

# Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Møller Jensen, Marie (2011) Saliency in language change. In: VaLP 2011: Variation and Language Processing 2011, 11-13 April 2011, University of Chester.

URL: <https://sites.google.com/site/valp2011/> <<https://sites.google.com/site/valp2011/>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:  
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/10402/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)

[www.northumbria.ac.uk/nrl](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/nrl)



# Saliency in language change

Marie Jensen

Northumbria University

# Overview

- Salience – what is it?
- Salience vs. non-salience
- Salience and language change – a model
- The socio-cognitive framework and exemplar theory
- Study of morphosyntactic change in Tyneside English

# Salience – what is it?

- According to the Oxford English Dictionary, if something is salient it “stand[s] out from the rest; prominent, conspicuous”
- In social cognitive psychology salience is defined as “[a] property of a stimulus that makes it stand out in relation to other stimuli and attract attention.” (Hogg and Vaughan 2008:61)
- In linguistics, salience is “a notion which seems to lie at the cusp of language internal, external and extra-linguistic motivation [ ] which we can provisionally define rather simply as a property of a linguistic item or feature that makes it in some way perceptually and cognitively prominent.” (Kerswill and Williams 2002: 81).

# Salience – what is it? (part II)

- Linguistic form > < linguistic meaning
- Linguistic form: arbitrary, does not carry (lexical) meaning
  - English: *chair*
  - Danish: *stol*
  - Arabic: كرسي
  
- Linguistic form (from a socio-psychological and socio-cognitive perspective):  
*sociolinguistic* meaning (the indexing of social characteristics of the speaker)

# Salience vs. non-salience

- Linguistic indicators, markers, and stereotypes form a hierarchy of salience which is outlined in the table below. The table outlines both factors relating to sociolinguistic groupings of speakers and to language use (stylistics). A simple + or – indicates whether the factors are relevant to the particular classification.
- Indicators, markers, and stereotypes

	In-group salience	Out-group salience	Social variation	Stylistic variation	Change
Stereotype	+	+	+	+	+/-
Marker	+	-	+	+	+
Indicator	-	-	+	-	+/-

- (adapted from Labov 1972, 1994 and Trudgill 1986)

# Saliency and language change

## – a model

- Any operationalization of the saliency notion must involve a match between three components:
  - 1) Language change through diffusion of forms from one variety to another the explanation of which is suspected to be due to saliency of the feature involved.
  - 2) Language-internal explanations (e.g. phonological contrast, semantic transparency, syntactic environment)
  - 3) Extra-linguistic factors (e.g. cognitive, pragmatic, socio-psychological) which are linked with the linguistic feature undergoing change.
    - (Kerswill and Williams 2002: 105)
- It seems that the presence of a language internal explanation (component 2) is a precondition for saliency and that the presence of extra-linguistic factors (component 3) are not only crucial in order to avoid circularity but also “ultimately the cause of saliency” (*ibid*: 105) as these directly influence speaker behaviour.

# The socio-cognitive framework

- Language processing in CL: no different than and not separate from processing of other input.
- Kristiansen (2006, 2008)
  - LANGUAGE STANDS FOR SOCIAL IDENTITIES
  - LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR CONVEYING SOCIAL MEANING AND EXPRESSING SOCIAL IDENTITIES
- Tajfel (1969, 1981), Social Identity Theory: stereotyping constitutes an inevitable and natural side-effect of the general process of categorization.
- Le Page (1980): speech is not just a reflection of identity, but a projection of it.
- Eckert (2004): style does not just reflect social meaning, but actively construes it.



