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Hall-Lew, L., Fairs, A., & Lew, A. A. (2015). Tourists' Attitudes towards Linguistic Variation in Scotland. In *Language variation - European Perspectives V* (pp. 99-110). (Studies in Language Variation (SILV); Vol. 17). Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub Co. [10.1075/silv.17.08hal](https://doi.org/10.1075/silv.17.08hal) **Tourists' Attitudes towards Linguistic Variation in Scotland**

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Abstract

This paper joins studies of linguistic variation (e.g., Labov 1972; Dubois & Horvath 2000) and discourse (e.g., Jaworski & Lawson 2005; Jaworski & Pritchard 2005; Thurlow & Jaworski 2010) that consider the intersection between language and tourism. By examining the language attitudes that tourists hold toward linguistic variability in their host community, we find that attitudes differ by context and with respect to tourists' travel motivations. We suggest that these results are particularly likely in a context like Edinburgh, Scotland, where linguistic variation has an iconic link to place authenticity. We propose that the joint commodification of 'intelligibility' and 'authenticity' explains this variability. The results raise questions about how the commodity value of travel motivation and the associated context of language use influence language attitudes.

Sociolinguistics and tourism

The economic pressures of tourism have been apparent in patterns of sociolinguistic variation since Labov's (1972[1963]) study of Martha's Vineyard. One of Labov's insights was that tourism, and islanders' attitudes towards tourism, was related to islanders' level of participation in local sound changes. More recently, sociolinguistic analyses conducted in other communities reliant on tourism economies have shown how tourism motivates high performances of local non-standard dialects (Schilling-Estes 1998; Dubois & Horvath 2000; Dubois & Melançon 2007). Heller (2003, *et seq*) has taken a direct look at the commodification of language in tourism, detailing how the globalised economy reshapes minority linguistic identities. The heart of the issue is the commodification of 'authentic' cultural and linguistic products and the inherent undermining and standardisation of 'authenticity' that results from that process. The insight from this work is that the pressures from globalised tourism economies can shift the semiotic value of linguistic varieties and variables, introducing new, commercialised meanings of (in)authenticity that emerge in interactions with visitors rather than among local community members (see also Hall-Lew and Lew 2014). The present study explores the extent to which linguistic variability is available for commodification in Edinburgh's tourism industry, which varieties correspond to which values, and how these correspondences vary according to tourist type and interactional context.

Language attitudes and tourism in Edinburgh, Scotland

Tourism is the largest employment sector in Edinburgh, accounting for 12% of the workforce. In 2011, tourists from the United Kingdom comprised 63% of Edinburgh's annual visitors, with 44% coming from England, and 17% from other areas of Scotland. The remaining 37% of tourists were from outside

of the UK, led by the United States (7.1%), Germany, (5.8%) and Ireland (4.1%).¹

Accent variation is a part of Scotland's promotional literature, but only to a limited extent. VisitScotland frames Scotland's great linguistic diversity as a positive aspect of the tourism experience: "Often characterised as rough and impenetrable, the truth of the matter is that it varies so much around the country that there's not really such a thing as a standard 'Scottish accent'... In fact, it's only when you visit you realise the rich distinctions in different regional dialects (and the fun you can have trying to copy them!)." ² The fact of dialect variability is highlighted and framed according to contrasting language attitudes: 'rough' and 'impenetrable' versus 'rich' and 'fun'. The parenthetical invites tourists to engage in a 'trying on' of accents, or participation in what MacCannell (1976) described as a type of *staged authenticity*, which Cohen (1979) described as *experimental tourism* and a temporary switching of worlds (cf. Shaw & Williams 2002).

Edinburgh English has been studied in several language attitudes studies (Bishop et al. 2005; Clark and Schleef 2010; Coupland & Bishop 2007; Romaine 1980). The general finding is that it typically scores high on prestige and solidarity dimensions, among both locals and non-locals. Based on the fact that most tourists to Edinburgh are visiting from UK locations, we predict that tourists to Edinburgh will generally hold positive attitudes towards local accent variation.

