



ORAL-READING MISCUES OF FINNISH-AUSTRALIAN INFORMANTS

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This paper examines the oral-reading miscues of three generations of Finnish-Australian informants with respect to the informant's gender and age. According to Goodman (1969: 19), a miscue is present when "...a reader's observed response (OR) differs from the expected response (ER)". Based on the theoretical framework of Romaine (2000), a suggestion is made that both gender and age may affect the type and number of miscues produced by these informants. Initial findings indicate some variation in the type and the number of miscues according to gender within the first generation and according to age across the generations.

Keywords: miscue analysis, sociolinguistic factors, Finnish-Australian, FEAC

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper presents some initial findings of research concerning oral-reading miscues of three generations of Finnish-Australian bilinguals. According to Goodman (1969: 19), a miscue is present when "...a reader's observed response (OR) differs from the expected response (ER)". The specific aim of this research is to

investigate the type and number of oral-reading miscues in order to discover if there are any patterns that are related to the sociolinguistic variables of an informant's gender and age. Based on the theoretical framework of Romaine (2000), expectations are that both gender and age may play a significant role in the linguistic choices made by informants. This study can be viewed within the wider framework of language shift which generally takes place among immigrant generations. This paper is divided into five sections. Firstly, a brief introduction outlines the contents of the paper and the corpus used for this study. Next, reference is made to background theory concerning the sociolinguistic aspects of gender and age and their importance in linguistic choice. Section three is a description of the methods used concerning the tabulation of miscues as well as a description of the oral-reading exercise used in this research. Next, the results are shown. Finally, a discussion and appraisal of the results are presented.

The material used for this study is taken from the Finnish-English Australian Corpus (FEAC). This extensive corpus was compiled in 1994 by Dr. Gregory Watson of the University of Joensuu, Finland. The corpus was collected in Australia in the cities of Brisbane, Melbourne, Canberra, Hobart and Sydney. This corpus consists of a series of interviews of three generations of Finnish-Australians. The section used for this study is a reading-aloud exercise which was taken from the interviews.

2 ROMAINE ON THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS OF GENDER AND AGE

Numerous researchers have examined the question of gender influence with respect to language maintenance or language loss. Referring to some of these, Romaine (2000: 78) states that “[a] number of sociolinguistic studies have found that women tend to use higher-status variants more frequently than men.” On the basis

of this observation, women, rather than men, would more likely use the dominant language of a society. At the same time, Romaine (2000: 148) contends that women and men may have quite differing roles in a community and that this could lead to earlier acquisition of the dominant language by either one group or another. She (2000: 148) cites Haugen's (1953) study of Norwegian immigrants to the United States. This study shows that it was the men who were more readily acquiring English, rather than the women. However, this was rectified by the second generation. Thus, we can see that there are complications in trying to draw simple conclusions from the relationship between gender and language; surely, the complexities of each situation must be taken into consideration.

In terms of the age factor related to patterns of language variation, Romaine (2000: 83) suggests that in some communities, "...sociolinguistics patterns are acquired quite early..." She (2000: 82, 124–125) cites the case of Scottish schoolchildren who are using certain variables and are quite conscious of the social significance of their choice of language. These children learn the prescriptive forms of 'proper and acceptable' language and they may be very sensitive to the situations in which these forms should be used. Clearly, the need for young children and young adults to be accepted by peers has some influence on the linguistic forms used by children and young adults. Romaine (2000: 125) points out that peer pressure to use language acceptable to the 'in' group's style of speaking may be very strong and, at times, may conflict with the norms suggested by family and school. Consequently, many young people develop several codes of communication: one for use among peers, one for home and with family, and one for school with teachers. Romaine (2000: 126) claims that this clearly indicates how affinity with certain groups may have an influence on the linguistic choices which a speaker makes.

Clearly, age is a significant factor in language choice and language use. Identification with a peer group will most likely affect the speaker's choice of language. However, there may be other

factors, such as innovation or preservation, which influence the speaker's choice. Whether the speech variations of various age groups are temporary or whether they indicate long-lasting changes in progress may be evident only after several generations.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 MATERIALS

In 1994, Dr. Gregory Watson of the University of Joensuu, Finland, compiled the Finnish-Australian English corpus (FAEC). This corpus is approximately 1.2 million words and includes a total of 120 informants representing three groups of Finnish-Australians. For this study, I was able to examine information from thirty informants; that is, ten informants from each of the three generations represented in the corpus.

