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# Modelling acquisition and use of dialectal, standard and multiethnolectal features in migratory contexts across Europe

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## ABSTRACT

Large scale in-migration waves of people speaking a diversity of languages into those parts of Europe which used to be called ‘western Europe’ before 1989 have fundamentally changed the linguistic landscapes of these countries. These social and demographical transformations represent a considerable challenge for linguistics, and in many parts of Europe, linguists have accepted this challenge. However, the question of how this new linguistic heterogeneity interacts with the continent’s most cherished traditional linguistic heterogeneity, which are the European dialects, has hardly been addressed. In this volume, we approach this issue for the first time in a transnational and systematic way, presenting research on various European countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland and The Netherlands). We have singled out one particular question regarding dialects and immigration, which seems to be one of the most interesting ones at the present point of sociolinguistic development: How speakers born and raised in immigrant families employ (or do not employ) regional or dialectal features in their everyday language. Hence, we look at those speakers who are also said to be the inventors and users of so-called multiethnolects (i.e. people who either immigrated at a very young age or who have second-generation immigrant backgrounds).

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## Introduction

Large scale in-migration waves of people speaking a diversity of languages into those parts of Europe which used to be called ‘western Europe’ before 1989 have fundamentally changed the linguistic landscapes of these countries. Despite considerable differences in the composition of the immigrant population from state to state, in the time scale of these migration flows, and in the particular type of multi- or monolingualism in the receiving societies before 1989, these migration flows have had a huge impact on the ways in which the (western) European states discuss and re-define the relationship between standard languages and nationhood. Nation states with a formally relatively monolingual population (if the dialect–standard dimension is excluded), such as Norway or Italy, have become multilingual, traditionally multilingual nation states such as Finland (with Finnish and Swedish as official languages) or Switzerland (with Italian, German and French as official languages) have had to reconsider their notions of multilingualism. Countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom or The Netherlands, who already had a considerable immigrant population mostly of

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the work-related type ('guest workers') have had to deal with linguistic 'superdiversity' of a kind previously unknown. The largest migration flows have been either inner-European, mostly from west middle Europe (e.g. from Poland into the UK or Norway), east Europe (e.g. from Russia into Germany) and southeast Europe (e.g. from former Yugoslavia into Switzerland or Germany), or with former colonies as the countries of origin (e.g. Pakistanis and West Indians into the UK, Congolese into Belgium, Surinamese into the Netherlands, South Americans into Spain), or they have resulted from the recent war- and poverty-driven influx of people from Afghanistan, the Middle East, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Some of these immigrants are highly visible and in the focus of public debates, while others remain more or less invisible. In agreement with O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo (2015) we use the term 'new speaker' in order to avoid contested labels such as 'non-native', 'second-language', 'L2 speaker', and 'learner' which seem particularly problematic in the case of the second generation. In our context the label refers to speakers who do not have the majority language as their primary or only home language.

These social and demographical transformations represent a considerable challenge for linguistics, and in many parts of Europe, linguists have accepted this challenge. The dominant focus of research so far has been on aspects of educational linguistics and second language acquisition (zooming in on the acquisition of the language(s) of the receiving societies among first generation immigrants), but various forms of bi- or multilingual behaviour such as codeswitching, hybridisation, poly- or translanguaging have been investigated as well. Since the last decade of the last millennium, these two strands of research have been complemented by an increasing recognition of the newly emerging varieties/speech styles of the languages of the receiving societies as spoken among the 'second generation', i.e. young speakers whose parents came to the West European states as immigrants, focusing around the – debated – notion of 'multiethnolects'. Surprisingly, however, the question has hardly been addressed of how this new linguistic heterogeneity in Europe interacts with the continent's most cherished traditional linguistic heterogeneity, which are the European dialects.

