

## **“Sellouts” and “Wannabes”: Ownership, authenticity and the difficulty of acquiring another dialect**

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Millions of people throughout the world begin acquiring another dialect of their own language – for example, the regional dialect of their new home or the standard dialect of formal education. But a meta-analysis of research on learning a second or additional dialect shows that very few are successful. In fact, many would conclude that second dialect acquisition (SDA) is more difficult than second language acquisition (SLA). This talk discusses some of the reasons for this special difficulty.

The most obvious explanations are linguistic – a consequence of the similarity of the second dialect (D2) to the first dialect (D1). It is well known that in SLA negative transfer occurs more readily between typologically similar language varieties and that it is difficult for learners to keep such varieties separate. Also significant is the fact that SDA concerns mainly phonological acquisition, and according to various theories of SLA, phonetic closeness between corresponding phonemes in two varieties leads to difficulty in acquisition because learners are unable to perceive the differences. Biological factors also come in here – the sensitive period for native-like phonological acquisition is only up to seven years of age, and after then, it is very unlikely.

In the specific case of SDA, however, sociolinguistic explanations may be even more significant. These are concerned with the close relationship between a dialect and social identity, and the attitudes of both D2 learners towards the dialect and of the D2-speaking community towards dialect learners. The main part of this talk concerns these factors, focusing on widespread views of ownership, authenticity and the “true self” with regard to dialect. It shows how these views make it difficult for learners to change their dialect, and also influence speakers of a dialect to react negatively to learners’ attempts at speaking it. The talk concludes by presenting some of the implications these sociolinguistic factors have for learning the standard dialect in the classroom.