

## **Second dialects and shifting linguistic identities: British women in the United States**

Alison Mackey, Anna Marie Trester, Sheena Shah and Kaitlyn M. Tagarelli (*Georgetown University*)

This paper examines the unique ways that British women living in the United States construct their evolving identities. These women, who are native speakers of British English, face a unique linguistic environment when compared to other foreign nationals in the U.S. because they are surrounded by speakers of their native language, while also being exposed to subtle (and not so subtle) differences between their native dialects and the new one. Our goals were to understand how these women's second dialect environments and experiences shape and reframe their identities (Siegel, 2010).

Our study focuses on semi-structured interviews in which, according to their own accounts, these women purposely distance themselves from U.S. dialects and identify strongly as British. Interestingly though, they concomitantly report intentional (and occasionally involuntary) use of a few features of U.S. English, for example to accommodate U.S. English speakers or to avoid drawing attention to themselves. The women react in a variety of ways to their own use of U.S. English during the interviews, including disbelief, as demonstrated below when Olivia inadvertently pronounces the letter "Z" in the U.S. dialect (*zee* vs. *zed*) when trying to describe differences in U.S. and U.K. spelling (*-ize* vs. *ise*) to a (British) interviewer:

Olivia: Like, what is it? "Organization" with a- what do we use in- a *zee* instead of an "S?" No, what do they use...over here?

Interviewer: *They use a zed. You just said zee.*

Olivia: Oh- oh! You see! A *zee*! You see? There we are! Isn't that weird?... I did. I said *zee*...A *zee*. Oh my god, I just said that.

Our paper utilizes approaches drawn from both applied and sociolinguistics to describe common themes and individual perspectives in the data. All of the women demonstrate clear attachment to their British identities. However, one speaker, "Emily," stood out from the others in her paradoxical desire to integrate into U.S. society, while being reluctant to group herself with Americans. We focused on investigating how Emily uses language to construct this shifting identity, finding that she constructs a "dual position" (Schiffrin, 1996) through language, notably by using repetition, "constructed dialogue" (Tannen, 2007), and contextualization cues, specifically voice quality. For example, Emily uses repetition: (a) to take a stance against a prior stance of hers in which she felt like a foreigner in the U.S., therefore indicating her identity as an individual who wants to integrate into U.S. society, (b) to demonstrate uncertainty about the differences between British and U.S. dialects, and (c) to reinforce her alignment with speakers of the former. She uses constructed dialogue to represent the speech of her American friends, allowing her to negatively align with these friends and construct the identity of not American while animating her own voice and the voices of her American friends through changes in her voice quality. Her use of this contextualization cue plays a complex role in her construction of a dual and shifting identity, one which is not American, yet also, not foreign.