Stylistic diversification as a factor in language variation and change

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Abstract

An analysis of the state and direction of processes of language change that affect different morphological features in North Western Catalan enables us to obtain quantitative data on the behaviour of various factors with explicative value –social as well as linguistic, sociological, and pragmatic– that may at the present time influence the evolution of these processes. In this article we focus on the influence of a pragmatic factor, speech style, and here we also present a proposal for delimitation internal to a communicative situation

Contents

1. Introduction

In linguistics, quantification has often been based on descriptive statistics, and this has made it possible to describe and summarise data in terms of frequencies. In this context, variationist sociolinguistics has clearly opted for looking for systems of data processing that involve inferential statistics. The latter refers to analysis of probabilities that will enable us to calculate levels of significance and reliability and thus make available a rigorous explanatory model to the study of linguistic variation. The second probability-based model proposed by Rousseau & Sankoff (1978), based on the VarbRul packages including the GoldVarb 2.0 application for Macintosh used in this study, is one of these statistical models, and one much used to measure the influence of linguistic and extralinguistic factors in the emergence of linguistic variants, since it converts real frequencies into theoretical probabilities by means of mathematical procedures.

Precisely this aspect of data processing, deriving from the sociolinguistics of variation, has been much used in different types of sociolinguistic research, especially on phonetico-phonological variables. This is the most studied linguistic level in the case of Catalan too (see Pradilla, 2002) the majority of which studies for the moment are moving away from the classic Labovian geographical distribution model consisting of analysing neighbourhoods or big cities, since the Catalan studies concentrate mainly on linguistic transition areas and / or areas far from the big conurbations.

Another aspect arising out of sociolinguistics and more particularly sociolinguistic variation studies, and frequently used in this field as a technique for the collection of data is the Labovian sociolinguistic interview, which provides a system to control stylistic variation, intended to elicit different speech styles (see Pradilla, 2001). In broad terms, Labov's technique (1966: chapter 4) sets out to obtain and to characterise five speech styles: *casual, careful, formal, + formal, + + formal.* The criteria used in our study to delimit a stylistic *continuum* produced in a pre-existent communicative situation, the plenary sessions of Tremp local government that make up our corpus, differ from the Labovian method we have just described and, in its own modest way, draws on a system based on contributions from the analysis of conversation, as we shall show below.

In this article[1] we propose to analyse the behaviour of a pragmatic variable, the speech style, as a factor for variation and linguistic change in different elements of nominal morphology in an area of interdialectal transition in the North Western Catalan major dialect area, the Conca de Tremp. The analysis is based on the use of frequency and inferential calculations[2] carried out with the GoldVarb 2.0 program.

2. Speaking style as an explanatory factor in processes of variation and linguistic change.

As we have already mentioned, the contribution made by this article concerns the analysis of the effect of an explanatory factor of a pragmatic nature on morphological elements. We shall now look at the parameters used *(a)* for the delimitation of the communicative situation and *(b)* for determining the categorisation of the speech as either prepared or spontaneous.

2.1 Criteria for the definition of the speech style explanatory factor

2.1.1 Segmentation of the discourse

In sociolinguistics the difficulties that arise when delimiting the stylistic *continuum* have generated considerable disagreement over the establishing of the parameters involved in its segmentation. In our case, delimitation of the explanatory variable *speech style* relies on a previous factor, the segmentation of the communicative situation in speech events.

