
Evaluation, grammar, and avoidance: Patterns of grammatical variation across speaker groups

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This talk deals with *grammatical taboos*, which designate “morphosyntactic constructions [...] subject to stigmatisation” (Vogel 2019: 38), and which can be viewed as a consequence of “the heterogeneity of communicative situations” (Vogel 2019: 39). Since speakers activate relevant parts of their linguistic knowledge in response to their expectations about a communicative situation or their assumptions about their interlocutor, language variation and change can be viewed as the result of feedback in interaction, which ultimately precipitates a modification or stabilization of linguistic knowledge (cf. Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 25–29). Hence, the avoidance of stigmatized variants can lead to language change.

We will compare the distribution of grammatical variants of two variables that are both salient and subject to negative evaluation, including comparative constructions (*wie* vs. *als*) (Hanulíková 2019: 8, Hettler 2013: 170, 174) and the expression of the analytic subjunctive (*täte* vs. *würde*) (Hanulíková 2019: 8). The analysis draws on the responses to a large-scale questionnaire conducted in the context of the project *Regionalsprache.de* (REDE) (Kasper & Pheiff 2023). Its aim was to collect data on (morpho-)syntactic variants for the vertical, i.e. between dialect and standard language, and the horizontal variation dimensions for the whole of Germany. Making explicit reference to modes of speech (*Dialekt*, *regional gefärbte Alltagssprache*, *Hochdeutsch*), we ask informants to respond to the tasks for the speech mode with which they feel most comfortable (*vertraut*).

The talk will compare the degree to which the negatively evaluated variants are distributed across three modes of speech in space, demonstrating in which speech mode and to what extent they are avoided. These results will, in turn, be interpreted diachronically, hence showing how patterns of avoidance can result in change.

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