

Watching television can be a factor in accent change

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(Medical Xpress)—New research has provided the first evidence to prove that active and engaged television viewing does help to accelerate language change.

In particular the study, funded by Economic and Social Research Council and published in the American journal *Language*, looked at how watching the television soap 'EastEnders' is altering certain features of the Scottish accent.

Linguists at the University of Glasgow found two particular features of pronunciation typically associated with London English that were becoming increasingly apparent in the Glaswegian dialect among people who regularly watched the television soap opera.

Jane Stuart-Smith, Professor of Phonetics at the University of Glasgow and lead researcher on the project, said: "Our study shows that the programmes that we watch on television can help to accelerate changes in aspects of language which are also well below the level of [conscious awareness](#).

"In particular, this study was investigating why certain linguistic factors that are normally found within the Cockney dialect in London were gradually entering into Glaswegian. Although this trend was apparent in people who had contact with friends or family living in London, there was a stronger effect for people who had strong psychological engagement with characters in EastEnders."

The particular features in question 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 with strong emotional and psychological engagement by the viewers of this program.

However, the study also concluded that simply being exposed to television is not sufficient to cause accent change; for someone's speech to alter, they need to regularly watch the show and become emotionally engaged with the characters.

The authors caution that television and other forms of popular media constitute only one of many factors that help accelerate language change and other, more powerful factors, such as social interaction between peers has a much stronger effect on language change in this study.

Professor Stuart-Smith said: "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 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."

Professor Barrie Gunter, Department of Media and Communication, Leicester University, said: "The research provided some evidence that this mediated influence on speech had occurred, most especially for children who were most closely attached to the programme and also after controlling for possible effects of meeting people from London. We now need to extend this work to include other media examples of speech, other speech forms and bigger samples of people. We also need to study more closely the psychological and linguistic mechanisms that underpin these speech change effects."

The study is titled "Television can also be a factor in language change:

Evidence from an urban dialect."

More information: [www.linguisticsociety.org/docu ...
stuart_smith_Lg_89_3](http://www.linguisticsociety.org/docu...stuart_smith_Lg_89_3)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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