**A(nother) day in the life of a purist**

**Anglicisms in the speech of Norwegian University Students**

**ABSTRACT**: This sociolinguistic study analyses the motivations behind the use of English loanwords and phrases, so-called “anglicisms”, in the everyday speech of Norwegian university students. In a duplication of an experiment originally carried out in Hong Kong by Li and Tse (2002), twelve students from a Norwegian university were asked (1) not to speak any English whatsoever for a 24-hour period, (2) to record in language diaries examples of the English words they had been obliged to avoid, and (3) to participate in a focus-group discussion after the experiment was over. The results reveal that all the students had difficulty avoiding English during the period. Through an analysis of the language diaries and the focus group discussion, a list of factors that motivated the use of anglicisms was drawn up. The results from the present study are compared and contrasted with those of the original Hong Kong study, revealing similar motivations for the use of anglicisms, but also differences in the linguistic registers in which they occurred. These patterns can be explained, in part, with reference to how the English language has been socio-historically embedded in Norway and Hong Kong respectively. The results of the experiment are used to refine the motivations underlying the use of anglicisms as identified by Rosenhouse and Kowner (2008), and to sophisticate student understanding of the debate over language purism in Norwegian society.

**ENGLISH IN ITS GLOBAL CONTEXTS**

The influence of the English language at the global level is unparalleled from both historical and contemporary perspectives. English is the undisputed language of diplomacy, science & technology, and popular culture, as well as being the first truly global *lingua franca* (Crystal 2003). An entire sociolinguistic field of enquiry, World Englishes, has emerged over the past 40 years to examine how and why English has attained its current position, and the consequences this has had both for the language itself, and for the languages with which it has come into contact.

Much of the work within World Englishes has investigated the sociolinguistic contexts under which different dialects or “varieties” of English have emerged, as well as the distinctive linguistic features of these varieties. Perhaps the most famous taxonomy of English usage remains Braj Kachru’s (1992) Three Circles Model, which posits that “Englishes” can be separated out into three broad categories based on sets of shared societal characteristics. The so-called Inner Circle includes countries such as the UK, the US and Australia etc. where English is spoken as a native language by the majority of inhabitants. The Outer Circle, by contrast, comprises countries that are typically former colonies of English-speaking powers, such as India, Kenya and the Philippines, where English has often been made an official language, and where it may serve as a link language between speakers from different geographical regions or ethnicities. The Expanding Circle refers to the rest of the world, which has no experience of British or American colonization, and where English is used primarily as a lingua franca with foreigners, often in the context of business and/or tourism.

Although work within a variety-based paradigm continues (Schneider 2007), the study of English in its global contexts has also diversified considerably. The importance attached to knowledge of English has spurred research into how it should be taught to non-native speakers, a pedagogical subfield known variously as English Language Teaching (ELT) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Alongside this applied perspective, the study of language contact has been fruitfully researched in Outer-Circle countries where English has been introduced through colonialism. This research is multi-faceted, reflecting approaches that highlight the importance of identity in language mixing (Le Page and Tabouret Keller 1985); the social motivations that underlie this mixing (Myers-Scotton 1993a); and also the grammatical constraints on how it is realized (Myers-Scotton 1993b).

Despite the abundant academic interest in English, its prominence on the world stage has not been without controversy. While Braj Kachru, the founder of the modern field of World Englishes, celebrated the language’s dissemination and diversification, other scholars have also highlighted the destruction of local languages that contact with English speakers has brought (Crystal 2002; Nettle & Romaine 2000). Robert Phillipson (1992, 2003) has been perhaps the loudest critic of the hegemonic status of English, claiming it has been achieved by the “linguistic imperialism” of Britain and America, countries, he believes, that have intentionally subordinated other languages, voices and cultures to the advantage of their own monolingual English-speaking citizens. While such claims have been disputed (Spolsky 2004), they nevertheless chime with the concerns of various national language academies, as well as individual speakers. Such concerns centre not only on the hegemonic status of English, but also on the way in which Anglo-American cultural influence has led to the widespread diffusion of English lexical borrowings, or “anglicisms” (see Terminology, below), throughout the languages of the world.

The concern over the spread of anglicisms is a modern-day manifestation of “linguistic purism”, an age-old phenomenon which Trask (1999: 254) defines as “[t]he belief that words (and other linguistic features) of foreign origin are a kind of contamination sullying the purity of a language” (see also Langer and Nesse 2012). The borrowing of vocabulary from one language to another is, in fact, as old as antiquity, as are the often polarized opinions that this phenomenon engenders. Although the Roman philosopher and orator Cicero was apt to use Greek words in his Latin correspondence, he was aware that the practice was stigmatized, and thus made sure to condemn it in his treatise on ethics, “for we ought to employ our mother-tongue, in case, like certain people who are continually dragging in Greek words, we attract well-deserved ridicule” (*De Officiis* 1.111, in Mullen 2015). The 18th century German writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, took the opposite view, famously inveighing against “negative purism decreeing that we should banish a foreign word which expresses a great deal or what is more subtle” (Hutchinson 1998). Personal opinion (or conviction) aside, it is a *fait accompli* that all languages throughout human history have come into contact with, and thus borrowed from, other languages – especially in situations where one group of speakers exerts significant cultural influence on another (Thomason and Kaufman 1988). The spread of English words is, in this respect, merely the most recent example of this phenomenon, even if the scale of its influence is historically unprecedented. It is against this broad historical and contemporary backdrop that the present study of anglicisms in Norwegian speech is situated.

**THE SCANDINAVIAN CONTEXT**

Scandinavia is in an ambivalent position with regards to the English language. On the one hand, the countries of Norway, Denmark and Sweden have never been colonized by an English-speaking country, and English serves no formal intra-national function within their borders. They should therefore slot unproblematically into the “Expanding Circle” of Kachru’s model, which also includes countries such as Japan, China, Thailand, Argentina, Russia and most of the European nations. On the other hand, Scandinavia has also embraced English perhaps more closely than any other region in the world. This is most clearly apparent in the strong English language skills of its citizens, as shown in the 2016 ranking of countries by English proficiency, where Scandinavia and the Netherlands occupy the top four global positions (EF English Proficiency Index 2016).