# Exemplar theory

- Smith and Zárate (1992): exemplar-based model of social judgment
- Pierrehumbert (2001): cognitive category clouds of remembered tokens
- Hay, Warren and Drager (2006): social information affects speech processing – social indexing of exemplars
- Foulkes and Docherty (2006): exemplar-based model of phonological knowledge offers the most productive means of modelling socio-phonetic variation

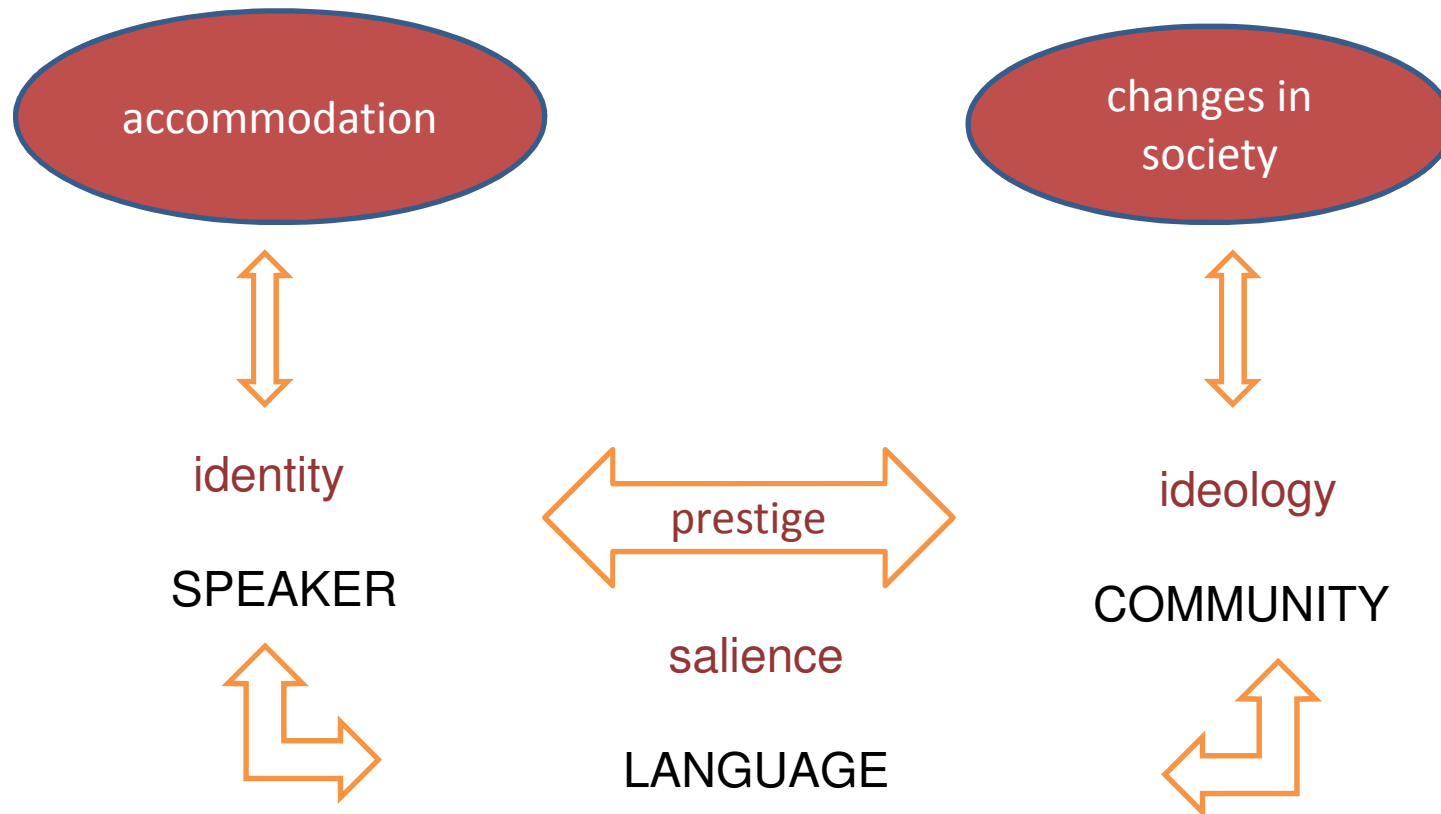
# Saliency – what is it? (part III)

- Based on the definition of saliency in social cognitive psychology, we can initially define saliency within socio-cognitive linguistics as: **the property of a linguistic form which makes it prominent relative to other forms in the cognitive domain.**
- The socio-cognitive framework allows for the crucial unification of structural, sociolinguistic and psychological aspects of language change needed in the conceptualisation of this complex construct.

