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Divergence and non-correlation in Tyneside English: towards a socio-cognitive model of language change

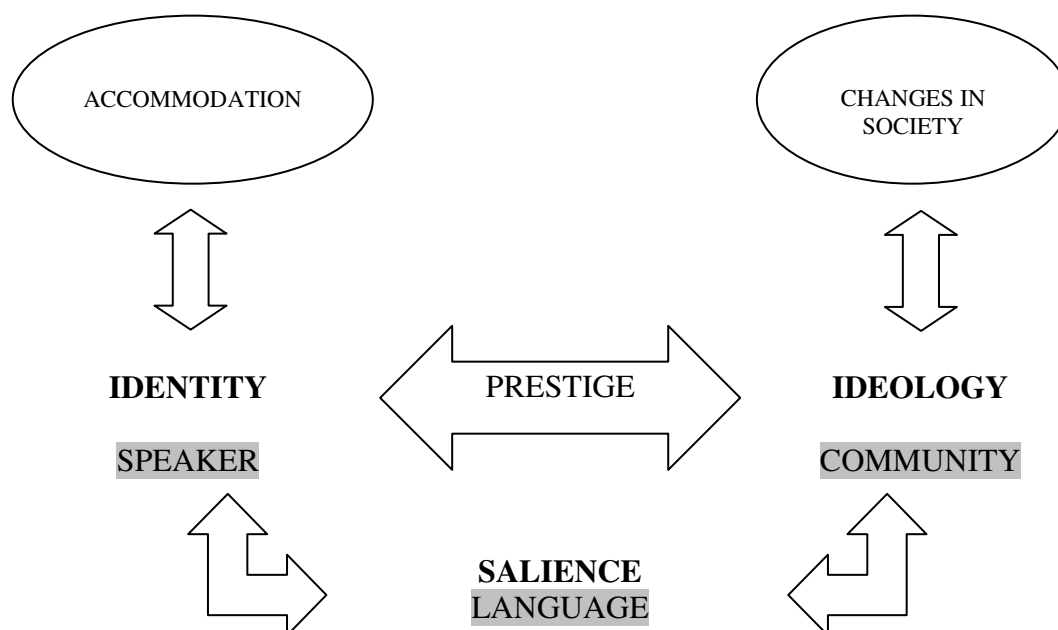
This paper will present the results of a pilot study (Jensen 2008, 2009) into the directions of change in Tyneside English and focus on the further development and expansion of this study which seeks to uncover the role of salience in language change. The pilot study takes the form of a corpus-based variationist sociolinguistic study implementing both real and apparent time comparisons of large amounts of data. The corpus used for the study is the Newcastle Corpus of Tyneside English stored and maintained by Newcastle University.

In short, the pilot study found that the use of some vernacular morphosyntactic features is increasing, in particular among young working class males. This result is in contrast with Watt's 2002 phonological study which showed that certain phonological variables are moving toward regional and thus less localised forms.

This seeming discrepancy in the direction of change in Tyneside English phonology and morphosyntax is anticipated by Cheshire, Kerswill, and Williams (2005) who conclude that there are only a "few parallels other than superficial ones between processes of variation and change" (*ibid.*:136) in the different components of language despite the expectation for a "considerable commonality in the direction of change and, perhaps, in the rate of change also." (*ibid.*:135). It is proposed that differences in salience of linguistic components can account for these discrepancies. Salient linguistic features are accessible to the speaker meaning that the speaker can consciously manipulate their form and use. Non-salient features, on the other hand, are linguistic components over which the speaker has no control; the components are inaccessible to the speaker as it were.

The results of the pilot study are interpreted in the light of the following model which is suggested as a rough working model of factors influencing language change:

Model 1: Motivators of language change (from Jensen 2009)



Thus, the role of speaker identity in language change, how this is influenced by language ideology and notions of stigma and prestige will be discussed with particular focus on the Tyneside speech community and how an exclusively Tyneside identity can be linked to recent developments in the area and how this is mirrored in speech. It is argued that the revival of vernacular morphosyntactic forms by the younger generation can be linked to the formation of a local identity centred on a sense of place, a linguistic dimension to a geographical space to which the speakers belong. The creation of a local identity in the face of increasing globalisation and urban developments has also been found in other places outside the Tyneside conurbation.

Further studies are needed, however, in order to further get at the role of salience in language change and to come full circle according to the model and the paper will briefly touch on some tentative suggestions for this but will also encourage a discussion of the topic.

References

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