Syllable structure in English speech produced by Congolese refugees with long transits in Uganda

Ida Syvertsen and Guri Bordal Steien

This paper will present the theoretical background, participants and methods, and preliminary results from an ongoing study exploring the phonological features of English speech produced by Congolese refugees in Norway. This is a sociolinguistic study within the conceptual framework of *mobile resources* (Blommaert, 2010), *translingual practice* (Canagarajah, 2013) and *metrolingualism* (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), and is both part of a larger project exploring various aspects of English speech produced by multilingual speakers in Norway, and a larger, longitudinal project exploring the linguistic repertoires of Congolese in Norway (see Steien & Monsen, forthcoming).

Upon arrival in Norway, the participants in this study have been exposed to highly fluid and dynamic linguistic feature pools (Mufwene, 2001; Blommaert, 2010) in DR Congo and Uganda, and their repertoires are made up of features from several languages, mainly Kinyabwisha, Lingala, Kiswahili, French and English (Steien & Golden, forthcoming). Given their varied repertoires, their production in English is characterized by crosslinguistic influences that are unusual for most English-speaking interlocutors with Norwegian as their dominant language.

The data presented in this paper stem from a case study of the English syllable structure of ten newly-arrived refugees. A production experiment inspired by Labovian sociolinguistics (Drager, 2018; Labov, 2006) was designed to elicit syllables that in written language and in other varieties of English have complex consonant clusters (e.g. e̲x̲t̲r̲a̲, s̲p̲l̲a̲s̲h̲, and s̲p̲r̲i̲n̲t̲).

The participants are recorded in three speaking styles: word list, reading of a passage and an informal conversation. The recordings are analysed acoustically to determine strategies for encountering consonant clusters. The results indicate four main strategies, one unmarked realisation and three marked ones: consonant deletion (e.g. *extra,* [ˈetrə]) schwa insertion (e.g. *splash,* [spəˈlaːʃ], and vowel insertion with vowel harmony (e.g. *sprint*, [spəˈrɪntɪ]).

References

Blommaert, J. (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. London: Routledge.

Drager, K. (2018). *Experimental research methods in sociolinguistics*. London: Bloomsbury.

Labov, W. (2006). *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mufwene, S. (2001). *The ecology of language evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Otsuji, E., & Pennycook, A. (2010). Metrolingualism: fixity, fluidity and language in flux. *International Journal of Multilingualism, 7*(3), 240-254, DOI: 10.1080/14790710903414331

Steien, G. B., & Golden, A. (forthcoming). "I Kongo har vi vært sånn flerspråklige." On speakers' experiences of linguistic fixity and fluidity across time and space. *Awaiting peer review for International Journal of Multilingualism*.

Steien, G. B. & Monsen, M. (Eds.), (forthcoming). *Language across time and space*. Awaiting decision for Multilingual Matters.