Segmentation was effected based on the criterion of hierearchic structure proposed in Tuson (1995: 49-51) for the study of conversation.[3] According to this criterion, the largest of the units into which conversation is structured is *interaction*, which can be seen to be delimited principally by the rituals of opening and closure.[4] The application of this notion to our analysis allows us to consider the totality of discourse that occurs in a local government plenary session constitutes a single interaction, since the rituals of opening and closure which are specifically indexed –*s'inicia la sessió*– (the session is declared open) */ s'aixeca la sessió*– (the session is declared closed) serve to frame the total communicative activity in question and establish the limits of the legal validity of the decisions taken. Continuing with Tuson's criterion, the second of the structural aspects that characterise conversation and form an integral part of the interaction is s*equence.* In general it is accepted that the sequence becomes delimitable basically on thematic criteria. Thus, sequences that form part of every local plenary session would coincide with the different items on the agenda (order of the day). On the third level, Tuson has *exchange*, understood as a minimum unit of dialogue, comprises two or more turns within a sequence. While on the level immediately below this is the *speech turn or utterance* made by each participant which, as Adam states (1992: 158), is the maximum unit at monologue level.
The last of the units into which conversation can be segmented, according to Tucson, is the *act*, which comprises the illocutionary and interactive functions at any given moment.

In our case, to evaluate correct assignment of different linguistic manifestations in the corpus to one or other of the speech styles in question, we have worked on the data at the level of the utterances of each speaker. To illustrate the procedure, see examples (1), (2) and (3):

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[1] This is based on the doctoral thesis of Sílvia Romero Galera *Linguistic change in the nominal morphology of the Conca de Tremp,* which can be consulted at the Catalogue of Doctoral Theses of Catalonia (http://tdcat.cesca.es/TDCat-0321102-124050/). The twin objective of the research consisted in, on the one hand, the completion and updating of the data available on the linguistic features occurring in the Conca de Tremp, the intradialectal transition zone between the Ribagorça and Lleida varieties of Catalan (see Romero, 2001*a*), and, on the other hand, to analyse the state and the direction of processes of linguistic change that affect morphological features, while seeking to identify factors behind the change (see Romero, 2001*b*).

[2] The Data are from an oral language corpus of 42,000 words, consisting of the verbal output of the plenary sessions of the Tremp local government (see Romero & Vicente, 2002: 175-195).

[3] This contribution by Tuson brings together the proposals of the Birmingham and Geneva schools (see Roulet *et al.* 1985).

[4] To establish a parallel with other proposals, Adam (1992: 154) considered that the interaction which he called *dialogue text*, is made up of two types of sequences: the *phatic sequences* of the opening and closure which he found highly ritualised and, therefore, very structured; and the *transactional sequences*, which constitute the body of the transaction and include both the linkages and the changes from one to another. These transactional changes can be determined using thematic criteria.

(1) The following fragment contains two *speech turns* generated in the context of one of the *exchanges* included in the only *sequence* in the *interaction*. The example provided is an urgent extraordinary plenary with one item on the agenda.[5] The first utterance is solemn and serves as an introduction to the second, which is a read institutional declaration condemning terrorism. Apart from this providing exemplification of the segmentation, we can ascribe to the categories of spontaneous cases those instances in which one of the linguistic varieties analysed, the masculine definite article. The prepared speech style is underlined at the right and is justified in point 2.1.2.

"A: (el) plenary session has one item on the agenda
an institutional declaration   prepared speech style (a)
which all persons and political groups forming a part of Tremp town council have previously agreed upon, and which will now be read by
(el) clerk to the council   prepared speech style (a)
S: whereas on the (el) day of the
tenth of April of nineteen ninety-five   prepared speech style (a)
the (el) infantry brigadier M   prepared speech style (a)
someone closely connected to the town and municipality of T
has been brutally murdered in SS
Closely connected since in addition to having been a student at the basic general academy for junior officers, he was married to a local person
and spent his holidays with his family at T where he was much loved and appreciated by all.
and whereas the town council of T is bound to express publicly its (el seu) rejection and condemnation of this act
in the name of the municipal corporation of the people of T
and in general in the name of all people of good faith who live in peace and coexistence
it is proposed that the council in full accord should firstly
express publicly its (el seu) rejection and repudiation of the brutal murder
of infantry brigadier M   prepared speech style (a)
and condemn in unmistakably clear terms the perpetrators of this act (TPLENS3: 46-72)

(2) The second extract contains seven short overlapping turns produced in the context of one of the exchanges included in the interaction, specifically the reports time toward the end of the session. It is an exchange of short or very short turns in the course of a tense discussion. The turns spoken by the mayor-moderator (A:) attempt to contain the transgressions of councillor (J:), as can be seen in the successive refusal to let the other take a turn. Each one of the occurrences of the masculine definite article which appears in this fragment can been taken to be cases spontaneous speech style, and this too we justify at 2.1.2.