### Different scenarios of dialect acquisition and use by 'new speakers'

In this volume, we attempt to approach this issue for the first time in a transnational and systematic way, presenting research on various European countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland and The Netherlands). We have singled out one particular question regarding dialects and immigration which, to us, seems to be one of the most interesting ones at the present point of sociolinguistic development. We ask how speakers born and raised in immigrant families employ (or do not employ) regional or dialectal features in their everyday language. Hence, we look at those speakers who are also said to be the inventors and users of the above-mentioned multiethnolects (i.e. people who either immigrated at a very young age or who have second generation immigrant backgrounds).

The articles in this Special Issue allow us to identify (ideally) three ways of the interaction between multiethnolect and regional ways of speaking – with the latter ranging from traditional dialects to regionally flavoured variants of the respective standard languages. Intermediate cases are possible as well, of course, hence it is adequate to speak of prototypes.

The **first scenario** is the wholesale acquisition and use of the repertoire of the receiving society, including the dialects. In this case, the dialect is spoken by people who grow up in immigrant families just as it is spoken by comparable speakers without such a 'migration background'. Although this looks like an uninteresting case of complete linguistic integration, the scenario raises a number of follow-up questions. First of all, it needs to be asked under which circumstances it is possible to acquire completely regionalised ways of speaking (including dialects of the traditional type) despite non-exposure to dialectal input in the family, which is generally considered to be the social institution in which dialects are transmitted best across Europe. In order to answer this question, a look at the status and also the prestige of the dialects in the receiving society is essential. Again, two sub-scenarios can be distinguished. The **first sub-scenario**, represented in this Special Issue

by (most parts of<sup>1</sup>) Norway, but applicable, as it seems, also for instance to the South of Italy with its Italo-Romance varieties, such as Sicilian, is characterised by a pervasive use of the dialects in public. In a sociolinguistic situation in which dialects are the dominant, if not the only spoken language (as in Norway, with the standard varieties by and large restricted to the written domain), it stands to reason that there will be sufficient exposure of the children of immigrants to these varieties, even when they are not used in the family: socialisation into the dialect will mostly occur in the peer group from an early age onward (for instance in kindergarten). There are so far no linguistic studies which prove that the dialect as spoken by new speakers is exactly the same as the autochthonous dialect acquired (also) in the family. However, these new speakers can 'pass' as authentic dialect speakers, and do not invest in salient, sociolinguistically meaningful distinctions in order to display an 'immigrant identity'. Such a linguistic integration also has an ideological and attitudinal dimension which must not be lost of sight: it requires mainstream society to accept the new speakers' accommodation, which seems most natural in a sociolinguistic situation (as again in Norway) in which there is no real alternative to dialect use, as shown by Røyneland & Jensen in this Issue. In this case, the new speakers' entitlement to speaking dialect is not contested.

**The second sub-scenario** of a wholesale acquisition and use of regional ways of speaking as they are common in the non-immigrant population refers to sociolinguistic situations, in which the local dialects are also highly prestigious but their use by speakers with immigration background is more contested and these speakers' entitlement to use the dialect is less obvious or even denied. This is illustrated by the case of the Dutch province of Limburg described by Cornips in this Issue, as well as the case of the Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia area in the West of Finland, where dialects of Finland Swedish are strong and prevalent among the 'locals' (see the contribution by Ekberg & Östman). In both cases, the local dialects are held in high prestige, but as the everyday language, they compete with Dutch and with Standard Swedish and, above all, Finish, respectively. Hence, there is an alternative to speaking the local dialect (which is not the case in the first sub-scenario), and speaking dialect is one option among others only. New speakers may not be expected to use the dialect and indeed, in public contexts, they may not be addressed in dialect by local speakers without immigration background, as Cornips shows. As Ekberg & Östman (in this Issue) point out, the attitudes of the 'locals' toward dialect-speaking people with immigrant background may vary, and so does the self-positioning of the latter.

Both in Limburg and in Ostrobothnia, the dialects are in a peripheral position within the nation states of The Netherlands and Finland; in a sense, they are a minority language. For the new speakers, who are then a minority within a minority context, this opens up the possibility to 'skip' the regional way of speaking and opt for the national standard language instead of the dialects in certain situations and with certain co-participants. However, as in the first scenario, they are competent speakers of it.

