

Seven factors in ‘dialect’ design

Ever since Chomsky (2005), studies of language development often assume three important factors in language design: (i) the innate endowment for acquiring language, (ii) linguistic experience, (iii) principles of general cognition that are operative in the course of development. Despite their universality, these factors do not capture the many faces variation can acquire. Language is not a homogeneous or fixed entity, detached from social influences (Cornips 2015). Chomsky’s idealized picture of a “completely homogeneous speech community” (1965: 3) and the conception of an “ideal speaker-listener [...] who knows its language perfectly” (1965: 3) does not fully capture the existing patterns of variation *within* linguistic communities. Different trajectories endow the acquisition process with unique features that leave their footprint on the ultimate attainment. In this context, the aim of this work is to identify the key factors that are of interest when one describes the ‘dialect’ design, especially in cases this involves non-standard/-codified varieties.

1. *The emergence of mesolectal varieties.* When the developmental trajectory involves two proximal varieties, the discreteness among variants fades away by the emergence of intermediate speech repertoires (Cornips 2006). The unclear dividing lines among the various ‘lects’ that exist on the standard-dialect continuum blur the boundaries of variants. This results to grammatical hybridity attested in the form of utterances that may incorporate elements from various lects without code-switching being in place (Henry 2005, Cornips 2006, Tsiplakou et al. 2016).

2. *Functionally equivalent variants within an individual’s repertoire.* The integration of grammatical variants that pertain to different lects may give rise to hybrid variety that involves doublets of equivalent forms or constructions (functionally equivalent variants; Kroch 1994) that have the exact same function, but are grammatically incompatible. For example, the mesolectal varieties on the Standard Greek-Cypriot Greek continuum involve such doublets, the variants of which originally come from the different poles of the continuum (Leivada et al. 2017a).

3. *The two-way competition: grammars and motivations.* Competing grammars are the result of speakers’ effort to parse ambiguous input through projecting various grammars (Kroch 1994). In proximal varieties, the attested overlap entails that input is partially ambiguous in terms of which variety it belongs to. Studies in ‘dialect’ development have thus shown that bilectal speakers are less efficient than their monolinguals peers in spotting the variety to which a grammatical variant pertains, even if this variant is part of their native repertoire (Leivada et al. 2017b). Moreover, given the sociolinguistic implications that often characterize non-standard dialects, competing motivations arise depending on the level of proximity existing between the home variety and the standard variety (Grohmann & Leivada 2012).

4. *Enhanced or weakened metalinguistic awareness.* Many studies have suggested that there is a link between bilingualism/bilectalism and enhanced metalinguistic skills (Bialystok & Martin 2004). At times, the opposite situation is observed when speakers of a non-standard variety show difficulties in providing introspections about decontextualized examples (Bresnan 2007) or in reflecting on their native dialect as “an object with various properties” (Devitt 2007).

5. *Influence by prescriptive notions of correctness.* Dialect speakers may be aware of norms that set the ‘correct’ way to speak, hence their introspective judgments about their linguistic repertoire are probably subject to more interference by prescriptive notions of correctness (Henry 2005).

6. *Personal pattern variation (PPV).* Dorian (1994) observed a high degree of interpersonal variation among members of the same community which could not be explained by any kind of social grouping. PPV is possibly expected in cases of non-standardized varieties spoken in secluded areas, as it has been shown that rule-based regularity develops gradually over time and in response to the need to facilitate exoteric, inter-group communication (Walter & Grace 2007).

7. *Weakened Consensus Principle.* Labov’s (1996) Consensus Principle (i.e. if there is no reason to think otherwise, assume that the judgments of any native speaker are characteristic of all speakers of the language) is weakened as a consequence of the dialect design (especially due to factors (2) and (6)), and this has important implications in the process of interpreting introspective judgments obtained by speakers of non-standard varieties.

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