussed in Chapter 2, it is important that one discards notions of “authenticity”. This study necessitated including all that was in the speech community. By means of the participant observation approach, I was able to see what certain individuals shared in common with other individuals and try to create categories that may result in correlations with variation. These categories were not always obvious. One must look beyond the usual sociolinguistic categories and find what informants may share in common in distinct speech communities such as the one in the present study.

- Are the number of years spent in the contact setting a factor for variation? If so, does this apply to all informants? Is there a critical period for the acquisition of some variants?

The amount of years spent in the setting was explored for both variables for a possible correlation with variation. It did not produce any conclusive results. It did, however, lead me to investigate type of primary education as a social variable. This was a very significant factor for variation for both of the variables under analysis.

The critical period seemed to be useful for the analysis of the BATH vowel. Youngsters were much more variable in their use of the variable than the teens. Teen informants, particularly Anglos and Spanish, were much more likely to categorically use long or short vowels. Chambers (1992) places the critical period somewhere between the ages of 7 and 14. He claims that beyond this age, complex rules and oppositions are rarely acquired as dialect features. The BATH vowel is a complex variable. BATH showed little variation for teens of all ethnicities, so it would seem, for a complex phonological variable like this, the critical period is a very important factor. BATH was found to be more ‘stubborn’ than the (t) variable. It is doubtful whether the categorical teens in the sample will change this linguistic behaviour in the future. It would be of interest to return to the field to see if changes have taken place with age with the young informants’ usage of the variable, and like the teens, they head more towards categoricity.

Still focusing upon the critical period, Non-Anglo teens and youngsters all acquired the glottal stop to some extent. This would suggest that there is no age limit to acquiring the glottal stop. Glottaling in word medial intervocalic position was either acquired less well, or disfavoured or possibly shunned by groups such as Spanish and youngsters of all ethnicities. Northern European teens’ levels matched or exceeded levels of teen Anglos. Some of these Non-Anglos had only been exposed to English for a small number of years. This may suggest that acquisition of this variant does not require a sustained period of time in the contact situation. Rather, the Non-Anglos may be accommodating to the high levels

in the teen community of the school. Age was a very significant factor for glottaling. Young children of all ethnicities had markedly lower levels than their teen counterparts. Perhaps there is a critical period for acquiring similar patterns of (t) variation as Anglos. As it is a socially stigmatised variant, we would expect the teens to be using it to a greater extent than the youngsters. (See 2.5.1 Adolescent Peak). It would be interesting to return to the field to see if the youngsters' levels increase over time as they enter into adolescence.

- Of the social factors which have been shown to influence new dialect formation in other studies, which ones play a role in this highly fluid community?

Social factors shown to influence new dialect formation in other studies do indeed play a role in this turbulent community. High levels of contact with Anglos led to some Non-Anglos acquiring the TRAP-BATH split to some extent, and high levels of glottalisation in some cases. Low levels of mixing with Anglos often resulted in unsuccessful acquisition of the TRAP-BATH split and markedly lower levels of glottalisation in comparison to Anglos. As with all contact situations, linguistic accommodation needs to occur frequently and over a sustained period of time for individuals to accommodate to each other. The linguistic behaviour of the young Spanish informants for both variables was more similar to that of their young Anglo peers than that of the teen Spanish and Anglos. This may show that early long-term linguistic accommodation leads to members of a speech community becoming more similar over time.

6.1 Concluding remarks and suggestions for future research

The results that were found from this research are important, not only for this research, but

for future dialect contact research. Although Trudgill (1986, 2004) states that the process of koinéisation takes three generations, and Kerswill and Williams (2000) suggest that it is possible in two, this research, despite all the messy conditions and diversity of the speech community, shows evidence of the early stages of koinéisation. This is important for future research that seeks to explore koinéisation as it is *actually* happening.

In the future, it would be of great theoretical interest to undertake a similar study that looks at long term linguistic accommodation over a year or more. In this way, it would be possible to look at factors such as levels of contact and friendship network, and see whether informants are becoming more similar *over time*. In hindsight, this would have been the ideal for this study.

It would be valuable to transport this study to a different dialect contact situation where Anglo and Non-Anglo children and adolescents come together. Something that would be very important both for this research and the wider field of dialect contact, would be to study some more variables in a setting such as this. Variables of interest would be those currently in geographical spread in the UK, such as L-vocalisation and TH-fronting. It would also be of interest to study another regionally sensitive variable STRUT, which like the BATH variable has a phonemic split. It would be of great linguistic interest to explore how these additional variables behave in a speech community such as the one in the present study, in comparison to what they are currently doing in the UK.