Children’s preference for English-sounding neologisms:
An experimental approach

Gillian Roberts, Eline Zenner & Laura Rosseel
Background

• Two recent developments in Anglicism research:

1. Transition from study of systemic impact of English loanwords to focus on socio-pragmatic functions
   • Matras 2009

2. Shift from semasiological to onomasiological approaches
   • Onysko & Winter-Froemel 2011
   • Zenner, Speelman & Geeraerts 2012
Background

**Meaning variation** (semasiological approach)

**Naming variation** (onomasiological approach)
Background

• This study integrates these two developments

• socio-pragmatic parameters that steer lexical choice

• usage-based approach taking into account lexical resources from both the heritage language and English
Background

• Case study of an under-studied group: youngsters

  “key players in the process of globalization”
  (Berns 2007:43)

• to inform about
a) the socio-pragmatic impact of English
b) children’s acquisition of the social meaning of lexical variation

→ also contributing to developmental sociolinguistics.
Research aims

• Which social and pragmatic parameters steer children's preference for English lexical items over heritage alternatives?

• How do children acquire such socially meaningful linguistic variation?
This study

Which socio-pragmatic parameters steer Belgian Dutch children’s preference for English-sounding names for novel objects from certain semantic fields over Dutch-sounding alternatives?

1. Forced-choice object naming task
2. Explicit attitudes questionnaire
Methodology: Overview

• Respondents
• Example trial
• Design
  • options & decision – feedback welcome!
• Procedure: key points
• Expected results
Respondents

• Belgian Dutch-speaking primary and secondary school children ($n = 120$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-9 (Grade 3)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11 (Grade 5)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13 (1st year)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents: considerations

Which age groups?

- multidimensional responses to language variation start ≈ age 8
- sociolinguistic competence fully acquired ≈ age 14
- transition from childhood to adolescence
- exclude children who have started formal English instruction

Regional variation?

- limited to a single regional area (Limburg, Belgium)
Experiment: example trial

Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.
Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.

“You use this thing to send notes to your family members in other rooms of the house.”

“I choose this word”
Experiment: example trial

Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.
Experiment: example trial

Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.

snæstər

IK KIES DIT WOORD

snæstər

IK KIES DIT WOORD

snæstər
Design: objects

Options:
• Which independent variables to include?
  • context in which object is presented (discretely/within a story)
  • characteristics of the speaker
  • semantic field of object

Decision:

Semantic field of object

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>youth culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English-prone</td>
<td>home &amp; family</td>
<td>garden &amp; pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch-prone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiment: example trial

Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.
Experiment: example trial

Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.

IK KIES DIT WOORD

snæstər

IK KIES DIT WOORD

snəstər
Design: **frame sentence**

Options:

- no frame sentence – simply choose between names
- Dutch sentence indicating the function of the object

Decision:

- Dutch sentence indicating the function of the object
- according to limited number of pre-determined structures

**Od – V**  
*Dit ding gebruik je om je huisdier te aaien.*

**Od – V – Oi**  
*Dit ding gebruik je om schoenen-tatouages te delen met je vrienden.*
Experiment: example trial

Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.

IK KIES DIT WOORD

\[\text{snæster}\]

IK KIES DIT WOORD

\[\text{snæster}\]
Experiment: example trial

Dit ding gebruik je om berichtjes naar je familieleden in huis te vervoeren.

IK KIES DIT WOORD

IK KIES DIT WOORD

snæstər

snæstər
Design: choice of names

Options:

- Type of names
  - existing English and Dutch words
  - graphemically identical neologisms pronounced in English-sounding or Dutch-sounding way

- Vary on linguistic features of names?
  - plausibility or “wordness” of neologisms (Impe 2010)
  - variety of English (BrE, AmE)
Design: choice of names

Decision:

Neologisms

Criteria:
• sufficiently different from existing EN or NL words
• at least two sounds distinguishing EN and NL phonological word
• morphological pattern: monosyllabic; disyllabic
• structure: CCVCC; CCVVC; CVVCC; CVCCVC; CVCVCC
Design: *choice of names*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Phon. EN / Phon. Du</th>
<th>Different sounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>glork</td>
<td>CCVCC</td>
<td>glɔɻk / ɣlɔrk</td>
<td>ɻ/r; g/ɣ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masper</td>
<td>CVCCVC</td>
<td>mæspəɻ / maspəɹ</td>
<td>æ/a; ɻ/r</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Design: choice of names

Pre- and post-tests:

- Pre-test to check
  - distance between each Dutch neologism and its English counterpart
  - distance between English and Dutch neologisms and existing words
  - avoid confounds from sound symbolism

- Post-test to check respondents’ recognition of English- and Dutch-sounding stimuli
Procedure: key points

• Within-subjects

• Respondents are told that they are choosing between English and Dutch

• Respondents see the graphemic word simultaneously with hearing the phonemic word
Overview of this study

1. Forced-choice object naming task

2. Explicit attitudes questionnaire

Independent variables:

- semantic field
- language awareness
- explicit attitudes
- age & gender
Recap of research aims

Broadly

• Which social and pragmatic parameters steer children's preference for English lexical items over heritage alternatives?

• How do children acquire such socially meaningful linguistic variation?

Specifically

• Which socio-pragmatic parameters steer Belgian Dutch children’s preference for English-sounding names for novel objects from certain semantic fields over Dutch-sounding alternatives?
Expected results

1. Children will prefer the English-sounding names for objects from semantic fields relating to the global status of English and Dutch-sounding names for objects from more “local” semantic fields
   • Androultsopoulos 2012; Piller 2003; Zenner, Speelman & Geeraerts 2015

2. Increasing preference for English compared to Dutch as children grow older.
Thank you
References


References