According to Watson (1996: 46), group 1A consists of those Finns who were 18 years or older upon arrival to Australia. Group 1B is made up of the children of group 1A, and of those who were born in Finland but migrated to Australia before the age of twelve. The second generation consists of those who were born in Australia of Finnish-immigrant parents. For convenience, I will refer to these groups as first-, second- and third-generation. I have used an even number of informants of both genders in this analysis of the Finnish-Australians; in all three generations, there were five male informants and five female informants.

The age range of the first-generation informants of Finnish-Australians is 16 years, with the average age being 63.4 years old. The age range of the second-generation informants is 25 years, with an average age of 29.8 years. The third-generation informants have an average age of 33.7 years, with an age range of 33 years.

The Finnish-Australian corpus includes a story which, during each interview, was read aloud by the informant. Analysis of this

section will be made and miscues will be calculated according to auxiliaries (excluding passive auxiliaries), articles, and the plural ‘s’. The reasons for using these particular grammatical areas are given in section 3.2. The tested items are italicized below for easy reference for the reader. They were not highlighted for the informants. The following is the oral-reading exercise from this corpus:

The little girl and the wolf.

One afternoon *a* big wolf waited in *a* dark forest for *a* little girl to come along carrying *a* basket of food to her grandmother. Finally, *a* little girl *did come along* and she was carrying *a* basket of food. “Are you carrying that basket to your grandmother?” asked *the* wolf. *The* little girl said yes she was. So *the* wolf asked her where her grandmother lived and *the* little girl told him and he disappeared into *the* wood.

When *the* little girl opened *the* door of her grandmother’s house she saw that there was somebody in bed with *a* nightcap and nightgown on. She *had approached* no nearer than twenty-five feet from *the* bed when she saw that it was not her grandmother but *the* wolf, for even in *a* nightcap *a* wolf *does not look* any more like your grandmother than *the* Queen of England looks like Madonna. So *the* little girl took an automatic out of her basket and shot *the* wolf dead.

Moral: It is not so easy to fool little *girls* nowadays as it *used to be*.

The total number of words in the text is 188 and the number of tested areas is twenty-eight. Twenty-three articles, fourteen definite articles (‘the’) and nine indefinite articles (‘a’), one plural ‘s’, and four auxiliaries will be tested.

3.2 METHODS

The method for analyzing the data is to calculate the miscues from an oral-reading exercise and, on the basis of these miscues, attempt to discover possible patterns based on the gender and age of the informants within each generation and across the three generations. Miscues are defined by Goodman (1988 [1975]: 11) as ‘...unexpected responses in oral reading...’ Goodman’s model (1969), modified by Cambourne, is as follows:

MISCUES

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. Insertions | Items added to those already in the text |
| 2. Omissions | Items deleted from those which appear in the text |
| 3. Substitutions | An item is substituted for one in the text |
| 4. Reversals | The relative position of a text item is altered |
| 5. Regression | A portion of the text is repeated |
- (Cambourne 1976–1977: 605–635)

The first three items (insertions, omissions, and substitutions) will be used in this study but the reversals and the regression items will be omitted because these two categories are a more complex form of miscue and they seem to reveal aspects of language unrelated to linguistic dominance.

In this study, I will concentrate on the areas of grammar that are challenging for Finnish speakers. As many researchers have indicated (e.g. Pålsson 1983; Sajavaara 1983; Chesterman 1991), auxiliaries, articles and the plural ‘s’ are all somewhat problematic for Finnish speakers of English. In particular, articles seem to be the most challenging of these three areas. Chesterman (1991: 90–109) and Sajavaara (1983: 72–87) both suggest that Finnish speakers who are learning English have difficulties with articles. Sajavaara observes this in his study:

It seems that for some time at the beginning of English studies the mere existence of the category of an article is a problem for the learner. It cannot be called a transfer from Finnish, because there are no articles in standard Finnish, but it is *definitely interference of L1*.
(Sajavaara 1983: 78; emphasis added.)

In addition to this, he suggests in his study of articles that the omissions of articles are a problem.