Such high levels of English proficiency have emerged from a complex series of inter-related factors. As members of the Germanic branch of Indo-European, the Scandinavian languages, like Dutch, have strong linguistic similarities with English. This affords a decisive advantage for Scandinavian learners of English who are further spurred by a strong cultural affinity with English-speaking countries. Such an affinity has deep roots in history, from the Viking era when much of Britain and Ireland were colonized by Norsemen; to the waves of American migration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; and partnership with the Allied Powers in World War II. By some estimates, there are just under the same number of Americans of Norwegian ancestry (4.5 million) as there are present-day Norwegian citizens (United States Census Bureau 2015). These cultural connections are reinforced through the widespread consumption of Anglophone film and television (Hult 2010), transmitted in the original version with subtitling in the respective local language. Indeed, this latter point distinguishes Scandinavia from other Germanic-speaking countries such as Germany and Austria, where English-language media is customarily dubbed into German, and where English-language proficiency is lower and less widespread. German speakers also have less need to rely on English-language media given the size of their speech community, which totals around 100 million speakers. The Scandinavian speech community, by contrast, amounts to only 20 million, which makes knowledge of English vital for communicating with a wider range of people.

As we will see, the combination of Scandinavia’s relatively small population and its high English-proficiency skills means that international business may be relatively less motivated to translate material from English into the respective local languages. Scandinavian businesses and universities have adapted to this fact, and even perhaps encouraged it by consciously co-opting English in local domains in order to compete globally (Gunnarsson 2012, Mortensen et al. 2008, Hultgren et al. 2014). These trends have naturally led to concerns that the spread and influence of English are displacing local languages. Such worries are expressed not only by politicians and journalists, but also in scholarly literature. Brunstad (2001) examines the effect that anglicisms are having on the Norwegian lexicon. Ljosland (2007) discusses how Norwegian is increasingly subject to domain loss (especially in higher education), a process by which a given language is used in increasingly fewer institutional or societal contexts. The project *Modern Loanwords in the Language of the Nordic Countries* (MIN) has added gradation to this particular debate by comparing how individual countries within the Nordic region (which also includes Finland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands) orientate themselves towards the use of anglicisms in written language. Results from this study, which were published in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (2010, issue 204), showed considerable variation across the region, with Denmark more readily embracing the adoption of anglicisms, while Iceland and Finland proved to be far more resistant.

With the exception of a number of interesting graduate theses on the subject (Johannessen 2014, Andersen 2007, Lea 2009), it is clear that Scandinavian scholars have paid less attention to anglicisms in everyday speech, and rather more to their influence on the written languages of the region (an observation also made by Sharp 2007). Alongside the *MIN* project, other analyses have focused on registers of language that are most likely to incorporate anglicisms (Johansson and Graedler 2002, Hultgren 2013), or the degree of morphological and semantic integration that a given anglicism may undergo (Graedler 2012). Dictionaries of anglicisms have also been compiled for the Scandinavian languages (Seltén 1993, Sørensen 1997, Graedler and Johansson 1997), some of which have contributed to similar dictionaries at the European level (Görlach 2001).

The present study represents, in one respect, an attempt to rebalance the present emphasis on writing by focusing on anglicisms in conversation; in this case, the speech patterns of Norwegian university students. In an attempt to sophisticate the debate over language purism, it was crucial to explore the motivations underlying why English loanwords are used. This is because there is a widespread belief that they might be avoided simply if individuals made more effort to do so. As we will see, this is shown to be a simplistic assumption when motivational factors are more fully explored. A somewhat unusual methodology drawn from a sociolinguistic experiment in Hong Kong (Li and Tse 2002), was duplicated for this precise purpose (see Methodology below). The methodological parallel between these two studies also provided a clear opportunity to compare and contrast results across the respective speech communities.

Hong Kong and Norway are not an obvious comparison. Hong Kong is a former British colony (comprising 7 million inhabitants) and thus belongs in the Outer Circle of World Englishes. Although Outer Circle societies have typically absorbed a great deal of English usage, Hong Kong is atypical, and has traits which are more in keeping with the Expanding Circle. Even at the time of the initial experiment, reported in Li and Tse (2002), English proficiency levels in Hong Kong were, from a global perspective, only middling. Moreover, while English was, and still is, an official language of this Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, it is not used as an intra-ethnic means of communication among Hong Kong Chinese. A Hong Kong identity is expressed more obviously through the vibrant local Cantonese culture and language. English tends rather to be used more as a result of situational factors, typically in the contexts of business and tourism, though it is used in some English-medium secondary schools, as well as at the tertiary level. This sociolinguistic context contrasts with Norway quite markedly. If Hong Kong is an Outer Circle country that leans towards the Expanding Circle, Norway is an Expanding Circle that leans towards the Outer Circle. English is not an official language within Norway, nor does it serve a communicative function between Norwegian citizens (though there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that English is being used increasingly as an intra-regional, Scandinavian lingua franca). That being said, English proficiency levels are far higher than those in Hong Kong, and as we have seen Anglo-American culture is deeply embedded in Norwegian society and culture.

It is perhaps because of the marked differences between these two communities that a comparison between them is so compelling. Such an approach has a precedent in Drange’s (2009) fascinating comparison of anglicisms in the youth language of Chile and Norway. It also chimes with wider sociolinguistic scholarship that emphasizes, amongst other things, how English is adopted and adapted differently by various speech communities throughout the world, and how this adaptation is bound up with processes of globalization (Blommaert 2010). The section ‘Contrasting Communities’, below, will therefore explicitly compare the findings from the present study with those of the original in order to shed light on what these two communities have in common, and where they differ.

**METHODOLOGY**

Twelve undergraduate university students at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) volunteered to spend a total of 24 hours without using any English whatsoever (note that this period excluded periods of sleep, and so effectively amounted to two consecutive days). During this period, they were obliged to keep a language diary in which they noted down the occasions when they had to stop themselves using English; how they compensated for this with Norwegian; the reactions of their interlocutors (whose age and relationship to the participant were also recorded); and any other relevant observations. A paper language diary, based on the original experiment in Li and Tse (ibid.), was drawn up to this end for participant use. Shortly after the experiment had ended, the participants were randomly divided into two focus groups (mostly determined by the students’ own schedules and availability). These focus groups then met to talk about their experiences during the experiment, and to consider specific points raised by the research assistant who was leading the discussion. The language diaries were subsequently collected, and the focus group discussions, which each lasted just over an hour, were transcribed, and checked for accuracy. The discussions took place in Norwegian to ensure that participants could express themselves as freely as possible.