"A: [Mr. J. there is no answer]
J: [and you've ended up saying that the error was administrative
well, you've got a flaming nerve!]   spontaneous speech style (b)
A: [no. I didn't say the error was administrative]
J: [and in second place]   spontaneous speech style (b)
A: And I don't blame anybody
J: and in the (el) second place
A: I assume full responsibility   spontaneous speech style (b)
and if you want to take legal action, then
you know the [el] way to do it [angry].
J: I regret your tone (el to)   spontaneous speech style (b)
(TPLENS5: 2040-2051)

(3) The third extract contains two turns produced in the context of one of the exchanges in a sequence of the interaction, dealing with the decision to organise a tribute to a mayor of the time of the *República* (the regime overthrown by Franco). The first of the speech turns is read, while the second is the reply. We feel that it provides a very good example of the transition from the prepared speech style to the spontaneous speech style –which we comment on at 2.1.2. In this case we can observe the occurrences of the linguistic variable

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[5] The transcription system which we have used is an adaptation of the one adopted by Payrató (1996: 201-216).

masculine definite article, underlined in the transcript, and the linguistic variable first person plural weak pronoun, in italics.

> "C: [the turn is longer]
> (:::) you are the mayor of a town council with a budget that doesn't balance and is getting progressively worse
> and given these circumstances
> you will not find an heir
> do not fear a motion of censure,
> it will be more and more difficult for us (*ens*) and more
> unpopular   prepared speech style (a)
> to balance the books.
> Mr. A
> Mr. Ar
> all (tots els) mayors   prepared speech style (a)
> simply because they are mayors
> if they are good mayors they
> (::) already
> already have their own tribute
> (:) let us not go into more detail than that
> let us not recall the past and let us make sure those days do not return
> nothing more
> and and let us concern ourselves (preocupem-*mos* [preoku'pemos]) with
> what is happening now   prepared speech style (a)
> I will see to it for the good of all
> that this vote (ague(s)t vot) is secret
> there will be many different opinions on the subject
> and there's no need for - need for grudges
> Ar: in terms of,
> my party's
> the least (lo mínim) I can do   spontaneous speech style (b)
> we have been going over and over this issue
> (ague(s)t tema) since April
> and in our case it was just one of the things that had to be done
> just one more
> not the only one   spontaneous speech style (b)
> the only (lo únic) thing we have done is put forward
> the proposal and get on with it"
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> (TPLENS2: 1178-1210)

2.1.2 Degree of preparation of the discourse

Once the communicative situation is segmented, at the speech-turn level, the next step is to determine the speech style associated with the occurrences of the variables in question, and we have already given an instance in the previous section.

From the point of view of conversation analysis, spontaneous speech has indeterminateness –in terms of speech turn, duration, topic, number of interlocutors, etc.– as one of its most recurrent traits (see Tuson, 1995: 55). In contrast, formal speech is generally identifiable for the prearranged topic, the longer turns, perhaps preceded by a request to have the next speech turn, few overlaps, syntactically and lexically elaborated discourse respecting the roles of the participants (Tuson, 1988: 138-140). The speech modalities present in the municipal plenary session occupy a broad spectrum ranging from written contributions intended to be spoken to informal conversation. What dominates, obviously, is a combination of largely planned oral styles or usages, but there are noticeably spontaneous comments, which transgress or override the constraints of formality and which can be associated with a number of different motives such as the (dictates of the) moment, the topic and the personal characteristics of the interlocutors, among others.