The most common type of error...[is]...the omission of the indefinite article...next comes the omission of the definite article...[and altogether] the omissions of the article total 85% of all article errors.
(Sajavaara 1983: 77–78)

The following are examples of the three types of miscues researched in this study. Each miscue is marked as such: =miscue/. The symbol =q/ refers to an omission.

Insertions (with articles)

Expected Response ...the Queen of England....

Observed Response ...the Queen of =the/ England...

Omissions (with plural 's')

Expected Response ...so easy to fool little girls nowadays...

Observed Response ...so easy to fool little girl=q/ nowadays...

Substitutions (with an auxiliary phrase)

Expected Response ...finally a little girl did come along...

Observed Response ...finally a little girl =came/ along...

As we can see from these examples, various types of miscues are present in the data. The reading-aloud section of the corpus had been coded for any form of deviance from the original text and the researcher checked these sections by listening to the recordings. Phonetic deviations were not included within this study.

4 RESULTS

In this study, I expect that first-generation informants, because of their Finnish language influence, will have more miscues than the informants of the other generations. In addition, I expect that article miscues will be most prevalent. When both gender and age are taken into consideration in the linguistic performance of informants, the expectations are that these sociolinguistic factors will play some part in the language use of the informants. Based on the information presented in Romaine's work (2000: 148), the expectations in this study are that the male informants of the first generation will show linguistic tendencies similar to those of the Norwegian informants. That is, assuming that first-generation Finnish-Australian males have more readily acquired the dominant language of the society, it is expected that they will have fewer miscues than the first-

generation females. Expectations are that the second- and third-generation informants will show no significant differences between the results of the male and female informants.

In addition, I expect that the younger informants will have fewer miscues than the older informants. This is based on the idea that the younger informants have more contact with native English speakers who have no influence from Finnish. It is expected that the second- and third-generation informants will be close to native English speakers in their abilities.

The results of this study will be presented according to each generation and according to the gender and age of the informants within each generation. In addition, a comparison of all three generations will be made. The statistical significance of the distribution of miscues was tested by means of a chi-square test with Yates' continuity correction when necessary. The significance levels used were according to standard convention: .05=probably significant, .01=significant, and .001=highly significant (see, e.g. Hatch & Farhady 1982: 165–173).

The miscues of the first-generation informants are presented in Table 1. The first-generation Finnish-Australian informants had 63 miscues in the areas tested. There were 4 auxiliary miscues and 3 plural 's' miscues. Article miscues accounted for 56 of the miscues. There were at least 2 miscues from each informant and 7 of the informants had 5 or more miscues.

TABLE 1. Miscues of the first-generation Finnish-Australian informants.

Informant	Auxiliaries	Articles	Plural 's'	Total
1A15M	1	7	1	9
1A2M	1	12	0	13
1A5M	1	4	0	5
1A7M	0	6	1	7
1A43M	0	9	0	9
1A1F	0	2	0	2
1A3F	0	7	0	7
1A8F	1	3	1	5
1A11F	0	3	0	3
1A33F	0	3	0	3
10 informants	4 miscues	56 miscues	3 miscues	63 miscues

As shown in Table 2, the second-generation Finnish-Australian informants had 8 miscues in the areas tested. There was 1 auxiliary miscue and 1 plural 's' miscue; 6 of the 8 miscues were article miscues. Of the 10 informants, 6 informants had 1 or more miscue.

TABLE 2. Miscues of the second-generation Finnish-Australian informants.

Informant	Auxiliaries	Articles	Plural 's'	Total
1B21F	0	0	0	0
1B9F	0	1	0	1
1B24M	0	1	0	1
1B15F	0	0	0	0
1B30F	0	0	0	0
1B18M	0	1	1	2
1B8F	0	0	0	0
1B16M	1	0	0	1
1B2M	0	1	0	1
1B14M	0	2	0	2
10 informants	1 miscue	6 miscues	1 miscue	8 miscues

Table 3 represents the number of miscues from the third-generation Finnish-Australian informants. They had 12 miscues in the areas

tested. Two of the miscues were auxiliary miscues and 10 were article miscues. Six of the ten informants had miscues.

TABLE 3. Miscues of the third-generation Finnish-Australian informants.