# Study of morphosyntactic change in Tyneside English

- Project investigating *salience* as an explanatory factor in language change
  - Pilots
  - Expanded corpus study
  - Interviewer-led questionnaire study

# Models of factors in language change (Jensen 2009)



# Tyneside study – results so far

	(do+NEG)	(you)
Gender	Male speakers use more vernacular variants in all 3 corpora	Females use more vernacular features in PVC, males use more vernacular features in NECTE2
Class	WC speakers use more vernacular variants in all 3 corpora (TLS not significant)	WC speakers use more vernacular variants in all 3 corpora (TLS not significant)
Real and apparent time	1960s speakers use more vernacular forms than 1990s speakers (loss of local forms) 2007-2008 speakers use more vernacular forms than young 1990s speakers (revitalisation of local forms recent)	1990s speakers use more vernacular forms than 1960s speakers (low frequencies) 2007-2008 speakers use more vernacular forms than young 1990s speakers (clear revitalisation of local forms)

# Tyneside study – the next step(s)

- Expanded corpus study: more variables and more data
- Interviewer-led questionnaire: information about extra-linguistic factors such as attitudes to and awareness of linguistic forms

# Summing up...

- The socio-cognitive approach is new in the investigation of diachronic language change.
- Allows for structural and social factors to be merged in the mind of the speaker which is fundamental in the conceptualisation of salience.
- Studies of morphosyntactic change are relatively rare, previous definitions of salience based on phonological studies.
- Study of morphosyntactic change in Tyneside English and questionnaire survey will allow for empirical testing of factors contributing to salience of forms and the role of salience in language change.

- Thank you!



# References

- Eckert, P. 2004. The meaning of style. <http://www.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/salsa2003.pdf>
- Foulkes, P and G. Docherty. 2006. The social life of phonetics and phonology. *Journal of Phonetics* 34, 409-438
- Hay, J., P. Warren and K. Drager. 2006. Factors influencing speech perception in the context of a merger-in-progress. *Journal of Phonetics* 34, 458-484
- Hogg, M. and G. Vaughan. 2008. *Social Psychology* (5<sup>th</sup> edition). Harlow: Pearson Education
- Kerswill, P. and A. Williams. 2002. "Salience" as an explanatory factor in language change: evidence from dialect levelling in urban England. In: M. C. Jones and E. Esch (eds.), *Language Change - the interplay of internal, external and extra-linguistic factors*, 81-110. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter
- Jensen, M. 2008. *Morphosyntactic levelling in Tyneside English – A variationist study of a changing dialect*. MA dissertation, Newcastle University
- Jensen, M. 2009. *Morphosyntactic Variation in Tyneside English: A sociolinguistic investigation into negation and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns*. MA dissertation, Aarhus University
- Kristiansen, G. 2006. Towards a Usage-Based Cognitive Phonology. *International Journal of English Studies*. Vol. 6 (2) 107-140.
- Kristiansen, G. 2008. Style-shifting and shifting styles: a socio-cognitive approach to lectal variation. In G Kristiansen and R Dirven (eds.) *Cognitive Sociolinguistics - language variation, cultural models, social systems*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter

# References

- Labov, W. 1972. *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, W. 1994. *Principles of linguistic change*. Vol I Internal factors. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Le Page, R. 1980. 'Projection, focussing, diffusion' or, steps towards a sociolinguistic theory of language. *York paper in Linguistics* 9:9-31.
- Pierrehumbert, J. 2001. Exemplar dynamics: word frequency, lenition and contrast. in J. Bybee and P. Hopper (eds) *Frequency effects and the emergence of linguistic structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 137-157.
- Smith, E. and M. Zárate. 1992. Exemplar-based model of Social judgment. *Psychological Review* vol. 99, no 1, 3-21
- Tajfel, H. 1969. Cognitive aspects of prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues* 25:79-97.
- Tajfel, H. 1981. *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trudgill, P. 1986. *Dialects in Contact*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Watt, D. 2002. "I don't speak with a Geordie accent, I speak, like, the Northern accent": Contact-induced levelling in the Tyneside vowel system'. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6/1:44-63
- Oxford English Dictionary online at [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)