

### Be(a)ware of the cognitive elephant in the sociolinguistic room

A central goal of quantitative sociolinguistic research is to identify variables that condition the use of linguistic target variables. We commonly distinguish between the following types of conditioning variables:

- **internal** formal, semantic or discursive variables (e.g. phonological or syntactic environment, animacy, stativity, information structure),
- **situational** variables (e.g. medium, formality, genre),
- **demographic social** variables (e.g. region, age, gender, ethnicity, education),
- **other social** variables (e.g. network structure, indexicality, prestige, identity, solidarity),
- **cognitive** variables (e.g. constraints on planning, limited memory capacity, imitation/priming/persistence),
- and, on a different level of analysis and explanation, **random** variables (e.g. speakers or participants, specific lexemes or test items, conversations).

In my talk I will explore the idea that all types of variables have a cognitive component or are ultimately 'cognitive' in nature, in the sense that they must somehow be represented in the minds of speakers to have an effect on their linguistic choices. I will discuss in which way they are represented and argue that predictive usage-based theories of linguistic cognition may have a lot to offer for sociolinguistic theory and practice.

To support my claims, I will re-analyze the results and findings of various sociolinguistic studies. Potential benefits of adding a usage-based cognitive perspective to sociolinguistics relate to all types of predictor variables, including internal, situational and social ones. The main added value, however, may lie in fresh explanations of thorny issues such as interindividual differences, intraindividual differences as well as effects of usage frequency and lexical items. I will also discuss methodological implications of a more cognitively-informed view of quantitative sociolinguistics.