Like much of Scotland outside of the significantly Gaelic-speaking areas, linguistic variation among native residents of Edinburgh can be described as falling along a cline between Scottish Standard English and broad Scots (Romaine 1980; Stuart-Smith 2004). For the purposes of understanding the tourist experience, this continuum also maps onto a cline of intelligibility, with Scottish Standard English being more intelligible to (non-Scottish) visitors than broad Scots. We suggest that this continuum also maps onto a cline of authenticity, with more English-like varieties (here, 'a light Scottish accent') being heard as less authentic than more Scots-like varieties (here, 'a heavy Scottish accent'; note that the imagining of Edinburgh's linguistic authenticity differs from the fact that accents such as near-RP are spoken by native Edinburghers; e.g., Romaine 1980). Consequently, we predict that the linguistic economy of tourism in Edinburgh is defined by the balance between *intelligibility value* and *authenticity value* (see Heller 2010, 357), which also interact. In addition, we treat this contrast as orthogonal to the well-known attitudinal contrasts of *prestige* and *solidarity*, both of which may increase with increases in intelligibility (cf. Table 1).

We operationalise the contrast between 'intelligibility value' and 'authenticity value' by presenting participants with imagined social encounters typical to tourism, but which we predict will differ with respect to the type of commodity value they presuppose: a historical tour (authenticity value) and a routine service encounter (intelligibility value). From a commodity perspective, we predict that more English-like accents will be preferred for service encounters and more Scots-like accents preferred on a tour. Of course, intelligibility is a valued quality of a tour guide as well; one question is if place authenticity is a valued quality in a service encounter. In Scotland, unintelligibility may itself index authenticity, and we return to this point in the discussion.

Tourists visit Edinburgh for different reasons, many of them connected to Scottish culture and the city's rich built heritage landscape. However, hundreds of thousands of tourists visit each summer to participate in one of the city's many summer festivals, particularly the Fringe festival, which alone

¹ <http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/Edinburgh%20Facts%20&%20Insights%202011.pdf>

² <http://www.visitscotland.com/blog/culture/scottish-accents/>

was estimated at 2,870,724 attendees in 2010 (Liu and Lin 2011). We predict that visitors motivated by an interest in Scottish culture will be more invested in authenticity value than visitors who are focused only on attending festivals.

Methodology

Analysis is based on surveys completed by tourists in Edinburgh in 2012 and 2013. The survey was divided into three parts, presented sequentially. Part one (1) of the survey collected socio-demographic information about each tourist (e.g., age, nationality, reasons for visiting). Part two (2) asked participants about their tourism motivations and experiences, such as ‘is experiencing Scottish culture important to you while you are on this trip?’ Part three (3) collected quantitative and qualitative data on language attitudes, and was divided into three subparts. The first subpart (3a) elicited attitudes towards Scottish accents, the second (3b) framed accents specifically as commodities and elicited accent preferences, and a single final question (3c) directly asked participants to choose between authenticity and intelligibility.

Instead of the typical semantic differential scale (Osgood et al. 1957), language attitudes were collected by asking participants to circle items from a word cloud. Word clouds, which have been successfully used in previous attitudinal surveys (see Campbell-Kibler 2007), were used to avoid participant fatigue and to allow participants to only select those adjectives that appealed to them for a given question. Each cloud contained 22 adjectives and there were four possible cloud types. Each cloud represented half of a total set of 44 adjectives, 22 ‘positive’ (e.g., *pleasant*) and 22 ‘negative’ (e.g., *unpleasant*), duplicated with the adjectives rearranged to counterbalance any accidental effects of visual saliency. Each participant saw only one of the four cloud versions, but saw that same cloud twice on the page: once when asked to circle as many adjectives as they liked to evaluate ‘light’ Scottish accents, and separately for ‘heavy’ Scottish accents. The terms ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ were chosen to avoid the complex terms such as ‘English’ and ‘Scots’ because pilot participants responded most comfortably to these options.

To assess the commodity value of Scottish accents, participants were asked to evaluate accents in two or three imagined tourism and travel contexts. The first question represents the auditory consumption of a linguistic product in a cultural tourism context: “Imagine you are taking a group tour of the Royal Mile. The tour costs £10. What accent would you most like your tour guide to have?” This context is taken to represent commodity value as related to authenticity. The second question evokes a travel industry context, where the product being purchased is not the speech itself: “Imagine you are booking a train ticket at Waverley Station. What accent would you most like your tour guide to have?” This context is taken to represent commodity value as related to intelligibility. Festival tourists saw an additional context, meant to represent the auditory consumption of speech in the context of festival tourism: “What is/are the best accents for a stand-up comedian at the Fringe to have?” This context is expected to be neutral to both authenticity and intelligibility, although of course both are arguably at play to some extent. For each question, participants were asked to choose as many accents as they liked from a word cloud of 11 accents. Accents consisted of *a heavy Scottish accent*, *a light Scottish accent*, and *Standard English*, plus other accents that might plausibly be heard around Edinburgh (*American-*, *Chinese-*, *Indian-*, *Irish-*, and *Polish-accented English*) and *Your own language*, *Your own accent*, and

No Preference. These word clouds were pseudo-randomised into four different orders, and each participant saw only one of the four orders (analogously to the language attitudes word clouds).

