

Cannae or Dinnae Want Tae?

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to investigating dialect adaptation

Sonja Schaeffler

*Clinical Audiology, Speech and Language Research Centre (CASL),
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh*

Particularly in regions with rich linguistic diversity like the British Isles, dialects (and accents) convey much more than just a speaker's geographic origin. They provide cues about social class, education, identity and communicative intentions.

Because of this, some speakers adapt their dialect depending on the situation and the interlocutor, just as they do with other linguistic and stylistic repertoires. A chat with a close friend from the same area is likely to sound very different to answers given in court or in a formal interview situation, for example. But not all speakers adapt their dialect to the same extent. Some cannot do it at all, others appear to switch effortlessly.

However, while there is plenty of anecdotal evidence, a systematic understanding or predictive model of dialect adaptation is lacking. What exactly determines who adapts what, when and how much? Are those more likely to adapt their dialect those generally more eager to please in social interaction? Those with more perceptual aptitude for fine-linguistic detail? Those with better cognitive capacity to handle multiple variants and pick amongst them in real time? Those who think of their own dialect as inferior? So far, neighbouring disciplines have worked on such explanations separately, utilising *either* naturalistic fieldwork *or* highly controlled lab-based experiments, examining *either* social factors *or* cognitive mechanisms.

Taking the example of speakers of Scots in Scotland, where pressures to adapt towards more Standard English are widespread, I will present a novel study design that tests the same speakers across multiple tasks drawing on methods from sociolinguistics, phonetics and psychology. Pilot data will illustrate how this approach may enable a more nuanced understanding of how interindividual differences and situation interact to drive variation in dialect adaptation.