Youz guyz gotta addz the Z’z at the endz’a yaz woidz, seezl!: metapragmatic commentary on English in New York City

Cecelia Cutler, City University of New York, Ccutler@cuny.gc.edu

Abstract

The present paper explores metapragmatic comments (attitudes towards, metalinguistic comments about, characterizations of, and performances of NYCE) in comments responding to 4 YouTube videos on how to sound like a New Yorker (N=3661). It examines affective responses to New York City English (NYCE) and the relationship between localness, attitudes towards NYCE, and the ways in which NYCE is represented or performed in the comment corpus.

Corpus of NYC English (in progress)

• 3 Year Collaborative NSF-funded project (2016-2019)
• Team: PIs: Christina Tortora (College of Staten Is.), Michael Newman, (Queens College), Bill Haddican, (Queens College), Cecie Cutler, (Lehman College), Beatrice Santorini, (U. of Pennsylvania); Ariel Diertani, Research Associate; Leyla Eldridge, Research Assistant
• Goal: 1M word corpus of spoken interview data with New Yorkers; transcription and force alignment in Praat
• 300+ interviews transcribed.

The current data: YouTube

Table 1. Comments Corpus from 4 YouTube Videos (N=3,661)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak with a NY Accent - the AW sound</td>
<td>950000</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak with a NY accent - drop the R vowel</td>
<td>117000</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn Accent</td>
<td>790000</td>
<td>1679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernie Sanders’ accent explained</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>1414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Attitudes towards NYCE among those who identify as local/nonlocal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>POSITIVE</th>
<th>NEGATIVE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>% POSITIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local identity</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-local identity</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No place identity</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results: Language attitudes

Language attitudes

William Labov: “New York City may be characterized as a great sink of negative prestige...The term ‘linguistic self-hatred’ is not too extreme to apply” (Tierney 1995).

Dennis Preston: “people consistently rate New York's as the most 'incorrect' and ‘unpleasant’ accent in America.” The few who give good ratings think of New York City as an artistic and intellectual center, but “most people associate it with immigrants, criminals and rude, uneducated people” (Tierney 1995).

Results: Linguistic features

Fig. 2. Linguistic features of NYCE appearing in metalinguistic/metapragmatic comments and mock performances of NYCE in the YouTube corpus (N=940)

Social types mentioned in YouTube comments

• Ethnic groups: Jews (N=99), Italians (N=29)
• Stereotypes: mafiosos, socialists/communists, cops (N=28)
• TV characters: Fran Drescher, Larry David, Jerry Seinfeld, Robert de Niro, Al Pacino, Christian Bale, Bugs Bunny, characters from “Friends” (N=114)

Conclusions

• Attitudes towards NYCE are largely very positive and do not differ notably between those who identify as local vs. non-locals.
• The most salient features of NYCE are /r/-Ø and the low back AW vowel followed by lexical items and expressions.
• The most common social types associated with NYCE are Jews, followed by Italians and a range of TV and movie characters and actors who play Jews and Italians.

References


R-Ø > D
ER > OI
Lexical
Intrusive /r/
%POSTIVE
78%
81%
73%

Follow up

1. Compare attitudes in CoNYCE with YouTube corpus
2. Relation between overt mention of features and metakal comments.
3. Study of mock features of NYCE
4. Relationship between features and social types.