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Sociolinguistic monitoring in England: Exploring Phonetic, Pragmatic, and Speech-Planning Features

Sociolinguistic monitoring is hypothesised to be a cognitive process that tracks the speech signal for socially meaningful cues of variable features and monitors their frequency (Labov et al. 2011). While there is disagreement on whether or not there is a dedicated module that focuses on sociolinguistic variation or whether this variation is processed by general monitoring processes (Campbell-Kibler 2016, Austen & Campbell-Kibler 2022), there is consensus that sociolinguistic monitoring occurs in both production and perception. Ideas about sociolinguistic monitoring have been most widely tested in perception – in the form of the matched-guise test in which the frequency of target features is manipulated, e.g. (ing) as *-ing* or *-in*. Labov et al. (2011) found speakers in the U.S. to be heard as more unprofessional with increasing numbers of –in but Levon & Fox (2014) did not find this to be the case in the UK, due to the lower social salience of the variable.

This presentation further pursues the generality of the monitoring process by exploring whether only classic sociolinguistic variables are subject to sociolinguistic monitoring or if it also applies to variable speech-planning features. We do this with the goal of finding out how specialized the process of sociolinguistic monitoring is. While variation in (ing) and (t)-deletion as well as the discourse-pragmatic markers *you know* and *like* are inherently sociolinguistic in nature, filled and unfilled pauses are clearly associated with speech planning (see Fruehwald 2016).

The study includes 600 respondents in England (100 per variable), who were recruited via *Prolific*. Similar to Labov et al.'s original design, participants rated seven versions of the same news report with varying frequencies of either (ing)- and (t)-variants, *you know, like, um* or unfilled *pauses* on a *professionalism*-scale. Guises were based on one speaker and one text and differed only in the occurrence of a given feature. The survey also assessed whether participants became aware that a respective variable had been manipulated.

In line with Levon & Fox's (2014) findings for (ing) in the UK, varying frequencies of (ing) and (t)-deletion did not prompt evaluation differences overall. However, participants who realised that (ing) had been manipulated did evaluate guises with more apical variants as less professional. This response pattern was found across all variables: awareness of the attitude target resulted in more negative evaluation and a different distribution of evaluation across token numbers.

For all other variables, an increase in token numbers of *you know, like, um* and *pauses* elicited lower *professionalism* ratings. This suggests that sociolinguistic monitoring also applies to speech-planning features and is not sociolinguistically specific. Our results support proposals that argue that there is no need for specialised cognitive modules to explain sociolinguistic behaviour (see Campbell-Kibler 2016) and that what has been described as 'sociolinguistic monitoring' can be captured by more general cognitive processes.

References

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