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Publication date:
2020

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Roberts, G., Rosseel, L., & Zenner, E. (2020). *Children's social evaluation of speakers who (don't) use English words in Dutch: an experimental approach*. Poster session presented at Sociolinguistics Circle, Antwerp, Belgium.

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Children's social evaluation of speakers who (don't) use English words in Dutch: an experimental approach

Gillian Roberts, Laura Rosseel & Eline Zenner

Background: The emerging field of developmental sociolinguistics, which studies the acquisition of socially meaningful patterns of linguistic variation (see De Vogelaer & Katerbow, 2017; Holmes-Elliott, 2016), is so far dominated by research focusing on children's production of phonetic variation (e.g. Chevrot, Nardy & Barbu, 2011; Docherty, Langstrof & Foulkes, 2013). This study aims to extend the focus in two ways. Firstly, targeting the alternation between English loanwords and heritage alternatives in the globalized Western European context foregrounds children's acquisition of socially meaningful lexical variation (e.g. Zenner, Rosseel & Calude, 2019). Secondly, children's evaluation (rather than production) of the social meaning of English vs. heritage lexical variants is placed centre-stage with a perception-centred experimental approach.

Research aim: This study sets out to chart the evolution of children's social evaluation of speakers who (don't) use English words in Dutch in order to gain insight into how children acquire variation and drive contact-induced language change (Labov, 2007).

Respondents and design: 300 monolingual Belgian Dutch children from the same dialect area are included in a sample balanced for gender and age (including 8-9, 10-11, 12-13 and 13-14-year-olds). A base study elicits children's evaluation of speakers who produce sentences containing either an English or a Dutch concrete noun. The core design is varied on to provide insight into the influence of (1) the type of linguistic form (substituting artificial neologisms, compare Samara et al., 2017) and (2) speaker characteristics (e.g. adult/child voice, male/female voice) on the children's social evaluations of the speakers.

Results will provide new insights into the acquisition of the social meaning of lexical variation in children with a window on the transition to adolescence, while the specific focus on lexical resources captures the heterogeneous linguistic reality of European language communities.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2019.100055>