The **second prototypical scenario** is linguistically more complex. In this case, the new speakers start from the regional or dialectal way of speaking but do not take it over in an unaltered way. Rather, they construe a (multi-)ethnolectal variant of it, i.e. they amalgamate regional or local features with ethnolectal innovations. As a consequence, they develop a (multi-)ethnolect, not of the standard language or a vernacular version of it, but of this regional or dialectal way of speaking. The emerging amalgam may have a double indexicality, indexing on the one hand local or regional belonging (perhaps with social class intersecting), and on the other hand social position as 'Ausländer'.

Of course, the amount of dialect entering this emerging new variety can vary. In the case of the dialects in German-speaking Switzerland, as described by Schmid in this Special Issue, the local dialects have a very strong position and are used by everyone and almost in all situations of informal interaction, regardless of social or migration status. In this sociolinguistic situation, it is easy to explain that, e.g., the Zurich dialect provides most of the linguistic structures (rather than the Swiss German standard language, to which the speakers are hardly ever exposed outside school), while the multiethnolectal features are comparatively few. The opposite case is represented by the speaking style which Quist and Skovse found in Vollsmose (a low-income neighbourhood/housing

estate in the Danish city of Odense). Here, the dialectal features are few, and there is a comparatively large number of multiethnolectal features of the type that would also be found in Copenhagen.

An intermediate type is represented by the speakers of Maghreb background in a Marseille housing project who are portrayed by Evers (in this Issue). The language spoken by these students (which they call *Castellanois* after the housing project in their suburb) is based on the Marseille vernacular, to which they have added Arabic-sourced phonetics/phonology, some dialectal Arabic lexis, and Arabic-sounding neologisms. Their way of speaking can therefore be described as an ethnolect of *Marseillais*, not of – standard – French, from which it is clearly distinct. The indexicality of *Castellanois* builds on the status of *Marseillais* as an urban lower-class variety, but adds to it the features indicating Arabic heritage.

As can be seen, the different varieties onto which (multi-)ethnolectal features are superimposed and with which they become amalgamated, carry along different social indexicalities from the very start: in Zürich, the urban dialect is a prestigious, socially unmarked variety indexing local belonging only; in Odense, flavouring one's speech with local features has, above all, the potential of signalling regional identity as distinct from the capital of Copenhagen; in Marseille, speaking like the traditional Marseille working class is first of all a social marker. It is an open question, however, whether in all three cases, the speakers themselves are aware of these indexicalities that existed before they began to speak 'their' Zurich German, 'their' Odense Danish, or 'their' *Marseillais*; in other words: whether the hybridity of their styles and registers, obvious to the linguist, is an emic hybridity for them. Judging from the analyses in this Special Issue, it would appear that this is indeed the case in Marseille and Zurich, but not necessarily in Odense.

The **third prototypical scenario**, represented in this volume by Germany, is the counterpart of the first. Under this scenario, no or hardly any regional features are acquired and used by speakers of immigrant background, although strongly multiethnolectal ways of speaking have emerged, showing distinct phonetic and grammatical features. But these multiethnolectal ways of speaking build on vernacular and standard German features that can be found everywhere in the country. If there are any features that are – from a dialectologist's perspective – typical of the informal standard of only parts of Germany, this regional distribution is in most cases unknown to the speakers and therefore carries no place-related indexical meaning. The tendency towards complete absence of local or regional features in the speech of new speakers in Stuttgart (traditionally part of the Swabian dialect area) described by Auer in this Issue, is of course in need of an explanation. First of all, this explanation must be sought in the changing sociolinguistic status and prestige of the (southern German) dialects. Although the official prestige of the dialects is high in most parts of Germany (including Swabia), their hidden prestige, particularly among young urban people, is low. As a consequence, the traditional dialects have next to disappeared, and since the middle of the twentieth century, they have been replaced by ever more standard-near ways of speaking. This levelling of the dialects in favour of less local and more standard-like features has progressed fastest in the cities. Dialects and strongly regionalised ways of speaking are almost absent in the media and in public discourse (although regional standards are accepted). However, comparable young speakers without migration background and living in non-immigration neighbourhoods still speak more dialect than those with migration background. An explanation can be found in the small amount of exposure to dialect-speaking, non-immigrant (older) Germans. With segregated multiethnic neighbourhoods, low attendance of preschool institutions, classrooms hugely dominated by multilingual peers, the only regular input during adolescence comes from the teachers (usually standard German or only slightly regionalised standard German). In sum, scenario three describes a sociolinguistic situation in which there are no incentives to acquire dialect, few possibilities to accommodate the speech of peers who use local or regional features, and a considerable amount of social segregation. [Table 1](#) summarises the three prototypical scenarios, whereas [Figure 1](#) illustrates the 'feature pool' and the possible processes that lead to the different scenarios.