The twelve undergraduate students (6M/6F) were all in their late teens or early 20s. They were drawn from a variety of subject disciplines, but most were part of the Faculty of Humanities. None of the participants had specifically studied anglicisms before, though some were studying for a BA in English language and literature, and were therefore aware of language contact as a concept. This did not, in the end, prove to be significant during the focus group discussions. No formal tests were conducted to assess English proficiency, but high levels of bilingualism can be assumed given that all Norwegian secondary-school students are required to pass an English exam, broadly equivalent to level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), to attend university.

As Li and Tse (2002, 151) note, two hypotheses are implicit in the methodological design of the study. First, it is assumed that Norwegian speakers, like their peers in Hong Kong, would be inconvenienced by having to avoid English lexis in an artificial manner, especially – as we will see – in interactions with friends and peers. The second implicit hypothesis is that the language diaries, along with the focus group sessions, would be useful in teasing out why in specific contexts English words and phrases were preferred, and why Norwegian was dispreferred.

A key characteristic of this study is that, aside from the focus sessions, no conversational data were actually recorded. The data from the study comprise, instead, anglicisms that participants *avoided* because they were deemed to count as “English” by the participants themselves. Such an approach, which taps into the metalinguistic awareness of speakers, is unusual in sociolinguistics, though it has been used extensively since the 1980s in psycholinguistic and SLA research in the form of “think-aloud protocols” (Dechert and Sandrock 1986). There are decisive advantages to any such participant-centred methodology. In the present study, it facilitated an exploration of how conscious speakers were of their own use of anglicisms; how they evaluated this behaviour; and what motivated them to use a given anglicism in a given moment or situation. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this study also served an important pedagogical function. Many of the assumptions that the participants had about their language behaviour came to be challenged by their language diaries and the subsequent focus-group discussions. The participants were also forced into a far more critical perspective on the desirability and feasibility of linguistic purism. In this respect, the present paper is not just a summation of these points, but also a pedagogical tool that will benefit future students and teachers. Indeed, the fact that the experimental setup itself requires no specialist equipment invites its future replication, adaptation and extension.

Despite the manifest advantages of this experimental design, the obvious limitations must also be acknowledged. Effacing the analyst’s perspective in favour of the speaker’s places a number of limits on what this study can justifiably say about the use of anglicisms in a Norwegian context. The data do not allow us, for example, to distinguish between established phonetically adapted loanwords and non-adapted recent borrowings, let alone contribute to even finer-grained distinctions, such as the direct hybrid borrowings or the indirect calque loan renditions described by Furiassi et al. (2012, 5ff). The experimental design also inevitably raises familiar questions about the methodological validity of self-reports. Myers-Scotton (1997, 218) notes that there is a “distrust of self-reports” when it comes to language mixing. This is, as Gardner-Chloros (2009, 15) describes, because speakers’ “level of awareness of their *own* [language mixing] behaviour seems to lag far behind their practice.” In other words, people who are inveterate language mixers may not necessarily be aware of this fact, and may even deny it entirely. In practice, this means that the data from this study cannot be used on their own to make quantitative assessments of how much Norwegians use anglicisms in their speech, as the participants may simply not have recorded all instances of when this occurred, or even been consistent in their judgements of what constitutes an anglicism.

**TERMINOLOGY**

As Clyne (2003) notes, within (socio)linguistics, the terminology surrounding the mixing of languages is particularly “troublesome”. Different writers mean different things when they refer to “code-switching”, “code-mixing”, “code alternation”, “language mixing”, “mixed code” and “(nonce) borrowing” (see ibid., 70-73). Eastman (1992, 1) concludes that efforts to distinguish between them “are doomed.”

The way certain Norwegians use English is especially tricky to capture in shorthand. It typically involves the insertion of single English words or small phrases, which may or may not be adapted to Norwegian phonetic and/or morphosyntactic norms. This means that the term “switching”, which implies alternation between longer constituents (Gardner-Chloros 2009, 11), feels somewhat inaccurate for a Norwegian context. An important aim of the study, namely to counterbalance an analyst-centred perspective, further complicates matters as terms such as “code-switching”, “code-mixing” and “code alternation” are often associated with the theoretical frameworks developed by specific scholars. Sharp (2007), whose article on the use of anglicisms in Swedish will be a useful point of comparison, uses the slightly more neutral “language mixing.” Unfortunately, “language mixing” also entails a break with the description of Li and Tse’s (2002) original experiment where the preferred term is, following Auer (1995), “code alternation.”

The term “anglicism” has been favoured in this study, though it also has its own shortcomings. On the one hand, it has the advantage of being language-specific, with the explicit meaning of “English lexis” or “English loanwords” while avoiding the rather more cumbersome form of these variants. The use of the term “anglicism” also connects the discussions in this paper with a body of literature that explicitly examines the effects of the spread of English lexis spread throughout the world (Rosenhouse and Kowner 2008). This term would therefore seem to be a particularly appropriate description for a study which compares two distinct speech communities. On the other hand, “anglicisms” as a term refers to the lexical items themselves, rather than the various processes through which they have come to be adopted by Norwegian speakers. This is a significant drawback in the context of this article which also examines such processes.

Pre-existing definitions may further muddy the water. Görlach (2001:1) defines an anglicism as “a word or idiom that is recognizably English in its form (spelling, pronunciation, morphology, or at least one of the three), but is accepted as an item in the vocabulary of the receptor language.” The emphasis on recognition is certainly in tune with the methodological design of the experiment, which is based around participants’ perceptions. Nevertheless, while English usage in Norwegian is indeed most clearly manifest in the form of small words and phrases, it also includes significantly longer constituents – often quotations from popular media. How suitable the term “anglicism” is as a description of these longer constituents is open to question. Moreover, Görlach’s definition explicitly lays stress on anglicisms being “accepted” as items within the receptor language. Again, this is problematic as the present study points to considerable variation in the use and acceptance of English lexical items within Norwegian.

