

4,000 /r/s in Blackburn, Lancashire: a (socio)phonological analysis of rhoticity in Northern England

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This paper presents a study of the accent of Blackburn in Lancashire, one of two small areas of England which are still **rhotic** (i.e. speakers pronounce the /r/ sound in *car*, *farm* and distinguish the pronunciation in words such as *spa* and *spar*, as indicated by the spelling). Although pronunciation of this /r/ sound is the standard in North America, Ireland and Scotland, it has disappeared in almost all other accents spoken in England. As a result, there is little work on rhoticity of accents of English in England, and almost no phonetic analysis. The aim of this study is to analyse /r/ in this rhotic accent from a phonetic, phonological and sociolinguistic perspective in order to answer empirically informed theoretical questions related to sound change.

Using pilot data from 10 speakers, interviews were forced-aligned using the FAVE suite, and acoustic measurements of /r/ were extracted, including information on F3, F2, duration and intensity. The results show that post-vocalic /r/ realisation in Blackburn shows next to no intra-speaker variation, with informants showing 100% for the most part. Strength of consonantal /r/ is found to fall in line with the predictions of the life cycle of phonological processes: word-initial [r] (e.g. *red*) is the most consonantal (lowest F3 values) and phrase-final [r] (e.g. *four*) shows the highest values, with intervocalic /r/s falling in between. Effects of /r/ formant trajectories, frequency and social factors are also taken into consideration. In summary, it seems that rhoticity is not under internal language pressures of lenition in coda position; rather, social factors of stigmatisation may be the cause of any predicted loss of rhoticity in the variety in future.

What you see is (not) what you get: on the interface between information structure and syntax

Jenneke van der Wal (University of Cambridge)

While we know that information structure (topic, focus) influences the morphosyntax, we do not know how integrated the two really are. The two extreme approaches to this issue are not attractive; these are models that assume either that the two are completely independent (e.g. Chomsky 2008), or that all of information structure is represented in the syntax (e.g. Rizzi's 1997 cartographic approach). In this talk I argue that before we can build an appropriate model of grammar, we need to look beyond the surface effects to establish which aspects of information structure are of direct influence in the grammar. I provide two case studies from Bantu languages of how this can be achieved. The first is Luganda, where I show that with a more elaborate toolbox we can specify a focus marker's meaning as 'exclusivity' rather than an underspecified 'focus'. The second is a typology of Bantu languages that on the surface have the same exotic verbal focus alternation (conjoint/disjoint) but on closer examination turn out to be two classes: one directly determined by focus and the other only indirectly. These cases highlight the necessity to look beyond 'what you see' and the essential role of appropriate methodology in comparative research.

Evidence for coevolution across linguistic levels: Parallel changes in word usage and duration in New Zealand English

Márton Sós-kuthy, University of York

In this talk, I present the results of a diachronic corpus study carried out jointly with Jen Hay from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. Although there is a large literature devoted to the topic of language change, the question of why a given change takes place at a given time in a given language – often referred to as the "actuation problem" – remains mostly unanswered. This talk looks at one specific hypothesis related to the actuation of sound change, namely that changes in one specific linguistic domain can trigger changes in another domain. One example of such parallel changes is the reduction of words and phrases as a response to a rise in their usage frequency (e.g. *God be with ye* > *goodbye*). While there is plenty of anecdotal support for such parallel changes, it is notoriously difficult to provide empirical evidence for such interactions from observable linguistic changes. This project attempts to fill this gap by looking at long-term changes in word duration as a function of changes in word frequency and other aspects of word usage. We collected word duration data for 700 different word types in the Origins of New Zealand English corpus, which contains recordings of speakers born over a period of 136 years. We then compared changes in the durations of individual lexical items with changes in their frequency, predictability and prosodic behaviour. The results show that word duration evolves in tandem with other factors, providing strong support for the idea that linguistic changes may in some cases be driven by changes at another linguistic level.

Sorry seems to be the hardest word

James Murphy, University of the West of England

Tokens such as *I'm sorry* are widely acknowledged to do apologetic work which seeks to remedy interpersonal damage resulting from the commission of an offence. However, such tokens also do work which is non-apologetic in nature, e.g. *I'm sorry you are wrong there*, where the apology prefaces dissent and can be argued to reinforce it. In the first part of the talk, I explore such uses of the apology token, propose a test to distinguish this use from the apology proper and suggest where this function comes from and how we can account for it on a cline of pragmaticalisation.

In the second half of the talk I explore some further non-apologetic behaviour – in particular, the refusal to apologise with a focus on political contexts for this. I discuss why delivering an apology is not the risk-free behaviour which is sometimes suggested elsewhere in the literature. I also outline some of the ways in which the refusal to apologise – which in itself is face-threatening – is carried out. I propose that this non-apologetic behaviour comes as a result of cost-benefits analyses (whether subconscious or conscious) in which the cost to face plays a large role.