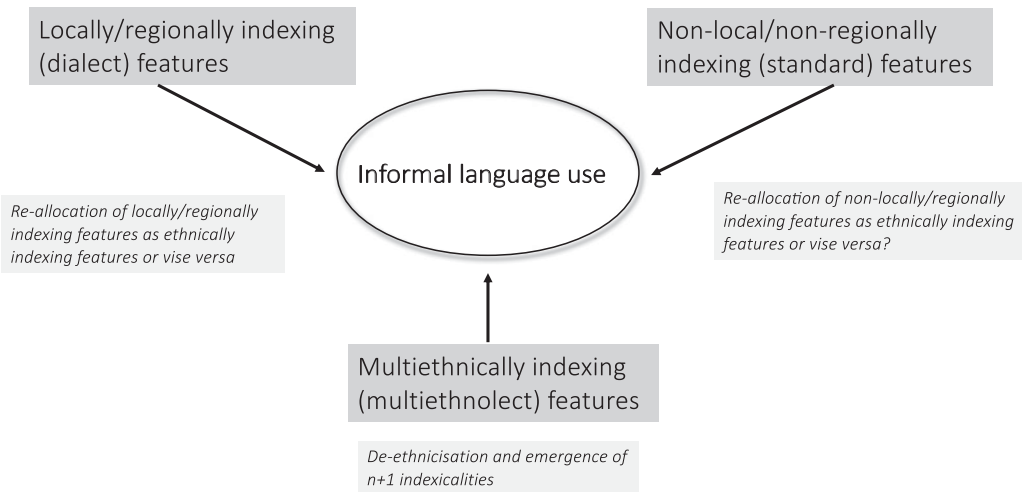
As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), features' indexicalities are not fixed, but may change over time through different re-allocation processes. A feature's indexical meaning is also strongly tied to and may vary

**Table 1.** Three prototypical scenarios of dialect acquisition and use by ‘new speakers’.

	Scenario 1		Scenario 2	Scenario 3
A	B			
Complete acquisition and use of local/regional dialect – new speakers seen as legitimate users of local features	Acquisition and use of both local/regional dialect and standard – new speakers <i>not</i> seen as entirely legitimate users of local features		Acquisition and use of multiethnolectal features in combination with regional/local features	Acquisition of use of multiethnolectal features in combination with standard features
Display of local/regional identities	Display of local/regional/supra-regional identities		Display of local/regional/multiethnic identities	Display of multiethnic identities

according to the other features with which it occurs. As discussed by Silverstein (2003, 194), ‘ $n + 1$  order indexicality is thus always already immanent as a competing structure of values potentially indexed in-and-by a communicative form of the  $n$ -th order, depending on the degree of intensity of ideologization’. Features that traditionally used to be indexes of local/regional affiliation may get picked up by new speakers and used in combination with multiethnolectal features. Through their use in new contexts these features may over time acquire new meanings (at least when used by these speakers) and hence move from primarily locally indexing features to (also) ethnically indexing features. An example is coronalization of syllable-final /ç/, traditionally a dialectal feature of Middle German regional varieties, but increasingly indexing immigrant background today. While in this case, the new indexicality is currently competing with the old one (which it may eventually replace), it may also simply be combined with the previous ones, and thereby create new meanings. As described in the case of Marseille, a remixing of features from the traditional French dialect of *Marseillais* with Arabic elements resulted in a novel, specifically *quartier* (i.e. both local and ethnic) indexicality.