It is clear that no single term will ever be fully accurate or appropriate. As such, “anglicisms” and, where necessary, “language mixing” (from here on “LM”) will be used here *faute de mieux*. As we will see, what exactly constitutes language mixing was enthusiastically explored by participants, and it is ultimately this discussion, rather than a terminological debate, that is of interest.

**NORWEGIAN-ENGLISH LM AND ITS MOTIVATIONS**

Despite the methodological caveats outlined above, a key finding from the data in the language diaries is that they appear to tally with existing studies of Scandinavian-English LM. One particularly striking feature of this research is how comparatively *little* Norwegian students make use of anglicisms. Graedler (2012) notes how public opinion tends to exaggerate the impact of English. She cites, for example, a newspaper article in which some Norwegian university students claim that approximately 50% of the language they use when communicating with each other is English. Lea (2009) provides evidence that would seem to justify Graedler’s scepticism, using data drawn from a corpus of everyday Norwegian speech that contained a very low proportion of anglicisms. In the present study, 9/12 participants recorded avoiding only 10-15 novel anglicisms for the 24 hour period; the minimum number was 5, and the maximum was 25. On occasion, certain participants would write that they had to refrain from using words such as “okay”, for example, on a number of occasions. As noted above, these data cannot be taken as an absolute quantitative statement of the total number of anglicisms used in the course of the 24 hours. They do, however, suggest that most participants had to avoid a comparatively small number of words which they would otherwise have used on multiple occasions.

The data from the language diaries also support the findings from studies of recorded Norwegian-English LM (Johannessen 2014), which show that language mixing in Norway tends to involve small English constituents. Just under half the items in the language diaries could be characterized as conventionalized phrases and hedges; exclamations, interjections and questions; and, less commonly, discourse markers. This suggests that many of the English words and multi-morphemic “chunks” (Backus 2003) that comprise Norwegian-English LM are, at least among students, quite formulaic in nature. Table 1 presents items falling into these categories as attested by at least 4 participants.

**-- Table 1 to be inserted here** –

Even though Sharp (2007) focuses on English LM in Sweden, many of the items from this Norwegian study were also uttered by the group of young Swedish reality-TV participants in her study. This suggests, firstly, that this type of formulaic LM is not confined to students, but is to be found more generally in youth language, and most probably throughout wider Scandinavian society. Secondly, it suggests that Norwegian young people use LM, as we might predict, in a similar manner to their Swedish peers. The MIN project referred to above strongly suggests the same behaviour would apply to young Danes, though not necessarily to speakers from Finland and Iceland, who were shown to have more puristic tendencies. In all cases, it should be stressed that many of these anglicisms have not displaced, but rather co-exist with, local equivalents. Their usage is, therefore, as Sharp (ibid., 238) notes, difficult to account for, though it may be related to a form of verbal playfulness; a point we shall return to later.

The items in Table 1 appear to constitute the core of English usage; in other words, they are those anglicisms that young speakers are most likely to have in common, and use most often. There was, however, a similarly-sized group of items each of which was avoided by only one single participant. This suggests, at first glance, these items might be characterized by their unpredictability or ‘one-offness’, a type of borrowing which would appear to correspond to Grosjean’s (1985) “idiosyncratic loans.” As we will see from the focus group interviews (below), however, this is where an analysis of the language diaries on their own can be misleading. Merely because an item was avoided by only one participant does not mean that the LM in that instance is necessarily idiosyncratic; it may instead simply point to the fact that specific items are low-frequency. This is the case with the anglicism “stalker”, for example, which only one participant noted avoiding, and yet which was described in a focus group as having wide currency among Norwegian speakers.

Irrespective of how ‘one-off’ a given anglicism is, the language diaries nonetheless allow us to explore how participants used Norwegian to compensate for the ban on English during this experiment. By attending to this fact, it is possible to determine a number of – often interlinked – motivations for the use of Norwegian-English LM. With particular reference to the language diaries, supplemented where necessary with focus group discussion, a series of motivations have been stratified out, and represented in Table 2, below.

**-- Table 2 to be inserted here –**

Weinreich (1953) claimed that “lexical need” is the prime motivator for borrowing words from one language and incorporating them into another. There is certainly evidence of this motivation in the present study, though it is not as simple a category as Weinreich suggests, nor as comprehensive an explanation. In the present study, there was only a small minority of words that were pure instances of lexical need, where participants could not find a serviceable Norwegian substitute. Some examples include: “date” (as in ‘romantic meeting’), “design” (as applied to technology) and “donut.”

More common were instances of lexical need when the anglicism appears to have been selected on the basis of semantic appropriateness, often by adding specific detail that a corresponding Norwegian translation lacked[[1]](#footnote-1). This can be illustrated with reference to two examples. While speaking with a friend, one participant wanted to explain how participating in the current project would earn him “brownie points”, which clearly carries positive associations. Such associations were lost, however, in the participant’s translation *smiskepoeng*, which is distinctly negative in tone. Another participant noted avoiding the phrase “man crush” – a feeling of non-sexual attraction felt by one heterosexual man for another. This was replaced with the more literal native Norwegian term *mannekjærlighet*. Interestingly, however, the interlocutor appears to have understood the speaker’s intended meaning, which suggests that conversational context did indeed help to disambiguate otherwise marked and potentially confusing vocabulary choices.

A second motivation for using English would appear to be that a given English constituent is shorter and/or cognitively easier to process. This is indeed what one participant claimed when he wanted to use the word “smooth” to describe whisky, rather than the Norwegian set phrase *rund og mild*. On a number of occasions, though, lexical need and the principle of economy jointly motivated the intention to use a specific anglicism. One participant reported avoiding the verb “nail” in its proverbial sense of ‘to accomplish perfectly’, with reference to an assignment he wished to complete. This verb is commonly adapted to Norwegian phonetic and morphosyntactic norms. Thus the sentence he avoided was: *Jeg kommer til å naile den*[[2]](#footnote-2), which was replaced with: *Jeg kommer til å gjøre den ganske lett!* In this particular example, the use of an adverb adds to the cognitive load of the sentence, while the meaning itself only relates to the speaker’s ability to achieve his goal, thus missing out on the faultless execution that ‘nailing’ something implies. A more conventional way of expressing this in Norwegian would have been: *Dette kommer til å bli plankekjøring*, though Norwegian grammar here demands an impersonal subject, which would require sacrificing the agentive emphasis (“*I’m* going to nail it”).