Informant	Auxiliaries	Articles	Plural 's'	Total
2F1AK	0	0	0	0
2F2AJ	0	0	0	0
2F3TV	1	1	0	2
2F4HA	0	3	0	3
2F5MO	0	0	0	0
2M1PA	0	4	0	4
2M2EI	1	0	0	1
2M3WS	0	0	0	0
2M4TL	0	1	0	1
2M5AR	0	1	0	1
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10 informants	2 miscues	10 miscues	0 miscues	12 miscues

As shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3, the first generation had 63 miscues, the second generation had 8 miscues, and the third generation had 12 miscues. The distribution of the number of miscues of the second and third generation is not significant ($p < 1$). The distribution of the amount of miscues of all three generations is significant ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that the first generation has significantly more miscues than the other two generations.

The miscues by gender for each of the Finnish-Australian generations are given in Tables 4, 5 and 6 (below). As is indicated in Table 4, when the results of the first-generation Finnish-Australian informants were tabulated according to gender, there were 20 miscues by women and 43 by men. There is a significant difference ($p = 0.001$) between the number of miscues by males and the number of miscues by females.

TABLE 4. Miscues by gender of the first-generation Finnish-Australians.

First-generation miscues	Male	Female
Auxiliary	3	1
Article	38	18
Plural 's'	2	1
Total	43	20

According to Table 5, the second-generation Finnish-Australian male informants had 7 miscues while there was only 1 miscue by a female; the difference is not significant ($p=0.072$).

TABLE 5. Miscues by gender of the second-generation Finnish-Australians.

Second-generation miscues	Male	Female
Auxiliary	1	0
Article	5	1
Plural 's'	1	0
Total	7	1

The results of the miscues by gender of the third-generation Finnish-Australian informants are given in Table 6. The number of miscues by males is 7, and the number of miscues by females is 5; the difference is not significant ($p=0.768$).

TABLE 6. Miscues by gender of the third-generation Finnish-Australians.

Third-generation miscues	Male	Female
Auxiliary	1	1
Article	6	4
Plural 's'	0	0
Total	7	5

The overall results for the miscues by gender show that, in all three generations, males had more miscues than females. However, it

was only the first-generation informants' results that showed a significant difference ($p=0.001$).

The results of the first-generation Finnish-Australian informants showed no evident patterns when the informants' miscues were tabulated in descending order according to age. No other statistical procedures were carried out.

TABLE 7. First-generation informants by age with number of miscues.

Informant	Age	Number of miscues
1A33F	69	3
1A43M	67	9
1A1F	66	2
1A2M	66	13
1A5M	66	5
1A7M	65	7
1A8F	64	5
1A3F	63	7
1A11F	55	3
1A15M	53	9

Table 8 shows the miscues of the second-generation Finnish-Australians according to the descending order of age of the informant. As is evident in this table, there were no patterns that formed when the miscues were counted according to age.

TABLE 8. Second-generation informants by age with number of miscues.

Informant	Age	Number of miscues
1B24	46	1
1B30	41	0
1B9	30	1
1B15	29	0
1B18	29	2
1B14	28	2
1B21	26	0
1B2	26	1
1B8	22	0
1B16	21	1

As shown in Table 9, the results of the third-generation Finnish-Australian informants present no evident patterns when the miscues were tabulated according to age.

TABLE 9. Third-generation informants by age with number of miscues.

Informant	Age	Number of miscues
2F2AJ	56	0
2M4TL	52	1
2F5MO	39	0
2M1PA	34	4
2F4HA	31	3
2M3WS	26	0
2M2EI	26	1
2F1AK	26	0
2M5AR	24	1
2F3TV	23	2

The results of the miscues according to age show no patterns within the generations. However, it is evident that there is a pattern when the overall results are examined across the generations. There are fewer miscues in the second and third generation than in the first generation. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In my initial analysis of the oral-reading miscues of three generations of Finnish-Australian informants, I applied three sections of Cambourne's (1976–1977: 621) proposals based on Goodman's (1969) categories of miscues. Goodman suggested that, in almost all circumstances, oral reading has miscues. This was also evident in the present study, as almost all readings that I analyzed had miscues to some extent. Nevertheless, the interesting fact in this study is the number and type of miscues that were produced. I had suspected that the oral-reading miscues found in

the performance of three generations of Finnish-Australian informants would be influenced by sociolinguistic factors such as gender and age. Preliminary findings of this study suggest that the type and number of miscues varied according to gender within the first generation and according to age across the generations.