The social meaning of features may vary across users and their speech, once they are used in different registers. One striking example of varying indexicalities relative to feature-context is the fronted /s/ in Copenhagen speech. While indexing ‘femininity’ and ‘gayness’ when used in combination with ‘modern Copenhagen speech’, it indexes ‘toughness’ and ‘masculinity’ when combined with so-called ‘street language’ (i.e. ethnolectal features) (Pharao et al. 2014). In this context the question may be raised whether the use of standard features also can be interpreted as indexing ‘foreignness’ when embedded in a multiethnic way of speaking or spoken by people that – from their appearance – do not seem to belong to the social group stereotypically associated with the use of



**Figure 1.** The feature pool used by new speakers and its indexicalities.



locally/regionally unmarked (i.e. standard) features. This would probably require a sociolinguistic context in which speaking standard is not an option in everyday informal communication, such as in Switzerland or Norway. Finally, it should be noted that multiethnolectal features may become ‘de-ethnicized’ and re-interpreted as indexing urban youth or street culture in general (compare the term ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’, coined by Rampton 2015).

### **Different methodological approaches**

The chapters in this Special Issue follow a number of different methodological approaches, ranging from ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative, interactional or narrative analyses to surveys and experimental data and more quantitative analyses. Many of the studies, however make use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data and analyses. Both Evers and Quist & Skovse have conducted lengthy, in-dept ethnographic fieldwork. They have collected observational data, interview- and conversational data, and taken extensive fieldnotes. Whereas Evers primarily analyzes the contents of conversations she had with young people living in the housing project known as *La Castellane* in Marseille’s suburbs, Quist & Skovse combine a quantitative analysis of linguistic variation with insights drawn from the ethnographic fieldwork in Vollsmose, a similar housing project in Odense.

Ekberg & Östman have conducted individual and focus groups interviews of first- and second-generation immigrants to the small Swedish speaking town Närpes in Finland. In their chapter they analyze the narratives from these focus group sessions with particular attention to the views related to identity construction and the linguistic resources used by these groups. Cornips discusses previous research on the acquisition of dialect and dialect features by locally born speakers with a migration background in The Netherlands, and analyzes extracts from interviews with a few new speakers regarding their experiences as ‘foreign looking’ speakers of the local dialect. Schmid analyzes dialect acquisition, code-switching and ethnolectal speech among second-generation immigrants from Italy and Albania in Switzerland by looking at interview data from a corpus of bilingual conversations which consists of recordings of six different communicative events. Auer’s study of use of Swabian dialect features by young people of (mostly Turkish or Balkan) background who were born, or raised from an early age on, in Stuttgart, Germany, is based on group conversations in peer networks. The data were searched for regional features and quantitatively described and analysed. For their study of attitudes towards dialect use by youth of immigrant background, Røyneland & Jensen conducted a large-scale survey and visual-verbal guise experiment with adolescents from different parts of Norway and provide a largely quantitative analysis of the data.

### **Factors favouring or impeding dialect acquisition and use by ‘new speakers’**

As discussed by Auer (2005), the dialect–standard constellations and the dialect–standard ideologies vary considerably in different parts of Europe. Whereas we find rather strong standard language ideologies and clear norms against the use of dialect in formal situations and public speech events in countries such as Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands, dialects have a much stronger position and will be used more widely, also in public contexts, in countries such as Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. The extent to which immigrants to different parts of Europe would be exposed to local dialects, and expected and encouraged to acquire them, will be contingent upon both the language ideologies in the receiving society and in the country of origin. As discussed in the article by Røyneland & Jensen in this Issue, Polish immigrants to Norway would for instance be expected by the resident population to learn the local dialect, but may not be inclined to do so since dialects in Poland have very low status and are seen as an index of lacking education and sophistication. In Germany and The Netherlands, on the other hand, new speakers of German and Dutch would, as discussed by Auer and Cornips in this Issue, be less expected to learn and use the local dialect – and may not be regarded as entitled users.