Fieldwork

Participants consisted only of visitors to Edinburgh who were targeted during different times of year based on the annual fluctuations that occur in Edinburgh. Data collection in August 2012 resulted in 32 surveys from Fringe festival visitors. Data collection in September 2012 and June 2013 resulted in 17 surveys from non-festival visitors. Fringe surveys were administered in a central location of the festival and surveys during other times were administered in a central location of the Edinburgh tourism industry, Princes Street Gardens. The questionnaire was administered by a speaker of Standard Southern British English (SSBE). We hoped that tourists might be less guarded expressing their attitudes towards Scottish varieties if the fieldworker was not Scottish. Participants were approached and asked if they would like to take part in a questionnaire about their experience as a tourist in Edinburgh. Answers to parts 1 and 2 were elicited verbally and answers to part 3 were filled in by participants themselves, with the intention of allowing participants to feel relatively less self-conscious about circling negative adjectives than they might in a face-to-face conversation. We acknowledge that all the responses were subject to conscious consideration and obtained in a context of certain social pressure (as one reviewer put it, pressure to accommodate to the assumed attitudes of the researchers).

Of the 49 participants, 42 were native English speakers. The sample reflects the known dominance of UK visitors to Edinburgh (N=31), most from England (N=27). Age and gender have been found to correlate with language attitudes (e.g., Coupland & Bishop 2007) as well as tourism behaviour (e.g., Shaw & Williams 2002), and our participants represent a relatively balanced gender sample (23 F, 26 M) and a wide range of ages (19-74). Participants were also split according to their answer to one of the survey questions: “Is experiencing Scottish culture important to you while you are on this trip?” which sought to assess the relationship between tourist’s conscious intentionality about cultural consumption and language attitudes. 18 of the 49 stated that they had no particular interest in Scottish culture while on their trip.

Results

Our results supported the previous literature in that tourists’ overt attitudes about linguistic variation in Edinburgh are largely positive. We also find that attitudes towards ‘light’ accents are significantly more positive than towards ‘heavy’ accents. However, as expected, the ‘heavy’ accents are slightly more likely to be rated as *authentic*. Most of the social differences between participants (age; gender; native v. non-native; festival v. non-festival; culture interest v. none) showed no correlations with attitudes, perhaps in part to imbalanced representations of subgroups in the dataset. In a mixed effect model with participant as a random effect, the only factor to significantly predict the likelihood of ‘authentic’ being a chosen adjective was the age of the tourist ($F=4.77$, $p < 0.05$). Interestingly, older tourists (median age 50) were more likely to choose ‘authentic’ than younger tourists (median age 31).

Our strongest result is that that the imagined context of the linguistic encounter appears to influence the types of accents tourists prefer to hear, pointing to the trade-off between intelligibility

value and authenticity value. Table 1 shows the results from part (3a) of the survey: the 331 adjectives that 49 tourists circled in response to two separate prompts pertaining to ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ Scottish accents, ranked by how often they were chosen for each accent.³ Overall, terms are mostly positive (88%), supporting previous evidence that Scottish English is generally rated highly on both social attractiveness and prestige. On the other hand, this result might be an artefact of the methodology, which easily allows participants to avoid circling negative adjectives. In future, the best way to corroborate these results may be to employ the standard methodology of semantic differential scales.

Table 1: Ranking of adjectives according to how frequently they were chosen for ‘Heavy Scottish’ versus ‘Light Scottish’ accents.

