

Coding for attitudes in the UK

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In order to explore the connections between speaker attitudes and linguistic behaviour, this paper discusses phonological variation and national identity. The often debatable borderlands which exist at the margins of the nation are where the connections between language and national identity may be strongest or weakest. This paper presents data from the on-going project *Accent and Identity on the Scottish~English border* ([AISEB](#))¹.

One of the most celebrated examples of the influence of a political border on linguistic behaviour is the border separating England from Scotland. The border is not the subject of conflict or dispute: on the contrary, it has remained peaceable and fixed for hundreds of years. However, it has been claimed that the greatest concentration of distinctive linguistic features in the entire English-speaking world is to be found along the length of this border (Aitken 1992), making the area of especially strong sociolinguistic interest. Explanations for this situation focus on the central importance of attitudes towards national identities. Perhaps more surprising still, given the current context of large-scale levelling and homogenisation in British English, is the view that the discontinuities of linguistic features across the border are predicted to increase, and that the dialects on either side of the border look set to diverge further (Glauser 1974; Kay 1986).

Previous sociological research carried out in and around Berwick-upon-Tweed (an English town lying three miles from the border) (Kiely *et al.* 2000) showed that regional and national identities in the area are unusually complex and fluid, and that linguistic behaviour plays a central role in making and marking these identities. Building upon these insights, the AISEB project investigates four localities lying in close proximity to the border (Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle on the English side and Eyemouth and Gretna on the Scottish side) and examines the relationships between informants' pronunciation patterns in a range of vowels and consonants, and their overtly expressed and implicitly held attitudes towards the various national identity labels available to them. To complement the production and the attitudinal strands of the project, a third perceptual strand is included in which data are

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gathered using a series of experiments seeking to uncover the ways in which people in the border area perceive fine-grained variation in speech patterns, and how they associate these patterns with 'Scottishness' versus 'Englishness'.

The attitudinal strand of the project contains several different measures of attitude:

- Qualitative data gathered from targeted questions posed in the *Identity Questionnaire* part of the sociolinguistic interview (questions relating to the significance of the border, the description and evaluation of the informant's national identity and accent, the perception and evaluation of inter- and intra-locality variation in linguistic behaviour etc.)
 - The cognitive component of the qualitative attitudinal data is elicited through questions relating to the identity and accent the informant believes him/herself to have
 - The affective component of the qualitative attitudinal data is elicited through questions relating to the evaluation of this identity and accent and how positively or negatively disposed towards this accent and identity the informant feels
- Quantitative data gathered from use of visual analogue scales of measurement of levels of agreement with authentic attitude statements derived from pilot interviews
- Quantitative data gathered from use of the 'magnitude continuum' which measures the relative importance to the informant of various relevant identity labels (British, Scottish, English, etc.)
- Implicit Association Tests (IAT) (Greenwald *et al.* 1998) which examine subjects' association of positive and negative personality traits with 'Scottish' and 'English' (a separate IAT which forms part of the perceptual strand of the study uses audio stimuli to test subjects' sensitivity to subtle phonetic differences that are independently known to vary with the speaker's Scottish or English origins).

This paper will focus on the two quantitative measures of overtly expressed attitudes - the visual analogue scales and the magnitude continuum. These measures are used as an alternative to the Likert scale – the most widely used approach to scaling responses in survey research. The alternatives presented here overcome a number of shortcomings associated with the Likert-type scales and provide more freedom of expression for the informant and fine-grained continuous data for the researcher.

Attitudinal results from the visual analogue scales and the magnitude continuum will be shown in relation to production data on rhoticity. We will see that the trends of convergence and divergence observed in the production data are mirrored in the attitudinal results. This, it is argued, combined with evidence from perceptual testing of the socio-

indexicality of linguistic forms, offers more substantial grounding for the interpretation of speaker motivations for variable linguistic behaviour than the examination of production data alone.

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