If we consider the degree of exposure and access to dialect we find quite striking differences in the national language ecologies presented in this Issue – ranging from maximal exposure and access in Norway, Switzerland, and Swedish speaking Finland, less exposure in France and The Netherlands and least exposure and access in Germany and Denmark (at least in the cities). This clearly has to do with the dialect–standard ideologies in the receiving societies – where dialects are spoken, by whom and for what purposes – but also with socio-economic and demographic factors such as ghettoisation versus integration. In situations where immigrants or young people with immigrant background live more or less segregated from the majority population, access to local speech will, of course, be more limited. Segregation, ghettoisation and economic deprivation of the kind reported, for instance, for Marseille (Evers’ article) and Odense (Quist & Skovse’s article), typically happen in urban agglomerations, and to a much lesser extent in smaller cities or rural areas. Hence, the urban–rural dimension is of crucial significance here. For instance, almost all the parents in Vollsmose, the Danish ghetto described by Quist and Skovse, were unemployed and seldom left the social housing project they lived in. Their children also had very little contact with local people beyond Vollsmose. Accordingly, the degree of contact between the minority and majority population was minimal – and by extension the degree of exposure and access to local speech. Nevertheless, some local/regional features may be picked up and used in combination with standard features and multiethnolectal features. These regional features are, however, not necessarily experienced as ‘regional’ and used in order to index a regional identity, but may simply be perceived as part of their style and neighbourhood identity.

In contrast to immigrants to urban areas with a large and concentrated immigrant population, immigrants to rural parts of Finland and Norway are much more likely to be integrated into the local society and, hence, exposed to local speech. This does not entail, however, that they are seen as legitimate and entitled speakers of the local dialect or that they want to sound like a local and identify with the local community. As discussed by Ekberg and Östman and also Evers in this Issue, questions of identity, social positioning, and belonging are quite complex. The second-generation immigrants in their studies tend to position themselves as belonging to a *third space* (Bhabha 1994), either by expressing solidarity with both the local and the immigrant population, or with neither of them, rather identifying with a distinct group, or by identifying and aligning with other young people in the diasporas of the respective ethnic group. By making use of features from a large linguistic repertoire (from local dialect, multiethnolect, standard, and other languages) they position themselves as having multiple belongings and affiliations. It is, however, not only up to the individuals alone to decide where they belong. As pointed out by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identities are always co-constructed, relational and contextually bound. Identities may in part be an outcome of others’ perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger social and material structures and ideological processes. As discussed in several of the articles in this Issue, questions of identities and belonging are linked to the question of ‘who gets to pass’ as someone who belongs. Several of the adolescents in Ekberg and Östman’s article say that they do not feel fully accepted as a local and that their version of the local dialect is criticised for not being correct and good enough. The articles by Cornips, Evers, and Røyneland & Jensen also discuss immigrants’ experience of in|exclusion, and of not being accepted as someone who belongs, and attribute this to the fact that they *look* foreign. Although they may speak like a local and dress like a local, they do not look local. As noted by Bucholtz and Hall (2016, 173) ‘bodies and embodiment are central to the production, perception, and social interpretation of language’. If, for instance, the ideological expectations of how language and skin colour can acceptably combine are violated, claims of identity and belonging may be rejected.

In sum, our Special Issue demonstrates that the use or non-use of locally/regionally indexing features – whether alone or in combination with multiethnolectal features – must be seen as related to a number of social, cultural, psychological, demographic and socio-economic factors. Key factors are language ideologies – both in the receiving society and in the society of origin –, issues pertaining to



belonging, identity and identification, questions of entitlement and legitimacy, and last but not least questions of exposure and access.

## Note

1. For details, see Røynealand & Jensen (in this volume). The situation is more complex as the Eastern part of Norway and particularly the urban agglomeration of Oslo follows different patterns.

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