‘Heavy’ (rank)	N	‘Light’ (rank)	N
unclear	13	pleasant	20
authentic	12	warm	17
pleasant	11	likeable	16
warm	10	melodic	15
interesting	10	helpful	13
honest	8	polite	12
unintelligible	8	authentic	11
likeable	7	interesting	11
helpful	7	clear	9
melodic	5	jovial	8
jovial	5	honest	7
confident	5	trustworthy	7
clear	4	intelligible	6
trustworthy	4	witty	6
polite	3	confident	5
intelligible	3	knowledgeable	5
intelligent	3	educated	4
uneducated	3	prestigious	4
competent	3	unclear	2
impolite	3	intelligent	2
witty	2	uninformed	2
knowledgeable	2	wealthy	2
educated	2	clever	2
unintelligent	2	unintelligible	0
unlikeable	2	uneducated	0
uninformed	1	competent	0
untrustworthy	1	impolite	0
monotone	1	unintelligent	0
poor	1	unlikeable	0
stigmatised	1	untrustworthy	0
stupid	1	monotone	0
unhelpful	1	poor	0
dishonest	1	stigmatised	0
prestigious	0	stupid	0
wealthy	0	unhelpful	0

³ Four participants chose only one adjective per accent; all other participants chose multiple adjectives.

clever 0 dishonest 0

In a mixed effect model with participant as a random effect, the only factor to significantly predict the likelihood of a negative adjective being chosen is whether the question referred to the ‘heavy’ or ‘light’ accent ($F=56.55, p < 0.0001$), with ‘heavy’ accents predicting the choice of negative attitudes. More positive terms ($N=288$) were chosen than negative terms ($N=43$), and more terms were chosen for the ‘light’ accent ($N=186$) than the ‘heavy’ one ($N=145$). Because of this imbalance, we compare the rank ordering of adjectives rather than their raw numbers.

The top two adjectives chosen for ‘heavy’ accents are *unclear* and *authentic*, while the top two for ‘light’ accents are *pleasant* and *warm*. The ‘heavy’ accents are also often rated as *pleasant* and *warm*, but ‘light’ accents are rated as *authentic* relatively less often, according to the rank order, and only twice was a ‘light’ accent described as *unclear*. The other adjectives that appear to distinguish the two imagined varieties are *polite* (attributed to the ‘light’ accent more often) and *interesting* and *honest* (ranked relatively higher for the ‘heavy’ accent).

Table 2: Ranking of accents according to how frequently they were chosen for each context

Tour Guide	N	Train Station	N	Comedian	N
Light Scottish	73	Light Scottish	28	No Preference	23
Standard English	22	Standard English	26	Light Scottish	7
Heavy Scottish	18	No Preference	17	Irish	6
Own Language	14	Own Language	12	Standard English	4
Irish	10	Irish	9	Heavy Scottish	4
Own Accent	6	Heavy Scottish	8	American	3
No Preference	5	Own Accent	7	Own Language	3
American	3	American	5	Own Accent	2
Scottish	2	Polish	2	Indian	1
Edinburgh (Write-in)	1	Chinese	1	Polish	1
Polish	1	Indian	1		

Table 2 shows the results from part (3b) of the survey: the 325 accents that 49 tourists circled in response to questions about accent preferences in a different imagined social contexts.⁴ The results suggest that accent preference reflects differ with respect to which tourism commodity is being consumed through the social interaction. The most frequently chosen accent was ‘Light Scottish Accent’ ($N=128$), followed by ‘Standard English’ ($N=52$), ‘No Preference’ ($N=45$), and finally ‘Heavy Scottish Accent’ ($N=30$). This pattern is mostly driven by the question about the hypothetical Royal Mile tour guide, which generated more responses ($N=155$) than the question about the Waverley train station attendant ($N=116$); responses to the Fringe festival comedian were much lower ($N=54$) in large part because only Fringe attendees answered that question.

While the tourists we surveyed have a clear preference for a ‘Light Scottish Accent’ (47%) when taking a Royal Mile tour, interestingly, this preference even holds in the Waverley train station scenario, where ‘Light’ Scottish accents (24%) are slightly preferred over ‘Standard English’ (22%).

⁴ One participant chose only one accent per content (‘No Preference’ in each case); all other participants chose multiple accents.