On numerous occasions, students reported having to avoid anglicisms which actually had cognates or close equivalents in Norwegian, including: “tax” [*avgift*], “basketball” [*kurvball*], “sociolinguistics” [*sosiolingvistikk*], “[internet] link” [*lenke*], and “Scottish referendum” [*den skotske folkeavstemningen*]. Neither lexical need nor cognitive load can be invoked as an explanation in these cases. It appears, instead, that these items were contextually connected with domains associated with English. This is transparently the case with “sociolinguistics” (given that some students had been studying this subject in English), “basketball” (the Norwegian equivalent for which is also considered old-fashioned), “[internet] link” and “the Scottish referendum”, yet rather less so with “tax”, which one participant actually noted down in her diary after comparing the price of alcohol abroad with that sold in Norway.

A related motivation was when some participants noted difficulty avoiding anglicisms because the activities they were engaged in at the time were already suffused with English terminology (an effect also noted by Johansson and Graedler 2002 in their corpus study of Norwegian newspaper articles). One participant, a fitness and weight-training enthusiast, noted in his language diary that he was obliged to invent Norwegian names for specific exercises he only knew in English, such as “skullcrusher”. Another participant experienced the same problem with climbing-related vocabulary such as “slopers”, “sit-start” and “heel-hook.” At first glance, these might appear to be simple cases of lexical need. However, both participants also report wanting to use English variants even when a Norwegian term was known and available (such as *armbøyer* for “biceps curl”). Collectively, they suggest not just that lexical need may occasion the use of English LM, but that the amount of anglicisms reaches a critical mass, at which point English terminology may be seen as being more appropriate than Norwegian for a given activity, even when equivalent Norwegian terms are available. The use of English LM may thus become self-perpetuating in certain contexts.

The effect described above appears to be amplified in activities which entail regular contact with English speakers, or English-language material such as magazines or websites. As confirmed by the subsequent focus group discussions, gaming culture stands out for two reasons in this respect. Firstly, it is suffused with anglicisms, and takes up a great deal of gamers’ free time, so contact with the language is extensive. Secondly, even when speaking with fellow Norwegians, a gamer’s cognitive effort is directed towards advancing within the game in question, which prioritizes quick reaction speeds. In these circumstances, it appears more likely that vocabulary will be taken up in its original form in order to reduce the cognitive load of translating a given term. Even though English is the lingua-franca of international gaming communities, this effect may be particularly apparent in small-language communities such as Norway, where high proficiency in English and a small consumer base (compared with China, for example) mean that online games are rarely translated. It is therefore no surprise that in the participants’ language diaries, computer- and gaming-related terminology, such as “boost”, “overkill”, “experience point”, were frequently attested, even when equivalent Norwegian terms were theoretically available.

The reactions of the participants’ interlocutors suggest that irrespective of the manner in which an anglicism was introduced, once it is established, the use of a Norwegian back-translation can incur a social or pragmatic cost. On one occasion, a participant replaced the multifunctional British English slang word “random” with the Norwegian *vilkårlig[[3]](#footnote-3)*. This served both to stop the conversation, and led to the participant being teased for being stuffy, and “too proper”. Such reactions were noted on more than one occasion. Avoiding this linguistic cost thus becomes a further motivation for LM. It should be noted, however, that not all items suggested a motivation *per se*. One participant recorded having to avoid the word “dog” without any clearly identifiable reason. On other occasions, there was simply a gap between the Norwegian terminology that was theoretically available to the participants, and the anglicisms that they wanted to use in that particular moment. This phenomenon, which is especially characteristic of spontaneous conversational LM, appears to be most evident with low-frequency items. One participant replaced the term “spectator sport”, for example, with *publikumssport*, because he was unaware of the native Norwegian term *tilskuersport*.

The integration of anglicisms into Norwegian also revealed a series of semantic doublets with distinct, complementary functions. While talking to a friend at a party, for example, one participant replaced “event” with the Norwegian *hending*. Although these are otherwise semantically very similar, the participant wanted specifically to reference an “event” that had been advertised on Facebook using the English term; the use of the Norwegian was therefore deemed “less accurate.”[[4]](#footnote-4) On another occasion, this effect was realized through intonation. In most contexts, the Norwegian interrogative *Hva?* is coextensive with “What?” In English, however, the vowel sound can be lengthened to indicate mock-outrage at a given suggestion or fact (“What?!”) This is not possible with \**Hva?!*, where the vowel-lengthening implies failing to catch a word, or deafness. Although the Norwegian word *Hæ?* can be used to express a similar sense of disbelief or incredulity to “What?!”, it also lacks the latter’s sense of mock-outrage. Although certain dialects of Norwegian may have comparable terms for “What?!” (e.g. *hvafforno?* in East Norwegian), for many Norwegian speakers, “What?!” adds a useful semantic nuance that may help to explain its widespread adoption.

Another motivation apparent in this study was the use of English as a reflexive form of verbal playfulness. To some extent, this helps to explain the use of certain greetings (“Hello!” “Morning!”) and interjections (“Oh my god!”) in Table 1. Although they serve the same function as local equivalents, and are in this sense doublets, these items may also be perceived as humorous or fun, much as the use of well-known French greetings (*Bonjour*!) would be for English speakers. In a Norwegian context, however, this playfulness also extends to longer English constituents, often quotations from films, TV shows and the internet, uttered – according to the focus groups discussions – with deliberately exaggerated English-speaking accents. Sharp (2007, 232) identified the same phenomenon, which she calls the “quoting game”, among some of her Swedish informants. There is often a great deal of humour associated with this particular phenomenon, which comes partly from a speaker’s skill at being able to introduce an apt and well-known quotation at the right point in a conversation, and partly from the performative aspects of accent imitation. Given LM is an inextricable part of the humour, it is no surprise that participants chose to remain silent in conversation rather than back-translate quotations, such as “What say ye?” or “Is this some sort of Christian magic?”, from English-language movies into Norwegian.