At this point, we asked ourselves what factors would allow us to determine the change from neutral style to spontaneous style. Cedergren (1973) [6] identified two types of factors: on the one hand, the contexts and different paralinguistic keys of the communication channel, and, on the other, the attention paid by speakers to their production. In principal, the context and setting in which the municipal plenary sessions take place is fixed, since it is constrained by predetermined conditions having to do with the time and place of the production, with external norms that affect the interaction and a good number of stable spoken formulae that form the situational limits. Despite that, the degree of attention paid by the speaker to his/her own speech production, which can be modified by the emotion or involvement in the subject-message, is a paralinguistic aspect similarly alluded to by Cedergren which can be correlated to the emergence of one or other speech style.[7]

Regarding the effect exerted by the extent to which the discourse is prepared on the production of the speech style, we used a classificatory or categorising scale for the texts based on degree of preparation or improvisation in the production, established by Castellà (1992: 128). This classification relates a large number of linguistic modes to a graduated scale of speaking styles ranging from speech styles where there is absolute control over what is to be said –*rituals*, such as the greetings or leave-taking formulae– to *totally improvised texts*, and taking in *reading and memorisation of texts* on the way –for example radio news broadcasts–, *texts with a prearranged structure* that enable the free construction of grammatical structure –for example storytelling– and *improvised texts on a prearranged topic* –as for example off-the-cuff statements made by a politician. In our case, we considered that this scale would enable us to make an initial sorting of the utterances or turns in terms of degree of preparation. This operation was further enabled, in part, by the presence of numerous explicit discourse markers of a metalinguistic or performative nature, as in the case, for example, of the expressions *I will read, I will read the exact words, I quote, I reproduce, turning to the written text*, which mark the beginning of the oral delivery of a written text.

3. Analysis of a case

The working hypotheses, formulated in relation to the second general objective of the study – recall that this concerned the analysis of the state and direction of processes of language variation and change of the five aspects of nominal morphology–,[8] state that the reduction of structural diversity in geographical varieties will increase and will be favoured by certain social, sociological, linguistic and stylistic conditions. Thus for instance, a link is established between formal styles, more affected by written norms and prestigious oral usage; and similarly the younger generations who have been educated in Catalan, will have their effect on the introduction or production of innovative forms. The results we obtained, confirmed the trend referred to here, since they show the existence of a clear tendency to language change in the direction of the standard variety. Thus, in terms of the features under analysis, three stages or degrees of change could be discerned: *(a)* fairly equal alternation between traditional and new forms in the case of the demonstrative adjectives, *(b)* the timid advance of the variants with intervocalic /–v–/ of the feminine forms of the possessive adjectives, and *(c)* the almost total replacement of the local variants of the definite article and the singular weak (clitic) pronouns and first person plural weak (clitic) pronouns (see Table 1). Regarding the behaviour of the speech style explanatory factor and its influence in this process, the calculation of the probability indices confirmed that prepared speech style favoured the loss of the heritage or local variants in the case of the 3 variables analysed by means of this procedure and, therefore, the increase in the use of the reinforced forms of the definite

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[6] Quoted in López Morales (1994: 80).

[7] It is worth mentioning that Moreno Fernández (1992: 76) proposed a similar description of linguistic production based on personal circumstances –sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic characteristics of the speaker, audience, etc. .– and on non personal ones –relacionated with the degree of formality of the discourse, the setting in which speech takes place, etc.– which affect the interlocutors. At the same time, Labov's notion of speech style should be borne in mind –criticised for instance by Milroy (1980: 105) and Lefebvre (1983: 323)– it was based on the amount of attention paid to speech as a single dimension..

[8] These five features are demonstrative adjectives (aquest (this), aquell (that) *vs.* aguest, aguell), the masculine definite article (el, els *vs.* lo, los), the first plural weak personal pronouns (ens, -nos *vs.* mos), the range of singular weak personal pronouns (em, et, es *vs.* me, te, se) and the possessive adjectives (meva, teva, seva *vs.* meua, teua, seua). The explanatory variables considered are speaking style (prepared or spontaneous), age (<30, 30-55 and >55), education level and knowledge of written Catalan and several linguistic ones depending on the variable

article (*el, els*) and the weak singular pronouns (*em, et, es*), and the general variants of the demostrative adjective *aquest* ("this"), *aquell* ("that"). In the variables looked at solely in terms of percentages, the same tendency could be discerned, that is to say, loss of the analogical form of the weak pronoun for the first person plural (*mos*) and of the variants with /*u*/ in the case of the feminine possessive adjectives, which evince higher percentages of loss when in prepared speech style.