The fact that tourists have any accent preference at all in the context of a routine service encounter rather than a culturally loaded tourism context is noteworthy, but even more so that the preferred accent is still one tied to place authenticity, even in a context where intelligibility ought to have functional primacy. That said, proportionally more respondents did choose ‘No Preference’ (15%) more often for the train station scenario than the tour guide scenario (3%), as expected. Lastly, it is not the case that all tourists only want to hear place-authentic accents from all speakers in all contexts; when Fringe festival attendees were asked what accent they preferred for a festival comedian, the overwhelming majority of answers were ‘No Preference’ (42%; the next highest, ‘Light Scottish’, was chosen 13% of the time). In all cases, these various choices were always chosen more often than the option of ‘Own Accent’ or ‘Own Language’ (although further work on a higher number of non-native English speakers will take a closer look at this particular ranking). Of final note is the one write-in answer of ‘Edinburgh English’ as the preferred tour guide accent – a direct nod to the value of local authenticity.

The final result from part (3c) of our survey creates an explicit (and misleading) contrast between intelligibility value and authenticity value, asking only one question: “Would you rather hear an accent which is authentic to Edinburgh, even if you cannot understand it?” Only two participants did not give a straight ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, saying, for example, “[It] depends. On the street it’s nice to hear but not if [I’m] desperate for directions” (the other participant said something similar). Of the remaining 47, a majority (26) said they would prefer to hear an accent that is authentic to Edinburgh, even if they cannot understand it.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper draws on work in Scotland in sociolinguistics (e.g., Abrams & Hogg 1987; Clark & Schleeff 2010; Lawson 2014; Stuart-Smith et al. 2007) and tourism (e.g., Bhandari 2012; Bregoli 2013; Bregoli & Del Chiappa 2011; Frew & Hay 2011; Rice 2010), and compliments analyses of metadiscourses around language use in tourism (e.g., Jaworski & Lawson 2005), by looking into the language ideologies of tourists rather than tourism operators. Our results show that tourists experience Scottish accents as *pleasant*, *warm*, and *authentic*. A ‘light’ Scottish accent is also conceived of as *likeable*, *helpful*, *melodic*, and *polite*, while a ‘heavy’ Scottish accent is considered *interesting* and *honest*, but also potentially *unclear* and *unintelligible*. While we have called these latter two ‘negative’ attitudes, the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ accurately reference one half of an adjective pair, rather than necessarily representing an attitudinal quality. For example, ‘melodic’ or ‘interesting’ may be euphemisms for more hostile language attitudes.⁵ It is not necessarily the case that tourists view unintelligibility as a negative experience; indeed, the finding that a majority of respondents prefer hearing an ‘authentic Edinburgh accent’, even if they ‘cannot understand it’, speaks to a possible positive affect, with unintelligibility correlating with deeper authenticity.⁶ Overall, we predict that these results reflect the methodology (the elicitation of overt attitudes), and future work will employ different methodology to investigate more covert attitudes.

Understanding tourists’ language attitudes is essential to analyses of tourism and mobility influences on patterns of local linguistic production (Labov 1972[1963]; Schilling-Estes 1998; Dubois

⁵ Thanks to a reviewer for raising this point.

⁶ Thanks to Marie Maegaard for initially raising this point.

& Melançon 1997; Dubois & Horvath 2000) and tourism discourse more generally (Coupland et al. 2005; Jaworski & Pritchard 2005; Strand 2012; Thurlow & Jaworski 2010). In a context like Edinburgh, where linguistic variation strongly indexes place authenticity, we find that there are differences in the commodity value of accents, depending on type of language work. In a tour guide, tourists vastly prefer to hear a ‘Light Scottish’ accent, which probably symbolises both authenticity and accessibility. This finding holds, to a lesser degree, for a station attendant, suggesting that even in less culturally loaded contexts tourists still prefer accents indexing place authenticity. In these common tourism encounters, the ‘Light Scottish’ accent holds a greater cultural capital value than other variants. While the ‘Heavy Scottish’ accent still holds comparative value, its secondary status may, in the long term, confirm the globalising influence of tourism in museumising local varieties (Hall-Lew and Lew 2014). As with other intangible culture artefacts (e.g., visual and performing arts), tourism commodification has a dual role in contributing to conservation and altering the form of the artefact itself (Shaw & Williams 2002). This situation speaks directly to “where to draw the line between the authentic experience and user-friendliness” (Heller 2003, 490), where one side of the line commodifies, and thus shifts, the value of authenticity, while the other responds to mass tourism industry needs by rewarding intelligibility. In contrast to these issues, Fringe tourists have few preferences for the accent of a comedian, providing the clearest evidence that travel motivation and language attitude are linked. The results point to many avenues for further research on how different travel motivations and different contexts of language work influence the commodity value of spoken linguistic forms.

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