The motivations described above are by no means a comprehensive account of Norwegian-English LM. They do, however, suggest a great deal more complexity to these issues than has been discussed with reference to LM in a Norwegian (or Scandinavian) context. Although these motivations have been stratified in Table 2 for the purposes of clarity, this is also potentially misleading. As we have seen, a number of motivations may act in concert to drive the use of specific anglicisms. Moreover, once these items have gained widespread acceptance, they enter into a complex semantic, stylistic and functional dialectic with existing Norwegian terminology. During the focus sessions, the participants not only verbalized their own explanations for the way they used English, they were also usefully able to relate these observations to Norwegian society in general.

**REFLECTIONS ON LANGUAGE MIXING**

The most significant point of agreement that arose among participants during the focus-group sessions was that avoiding English entirely during the 24-hour period was extremely challenging. Although they considered the experience fun and interesting, not using English was also described as difficult and cumbersome; others said it interrupted the flow of conversation, while one participant described herself feeling linguistically handicapped. A number of participants, particularly those who were taking part in activities where anglicisms were commonplace (such as gaming and climbing), admitted that they simply stopped speaking[[5]](#footnote-5) in order to avoid having to find, or invent, appropriate Norwegian terms.

Participants were able to identify specific motivations for using anglicisms, which chimed with results from the language diaries. These included: being unaware of the Norwegian term; the Norwegian being stylistically inappropriate or inaccurate; or the anglicism in question blocking a corresponding Norwegian term (often after a participant had read or watched something in English). The effort to persist with Norwegian often led to results that participants found comical. They frequently elaborated, and laughed at, their ineffective efforts at replacing English with Norwegian terminology. This, in turn, triggered discussions of whether a better Norwegian phrase or expression could be found. While such discussions ultimately confirmed the major hypothesis of the study, namely that students found it unnatural to avoid English, they also added valuable context to the data from the language diaries.

One significant observation was that many participants reported experiencing difficulty determining what exactly constituted an English word or term. Interestingly, common older loanwords, such as derivatives of *å* *jobbe* or *lunsj* (see Stene 1945 for more examples) were not reported in the language diaries, or commented upon during focus group sessions, even though they are likely to have been uttered. Although the phonetic and morphological adaptation of these words to Norwegian norms might have made them less perceptually salient, other more-recently adapted anglicisms, such as *å rage*, *å naile* , *å kicke*, or IT terminology such as *patcher-en*, were explicitly noted as instances where English had been “Norwegianized” [*fornorsket*]. This demonstrates how anglicisms have in fact been sedimented into Norwegian over time, with the most modern imports being the most apparent to speakers, potentially owing to their cultural associations. Indeed, how “English” an anglicism was perceived to be was influenced more by the lexical register it belonged to, rather than its etymological roots. One participant noted, for example, *Jeg gikk så langt at jeg sa «fjernsynsapparat» i stedet for TV*. Although the pronunciation of this abbreviation is invariably Norwegian [‘te:ve], and the etymological roots of “television” are a mixture of Greek and Latin, the word itself was perceived as English[[6]](#footnote-6). This highlights, once again, the crucial role of cultural influence in the transmission of these anglicisms; in this particular case, the pervasive association of technology with English-speaking countries.

The participants’ difficulty in determining what constituted “English” also points to the fact that LM is a graded process rather than a categorical phenomenon. As Langer and Nesse (2012) note, there is a puristic assumption that identifying and eliminating foreign words is simply a question of effective language planning and the operation of a community’s collective willpower. As these participants discovered, however, any attempt to avoid English actually required nuanced linguistic analysis as to whether a given word should or should not count as English. This process of reflection also highlighted for participants how LM is not just a synchronic phenomenon. When asked to consider whether they would mind their future grandchildren using even more English than young people do nowadays, a number of participants responded negatively, claiming that their own perception of what normative LM is would inevitably evolve as they got older, just as it must have done for their parents. They also admitted, however, that their personal views were not necessarily widespread, and were probably at odds with certain puristic viewpoints in the Norwegian media.

When questioned about which groups in Norwegian society were likely to use English more than others, a number of participants referred to predictable demographic categories: younger people, city dwellers and the well-educated. Some of these categories were, however, challenged, and then decomposed into more fundamental differences of ideology and cultural orientation. Although, for instance, there was widespread agreement that younger people were, on average, more likely to integrate anglicisms into Norwegian, exceptions to this trend were also noted. Students who specialized in Nordic languages, for example, were identified as a group that was more local or Norwegian in orientation, and therefore less predisposed to using anglicisms. Although a defining feature of this orientation was perceived to be linguistic conservatism, participants also felt that these students benefited from a wider active Norwegian vocabulary as a result of their studies. This, in turn, meant they were less likely to forget Norwegian words or, indeed, to be reticent about using them, given their friendship circles consisted of like-minded speakers. Gamers were juxtaposed as a group with a highly globalized orientation. They actively sought out social contacts with people from across the world with whom they communicated in English in order to take part in an activity with a common objective. Some participants also believed that the amount of time spent on this activity served to atrophy gamers’ Norwegian vocabulary, and even anglicize their grammar (an avenue for further research).

The participants’ observations collectively suggest that extensive use of anglicisms is not simply a linguistic reflex of the demographic categories (e.g. age, gender and educational background) to which a person belongs. It appears instead to be directly determined by his or her active orientation towards, and participation in, cultural activities with English-language associations. Indeed, such an orientation can be linked directly to many – though admittedly not all – of the motivations for LM outlined in Table 1 (above). Motivation 1, for example, refers to the use of English for lexical need. As we have seen, certain words such as “date”, “design” and “donut”, with which the vast majority of Norwegians would be familiar, fall into this category. However, less common anglicisms, such as “brownie points” or “man love” express subtle semantic nuances that are available only to (often university-educated) Norwegians with the high levels of English proficiency that typically index a positive orientation towards English-speaking cultures. Motivations 3 and 4, whereby LM is triggered either by direct association with the English-speaking world (e.g. “basketball”, “Scottish referendum”) or activities with a strong English-language connection such as gaming, will obviously affect people who have the most contact with those registers of language use. This is also the case with Motivation 8, in which English is used as a form of verbal play, often involving quotations from English-language popular media.

