

Turbulent times: a century of linguistic change in Falkland Island English

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The Falkland Islands, a British Overseas Territory in the South Atlantic, comprise one of the most recently formed societies in which English is the dominant first language. It has been spoken there since 1833. Their English has long been intriguing for dialectologists, partly because it emerged, as many colonial dialects did at the time, as a result of dialect contact between rather divergent dialects of British and Irish English, but also because this contact took place in a *tabula rasa* situation (i.e. there was no *indigenous* language that came into contact with the English settlers, unlike in New Zealand, Australia, etc.) (Trudgill 1986).

On the Falklands, there is a population of only 3600 in an area larger than Cyprus or, Lebanon. Whilst today over 80% of the population is concentrated in the capital Stanley, it was once more sparsely scattered in settlements across the islands, leading Trudgill (1986) to speculate that new dialect focussing there had not progressed especially rapidly, because contact had not been intensive, and that traces of the settler dialects could still be heard. In this paper, I examine the evolution of the variety that formed in the Falkland Islands, on the basis of a near-million word ELAN-transcribed corpus of informal conversational Falkland Island English, collected from speakers born between 1910 and 2005 at two data collection points in 1997 (Sudbury 2000) and 2020.

I will firstly look for evidence of colonial koine formation, pointing to the dialect levelling of many settler input features, as well as 'new' features which emerged as a result of contact-induced reallocation, such as Canadian Raising of the diphthongs /ai/ and /au/ (nuclei are more raised before voiceless consonants than elsewhere). I then explore Trudgill's (1986) claim about the maintenance in the Islands of traces of settler dialects, and show how Scottish and South-Western English ancestry shapes speakers' use of /ai/ and of intrusive /r/ (the use of an etymologically unexpected /r/ in vowel-vowel hiatus positions). Thirdly, I consider evidence of Spanish-influence on Falkland Island English, given the presence of hispanophone gauchos on the islands in the 19th century, and given the close ties the Islands had with the South American mainland until 1982. Finally, I explore the fate of this colonial koine in more recent times, considering the linguistic changes which have taken place since the conflict with Argentina in 1982, changes which coincide with stronger educational, institutional, economic and social ties with Britain.

References:

- Sudbury, A. (2000). *Dialect contact and koineisation in the Falkland Islands: Development of a southern hemisphere variety*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex.
- Trudgill, P (1986). *Dialects in Contact*. Oxford: Blackwell.