When the issue of gender influence on language choice and language use is examined, unexpected findings emerge. The results of the first-generation informants show that there is a significant difference ($p=0.001$) between the number of miscues by males and the number of miscues by females. Male informants of the first generation had 43 miscues and female informants had 20 miscues. Based on the assumption that males would more quickly acquire the dominant language, I had expected that the number of miscues by males would be less than that by females. The second-generation Finnish-Australian male informants had 7 miscues, while there was only 1 miscue by a female. The difference between the number of miscues by males and the number of miscues by females is not significant ($p=0.072$). The third-generation informants show no significant difference according to gender ($p=0.786$). Third-generation males had 7 miscues and the females had 5 miscues. In order to account for these findings, we should look more closely at the task of oral reading in relation to the informants' environment.

Due to the social environment of the first-generation Finnish-Australian immigrants of this study, and considering the general trends of the times, almost all men were working outside of the home and almost all women were working at home. This meant, of course, that it was the women who were most often with the children. It is possible that the first-generation women read aloud to their children during the years before the children began school and even after they were in school. In addition, it is most probable that the women, rather than the men, were more involved with the schoolwork that the children brought home. This, naturally, would lead to a situation in which the children read aloud to their mother. With this in mind, we can suggest that perhaps the female informants

of this study were more ‘practiced’ in the art of reading aloud and, for this reason, performed better. It is also possible that the education of the informants differed greatly. More investigations into these areas would be needed before any definite conclusions can be made concerning the influence that gender plays in this type of study.

Although no evident patterns emerged within the generations when the miscues were counted according to age, the difference between the generations was clearly visible. According to the reading-aloud test in English and the subsequent search for miscues, the results seem to indicate that the first-generation Finnish immigrant informants differ from the second and third generations in terms of linguistic choice and language use. There is a significant difference in the total number of miscues when all three generations are compared ($p < 0.001$). When the total number of miscues for the second and third generations are compared, the difference is not significant ($p < 1$). A closer look at the type of miscue most prevalent in this study will exemplify these generation differences.

In this study, articles were the most challenging for the informants of all three generations. In particular, the omission of an article was a typical form of miscue for many of the informants. Article omission in the first-generation Australian informants’ readings of the text ranged from one omission to twelve omissions, with seven of the ten informants omitting at least one article. In the second generation, two informants omitted an article, and there were no omissions from the third-generation informants. Some of the article omissions of the first-generation informants were:

The little girl and =q/ wolf.
...disappeared into =q/ wood.
...when =q/ little girl...

These types of omissions, unique to the first-generation informants, result in a form that is grammatically incorrect. In addition, this type of miscue is one which native English speakers would most likely correct immediately. It is not surprising that articles were a

major problem for the first-generation informants. Many experts, among them Sajavaara (1983: 72–87) and Chesterman (1991: 90–109), have pointed out particular problems that Finnish speakers have with articles.

It is interesting to note that the second- and third-generation informants have, altogether, only two omissions of articles. Both of these omissions result in an ungrammatical form and cannot satisfactorily be accounted for without more sophisticated technical listening devices. It is possible that a contracted form is present but undetectable with normal listening devices. More detailed investigation would be necessary to account for these exceptions.

In conclusion, it is evident that more research is needed in order to supplement the findings of this study of oral-reading miscues of Finnish-Australian informants. In addition to the socio-linguistic aspects of gender and age, it would be beneficial to include other factors, such as social networks and education, that may influence language choice and language use. It seems clear that education plays a major role in this type of reading-aloud exercise and has contributed to the ease and proficiency with which the more educated informants read. Reading aloud in English is a skill that most informants who have been educated in the English-language school system have learned in school. On the other hand, those who have not been in this system have probably not had access to such training. As we have seen, age does not seem to play an important role in this type of reading-aloud exercise. The results show that there were no patterns which emerged from the number of miscues in relation to the age of the informant. Those patterns which emerged across the generations may be due to Finnish-language influence or length of stay in Australia rather than the age of the informant. It is clear that socio-linguistic factors contribute to the language choice and language use of an informant in a complex manner and should be researched on several levels. The approach used in this study is a good starting point for a more in-depth investigation.

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