We will turn now to the probability index results in Table 1, which indicate that, over all, the production of the nominal morphology of the standard language will be significantly associated with formal speech in North Western Catalan. We observe that in the case of the masculine definite article linguistic variable, the prepared speech style explanatory factor favours the non-realisation or loss of the so-called etymological variants (*lo, los*), while the effect of the spontaeous speech style factor has the opposite effect. In the case of the full variants of the singular weak or clitic pronouns, the prepared speech style factor similarly favours the non-realisation of the full forms, while the spontaneous speech style factor does not favour it. Lastly, the demonstrative adjective again shows the same pattern, as expected.

Table 1. Quantification of the process of linguistic change and of the effect of explanatory factors

Variable	Probability of loss of the heritage or regional variant [9]	Probability of effect of speech style[10]
Masculine definite article	0.985	Prepared: 0.641 Spontaneous: 0.230
Singular weak pronouns	0.967	Prepared: 0.602 Spontaneous: 0.349
Demonstrative adjectives	0.291	Prepared: 0.549 Spontaneous: 0.409

Other exploitation of the data offered by GoldVarb 2.0, such as the calculation of frequencies by cross tabulation, allow us to observe that in all three cases the effect of the prepared speech style explanatory factor on the loss of the heritage (i.e. regional) variants is enhanced or increased when associated with the university education & knowledge of written Catalan factors [older Catalan speakers who went to school in the time of Franco were educated in Spanish, hence the existence of this factor]. Consequently the spontaneous speech style factor associated with secondary school and vocational training *&* no knowledge of written Catalan, do not favour the loss of the regional variant.

The results for the weak first person plural personal pronouns and the feminine possessive pronouns, which as we have already mentioned were analysed solely in terms of statistical frequency, since the conditions demanded by GoldVarb for calculation of probabilities were not met, followed exactly the same patterns as the variables that were processed for probabilities, confirmed too was the hypothesis we put forward: that a higher percentage of the incoming variants occurs in prepared speech style. Cross tabulation confirms the pattern found with the rest of the variables, in that the prepared speech style factor group linked with the education & knowledge of written Catalan factors, act to cause dialectal convergence.

4. Conclusions

We have sought to explain how utterances, seen from the point of view of conversational analysis and produced in the context of the full sessions of the council, can be related to various degrees of preparation versus spontaneity and that these circumstances of discourse

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[9] Values closer to 1 indicate greater probability that the variable will be applied.

[10] This result, *Weight*, is obtained in the *Binomial Level of Analysis of* GoldVarb 2.0. This is a statistical index which indicates the effect of each of the explanatory factors on the linguistic variable. If the valued is greater than 0.5, it indicates that it favors realisation of the variable; while if it is less, it is assumed not to have an effect. We observe, therefore, that in all three cases, the prepared speaking style favours avidance of the heritage or regional forms, while sppontaneous speech does not. The *Step Up and Down binomial analysis of* GoldVarb 2.0 confirms the effect of the speech style factor group as relevant in the analysis of all three variables.

production, especially variation in the degree of personal implication, have a significant effect on the resultant continuum. We have taken as point of departure the fact that the full sessions of the town council deal with local government business using the oral mode of production and transmission of the message within the framework of formal oral discourse. As such, the latter may combine discourse strategies taken from the written language with others associated with spontaneous oral discourse, using mechanisms of coherence and repetition associated with reduced rigour in the selection and elaboration of information.

Speech style, then, emerges as an explanatory factor favouring the incoming forms of the variables we looked at, that is, the reinforced variants of the masculine definite article, (*el, els*), the singular personal pronouns (*em, et, es*) and the non-velar variants of the demonstrative adjectives (*aquest, aquell*).

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