



Linguistic Society of America

For immediate release: September 10, 2013
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Language change: from London's "EastEnders" to Glasgow

(Washington, DC) – A recent study provides the first empirical evidence to show that active and engaged television viewing can help to accelerate language change. The study, "Television can also be a factor in language change: Evidence from an urban dialect," to be published in the September 2013 issue of the scholarly journal *Language*, is authored by Jane Stuart-Smith, English Language/Glasgow University Laboratory of Phonetics, Glasgow University; Claire Timmins, Speech & Language Therapy, Strathclyde University; Gwilym Pryce, Urban Studies, Glasgow University, and Barrie Gunter, Department of Media and Communication, Leicester University. A preprint version is available online at: http://www.linguisticsociety.org/document/stuart_smith_Lg_89_3.

This *Language* study investigated the role of viewing the televised soap opera "EastEnders" in the rapid spread of two features of pronunciation typically associated with London English to the dialect of Scotland's largest city, Glasgow. The features are using [f] for /th/ in e.g. *think*, *tooth*, and a vowel like that in "good" in place of /l/ in words like *milk*, and *people*. The results show significant correlations between using these features of pronunciation and strong emotional and psychological engagement by the viewers of this TV program. "Mere exposure to TV or even this drama is not linked with language change – watching and engaging with the show and its characters is important, not just having the set on, or seeing the show in passing." The authors caution that television and other forms of popular media constitute only one of many factors that help accelerate language change. "Our study shows that the media can be involved in helping to accelerate changes in relatively subtle aspects of language, which are also well below the level of conscious awareness."

The authors recommend further study of the role of social interaction as one of many potential factors influencing language change: "Our results show that Glaswegians' actual experience of producing and perceiving speech in their daily interaction fundamentally constrains any possible influence of [popular] media. We don't properly understand the mechanisms behind these changes, but we do see that the impact of the media is weaker than that of our informants' actual social interaction. We need many more studies of this kind in order to appreciate properly the influence of [television and other popular] media on language change."

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The Linguistic Society of America (LSA) publishes the peer-reviewed journal, Language, four times per year. The LSA is the largest national professional society representing the field of linguistics. Its mission is to advance the scientific study of language.