

Transmission complete
From preschool to preadolescence in the acquisition of styleshifting
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Labov (2001:437) observes that ‘children begin their language development with the pattern transmitted to them by their female caretakers, and any further changes are built on or added to that pattern.’ A case in point is styleshifting, where ‘Linguistic variation is transmitted to children as stylistic differentiation on the formal/informal dimension....Formal speech variants are associated by children with instruction and punishment, informal speech with intimacy and fun’ (ibid). The further development in styleshifting norms arises when ‘children learn that variants favoured in informal speech are associated with lower social status in the wider community’ (ibid) and ‘later acquisition of superposed dialects’ (Labov 2013:247).

Our previous research on preschool children (2-4 year olds) in interaction with their primary caregivers (Smith et al 2007, 2009, 2013) showed that the caregivers used systematic patterns of styleshifting from vernacular to standard with some variables (1) but not with others (2). These patterns of (non)styleshifting were transmitted to the children who faithfully replicated the patterns in their own speech.

1. (child) Are we gan to Isla's? (caregiver) Uhuh. (child) Are we? (caregiver) Later on, *aye*. (child) Say *yes* or no. (caregiver) *Aye...yes*. (child) No, say *yes* or no. (caregiver) *Yes*.
2. (child) *Is* there pens in there? (caregiver) *Aye*, there *is*. (child) My paints *are* in there.

What happens to these patterns of (non)styleshifting once the children move from the vernacular dominated norms of the home to the standard dominated norms of the school?

To tackle this question, we returned to the original preschool children now in pre-adolescence (11-13 years old). In order to tap the boundaries of styleshifting between vernacular and standard, we recorded the speakers with a) a community insider who uses the local vernacular and b) a community outsider who uses a very standard dialect and replicated the analyses of variables carried out eight years earlier.

In analysing the results, I appeal to Labov’s (1993, 2008) *sociolinguistic monitor* in interpreting the (lack of) development of styleshifting from preschool to preadolescence, and indeed in later life.