The process of disentangling language transfer, innovation, and sociolinguistic variation is complicated by independent cross-linguistic tendencies and universal processes. How is a comparison of non-native speaker variation with native speaker variation to determine where differences between the two groups come from?

Our research is based on a corpus of c.200,000 words of read and conversational speech recorded with Polish teenagers who have migrated to Britain with their families and their locally-born peers in London and Edinburgh. We consider the variation observed with the (ing) variable- the alternation between apical and velar nasals in words like morning and choosing. This variable is well-studied for a number of varieties of English and the major constraints for native speakers are considered to be well-known. Previous work (Schleef et al. 2011) showed that Polish teenagers acquiring this variation in their English have some success in matching the constraints on (ing) in the speech of their locally born peers, but also failure to match native speaker constraint rankings entirely (cf. Mougeon et al. 2004).

The data suggests that there are strong L1 influences on the Polish teenagers' production of this variable. About 25% of all tokens of (ing) are with a stop-reinforced variant [ŋk], which is what Polish requires for a coda velar nasal. However, in this paper, we consider the possibility of L1 transfer effects on the constraints on (ing) in more detail. Polish has variable patterns of nasal assimilation which are triggered before [+continuant] segments and we consider whether this variable L1 constraint affects the production of nasal (ing) in the L2. We find evidence that the L1 constraints do continue to play a role on the realisation of (ing). That is, in addition to acquiring the linguistic constraints on (ing) of the native speakers, the Polish teenagers seem to draw on constraints from Polish. However, the story is more complex still. When we examined the alternation between [m] and [ŋ] in the native speaker population s, we found that some native speakers show an effect for a following [+continuant] segment too, a constraint hitherto unexplored for English (ing).

These results demonstrate that it is important (i) to consider constraints in the target variable and similar variables in the L1 when looking at how variables are shaped in emerging, ethnic varieties, and (ii) to consider the possibility that cross-linguistic universals play a role. Our findings show that by looking at the emerging English norms of Polish migrant teens, we may learn more about the nature of even a well-documented variable in English native speakers.