There are, however, important caveats to the emphasis on individual cultural orientation. It cannot account for strictly psycho(linguistic) motivations for LM, such as the principle of economy (Motivation 2), nor the cases where grammatical considerations are important (as in the *naile* example, above); neither does it help to explain intra-individual variation in LM usage. Even though participants unanimously claimed that they found the experiment difficult, this difficulty was not uniform throughout the 24 hour period. Roughly one quarter of the participants reported, for example, speaking to their grandparents during the experiment, yet none of these participants recorded English items during those conversations. This fact was remarked on by the participants, who claimed they did not consciously have to avoid anglicisms when speaking with grandparents, unlike with friends. This suggests some form of subconscious audience design (Bell 1984), manifested partly, perhaps, through the selection of conversational topics that do not appear to trigger English loanwords.

**CONTRASTING COMMUNITIES**

A key question arising from the findings of the study is how generalizable they might be beyond Norway’s borders. In their edited collection *Globally Speaking: Motives for Adopting English Vocabulary*, Rosenhouse and Kowner (2008, 12-13) triangulate three “fundamental” motivations for why a given speech community might make use of anglicisms: (1) the need to coin new terminology and concepts, (2) a tendency to emulate a dominant group, and (3) a tendency to create a special jargon in closed groups. Although the present study confirms there is some truth to these general observations, it also suggests that the motivations underlying LM are significantly more complex. A finer-grained analysis is certainly necessary in order to understand how and why anglicisms are used by individuals and specific groups of speakers in conversational interaction. With this requirement in mind, we will now turn to Rosenhouse and Kowner’s subsequent claim that the “effects” of these motivations “vary in different languages and cultures due to their interaction with other social and political circumstances as well as the character of their relations with English-speaking societies” (ibid.). In order to test this claim, the results from this experiment will be compared with those from the original Hong Kong study in Li and Tse (2002).

Li and Tse (2002) refer to a series of recurrent “themes”, listed in Table (3) below, that repeatedly crop up in the Hong Kong’s participants descriptions of the period when they were obliged to avoid using English.

**-- Table 3 to be inserted here --**

What is immediately striking from these themes are the motivational similarities they bear to the present study. In both cases, participants found eliminating English from their daily lives an onerous activity, not least because it made communication less effective, and reduced semantic precision (Motivation 1, Table 2). This, in turn, led certain participants in both studies to avoid specific topics of conversation altogether. When forced to monitor their LM behaviour, both sets of participants also became aware of how subconscious such behaviour typically is.

Specific observations from Li and Tse (2002) were also echoed in the Norwegian study. In both cases, for example, the use of specific anglicisms was thought to bleach the perlocutionary effect of an utterance (Motivation 9, Table 2). The Hong Kong participants reported wanting to say “sorry” to apologize for causing other people minor inconvenience, while *deoi3 m4-zyu6* was reserved for heartfelt contrition. This also appears to be the case in Norway, where “sorry!” (Table 1) and the Norwegian *beklager* follow a similar pattern for many speakers. Such an effect was also apparent in the use of English swear words, which were perceived to be less taboo than swearing in Cantonese or Norwegian respectively. This bleaching effect was further apparent in displays of affection. In both studies, a single (female) participant reported finding it easier to say “I love you” in English to her partner, than the equivalent phrase in Cantonese or Norwegian (see Dewaele 2008, for an extended discussion of this phenomenon). Although not specifically mentioned in Li and Tse (2002), Li (2002, 91) also mentions the principle of economy (Motivation 2, Table 2) as a motivation for Cantonese-English LM. He illustrates this principle with the example “to check in” which is used in the hospitality industry instead of the more circuitous Cantonese equivalent: “go through the in-stay procedure” (ibid.).

On certain occasions, the same motivation for LM produced quite different results, owing to the socio-historical differences between Norway and Hong Kong. It is clear from Li and Tse (2002), for example, that English had – and still has – an extensive role in the educational system at secondary and tertiary levels. Participants consistently reported finding it difficult to discuss academic subjects without recourse to anglicisms. Although a few, isolated instances of this were noted among the Norwegian participants, the effect was far smaller, and tended to be limited to the English BA participants. This is likely due to the fact that Norwegian is the main language of instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels within Norway[[7]](#footnote-7). The difference between these two communities here can be captured with joint reference to Motivations 3 and 4, Table 2, where English is triggered by reference to a specific domain, or linguistic register. As we have seen, it is popular culture, rather than an academic register of language, that appears to constitute the primary conduit of English-language lexis into Norwegian, a point also noted by Johansson and Graedler (2002).

At the micro-interactional level, it appears that the same linguistic item can arise from different realizations of the same motivation. An example of this is the use of the English word “fan”, in the sense of ‘enthusiast’. As Li (2002, 88) notes, the Cantonese word for “fan” requires a grammatical pre-modifier, which means one must be a “song fan” [*go1 mai4*] or a “film fan” [*jing2 mai4*]. The English word “fan” does not, by contrast require a pre-modifier, which means it provides a useful way of being less semantically specific (Motivation 1, Table 2). In Norway, however, the native Norwegian equivalent, *tilhenger*, is considerably longer than the anglicism in question, which makes grammatical pre-modification long-winded. During one of the feedback sessions, for example, there was great amusement when one participant suggested “X-box *tilhenger*” as a possible substitute for “X-box fan.” The inappropriateness of *tilhenger* is compounded by the fact that its primary sense has come to mean “car-trailer”; insisting on the use of the Norwegian term can therefore be either confusing, or stylistically marked (Motivation 5, Table 2).

