Modelling social salience across multiple variables to show (non)-associations with social categories

Felicity Meakins,[1] Xia Hua,[2] Jesse Stewart[3] & Lindell Bromham[2]
University of Queensland,[1] Australian National University,[2] University of Saskatchewan[3]

Social salience is the property of a variable which listeners collectively associate with a social category. Variables where there is a high consensus within the community about their association with a social category are considered highly salient. One of the interests in social salience relates to its potential explanatory power in studies of language change. One prediction has been that variables with higher social salience will show higher rates of change (e.g., Baxter, Blythe, Croft, & McKane, 2009; Greenhill et al., 2017; Hinskens, 1996; Kerswill & Williams, 2002; Labov, 1972, pp. 178-179; 1994, p. 78; Rácz, 2013 but see Trudgill (1986) for a different perspective). This prediction has not been empirically tested due to a lack of metrics for measuring social salience in datasets. Perception experiments have been used to determine whether a variable has social salience by assessing the extent to which listeners from a speech community converge on the association of a variant with a social category (e.g., Campbell-Kibler, 2009; Fridland, Bartlett, & Kreuz, 2004; Plichta & Preston, 2005). However, most of these experiments have involved tests of individual variables which do not provide us with enough data to model the relative rates of uptake and loss of different variables based on their social salience in models of language evolution. Experiments which have assessed the social salience of multiple variables only consider the association of the variables with social categories (Llamas, Watt, & MacFarlane, 2016). This paper introduces a new method which provides a measure of salience across multiple variants in the Gurindji Kriol dataset. It also assesses the relative association and non-association of variants with social categories across these variants. This method provides us with the necessary metric required to show how the higher association or non-association of variants with social categories might affect rates of uptake and loss.

References

Baxter, Gareth, Blythe, Richard, Croft, William, & McKane, Allan. (2009). Modeling language change: An evaluation of Trudgill's theory of the emergence of New Zealand English. *Language Variation and Change, 21*(2), 257–296.

Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. (2009). The nature of sociolinguistic perception. *Language Variation and Change, 21*(1), 135-156.

Fridland, Valerie, Bartlett, Kathryn, & Kreuz, Roger. (2004). Do you hear what I hear? Experimental measurement of the perceptual salience of acoustically manipulated vowel variants by Southern speakers in Memphis. *Language Variation and Change, 16*(1), 1-16.

Greenhill, Simon, Wu, Chieh-Hsi, Hua, Xia, Dunn, Michael, Levinson, Stephen, & Gray, Russell. (2017). Evolutionary dynamics of language systems. *Proceedings of the Royal Society, 114*(42), E8822-E8829. doi:10.1073/pnas.1700388114

Hinskens, Frans. (1996). *Dialect Levelling in Limburg: Structural and Sociolinguistic Aspects*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Kerswill, Paul, & Williams, Ann. (2002). 'Salience' as an explanatory factor in language change: Evidence from dialect levelling in urban England. In M. Jones & E. Esch (Eds.), *Language Change: The Interplay of Internal, External and Extra-Linguistic Factors* (pp. 81-110). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Labov, William. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, William. (1994). *Principles of Linguistic Change: Internal Factors*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Llamas, Carmen, Watt, Dominc, & MacFarlane, Andrew. (2016). Estimating the relative sociolinguistic salience of segmental variables in a dialect boundary zone. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01163

Plichta, Bartek, & Preston, Dennis. (2005). The /ay/s have it: The perception of /ay/ as a North-South stereotype in US English. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia, 37*(243-285).

Rácz, Péter. (2013). *Salience in Sociolinguistics: A Quantitative Approach*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.