Through a comparison of the Norwegian and Hong Kong studies, we find that while the motivations for LM can be remarkably similar, the differences between the two societies at the socio-historical and grammatical levels have resulted in vast differences in precisely which anglicisms are adopted. What further brings out the similarities and differences between these two studies, and the societies they describe, is what happens when speakers are exposed to non-normative forms of LM. As Chen (2008) notes, Cantonese-speakers who mix languages above the clause level are typically Chinese who have been raised as children in English-speaking countries but who have returned to Hong Kong in later life. This atypical mixing style is immediately salient for, and often stigmatized by, born-and-bred Hong Kong people. In the present study, the Norwegian participants were asked how they would feel if they heard two or more Norwegians engage in precisely this type of LM, i.e. one that was not confined to small English constituents, but rather involved, for instance, inter-sentential mixing. This proved to be a difficult concept to grasp, at least initially. Many participants expressed confusion as to why two Norwegians would want to speak in this way. Another common reaction was irritation directed at the perceived indecisiveness of the speech. Eventually, however, examples of this type of LM were connected with specific groups of people, namely: international baccalaureate (IB) students, and Swedish hospitality workers in Oslo. With regards to the former, one participant commented

*Jeg bor sammen med en som har gått IB, og hun og kjæresten de prater fifty-fifty, femti-femti* (laughter) *norsk-engelsk, og det er litt sånn småirriterende egentlig, fordi, jeg vet ikke, jeg vet ikke helt hvordan jeg skal plassere dem. Det er litt sånn, mm. Og sånn, jeg gikk på en skole der de hadde IB og, og da var det veldig sånn at norske studenter, norske elever de bare virkelig la skikkelig om til engelsk og de snakket engelsk med andre norske elever og skikkelig irriterende, egentlig. Alle sammen hatet de jo. De pratet bare engelsk. Selv om de bare* (inaudible) *norske og ikke hadde utenlandske foreldre eller noe som helst.*

(I live with someone who did the IB, and she and her boyfriend they speak "fifty-fifty", fifty-fifty (laughter) Norwegian-English, and that's kind of annoying, actually, because, I don't know, I don't really know how to place them. It's kinda, mm. And like, I went to a school where they also had IB and, and then it was very much like that, that Norwegian students, the Norwegian school students, they really did just switch to English and they spoke English with other Norwegian students and it was really annoying, actually. Everyone hated them. They only spoke English. Even if they only (inaudible) Norwegian and didn't have foreign parents or anything like that.)

Owing to differences in the sociolinguistic histories of these speech communities, Norwegians have less experience with the type of LM that Hong Kong people associate with foreign-born Chinese. Nevertheless, in both places, there appears to be a border-line beyond which English LM is deemed to have gone too far, even for young highly bilingual speakers. Sharp (2007, 233) notes the same reaction in her Swedish informants, quoting Giles *et al’s* (1991, 26)observation that “a move beyond a certain threshold… may be negatively perceived.” This tolerance threshold may help to explain why young Norwegians often quote from popular media using exaggerated English-speaking accents (Motivation 8). To speak with a Norwegian accent would be stigmatized and associated with poor English, but adopting an English or American accent while in conversation with other Norwegians may be perceived as pretentious and/or ethnolinguistically disloyal.

**CONCLUSION**

As with Li and Tse’s (2002) original experiment which explored the LM of young people in Hong Kong, the present study has attempted to give a fuller account of why young people in Norway use anglicisms in their everyday conversation. A non-exhaustive list of motivations has been compiled to this end, though an important caveat to such a list is that a specific anglicism may be driven by more than one motivation operating in concert. Although the distribution of LM throughout Norwegian society has been anecdotally linked to familiar demographic categories such as age, gender and educational background, the present study suggests that cultural orientation may be better at accounting for this distribution. This line of enquiry could be pursued further in analyses of how cultural orientation is realized through “social practice” (Eckert 2000). This is the idea that individuals actively choose to become a part of social groups in which language use, whether multilingual or monolingual, becomes used in a specific, and potentially indexical, manner. The present study suggests that gaming contexts, for example, would provide one such opportunity.

In comparing the present study to Li and Tse’s (2002) original study, it is clear that the two sets of participants shared many motivations for engaging in LM. Nevertheless, the English lexical registers that were most common in the Hong Kong study varied widely from those in the present study. This point was explained, following Rosenhouse and Kowner (2008), with reference to how differently English has been embedded in these two societies. It should, however, be noted that a 14-year gap also separates the two studies. If the Hong Kong study were to be rerun today, the results might be substantially different, firstly because of the rapid growth of the internet, but also because a generation of students has grown up without the experience of British colonial rule.

What has endured in Hong Kong, and what is also present in certain sections of Norwegian society, are puristic attitudes towards language use, specifically with respect to the use of English. The present study is not intended to be political in the sense that it directly advocates for more relaxed attitudes towards LM. It does, however, suggest that recourse to anglicisms appears to allow for more nuanced and efficient communication. The present study clearly shows the difficulty that many young speakers of Norwegian experience when they are deprived of this linguistic resource. In all cases, even though speakers in both Hong Kong and Norway rely on English in a manner which may alarm language purists, more complex forms of Norwegian-English LM that involve intra- and inter-sentential mixing appear to be stigmatized. This testifies to greater ethnolinguistic robustness than is commonly perceived, a point which is clearly shown in the conclusion of one of the focus groups. In response to a discussion of how much English it is acceptable to use, one participant commented:

*Jeg er nå glad i norsk og jeg synes nå man skal holde på norsken, så selv om du har ord og uttrykk på engelsk, så synes jeg du skal hoved, hovedsaklig skal snakke norsk, på en måte. Ja, kan du bli forstått på norsk, så snakker du norsk. Det er ikke noen vits å legge om.*

*Men kodeveksling er greit?*

*(flere sier) Ja*

(I really love Norwegian and I really think one should stick to Norwegian, even if you have words and expressions in English, I think you should main- mainly speak Norwegian, kinda. Yes, if you can be understood in Norwegian, then speak Norwegian. There's no use switching.

But code-switching is ok?

(several people say) Yes.)

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1. This should not be taken as a comment on the size of the Norwegian lexicon. Although not discussed in this study, L1 Norwegian speakers of English face similar challenges expressing themselves when they are confined to using English. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Referring to the masculine noun *oppgave.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Random can occur as an interjection (‘Random!’); an adjective (‘We went to a random party’, ‘The party we went to was totally random’); a noun (There were a bunch of randoms at the party) etc. In this case, the participant wished to use the interjection, and therefore said *vilkårlig*! [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This also reflects the fact that many young Norwegians set English as their preferred language on Facebook. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Further evidence why the language diaries cannot be used as an absolute quantitative statement of the amount of English used on a particular day. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. How poorly etymology serves as a guide to what is perceived as English or Norwegian can also be seen in *fjernsynsapparat*, where the morpheme *apparat* is also from Latin: *apparatus*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. English is, however, making inroads as a medium of instruction, particularly on university science campuses. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)