

Language Acquisition and Dialectal Variation: When Sociolinguistics Meets Psycholinguistics

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Dialectal variation in adults

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- Variationist studies
 - ▣ Linguistic variables (and their variants)
 - Usage depends on:
 - Linguistic context
 - Socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, social background)
 - Context
 - Subject to social judgment
 - Standard *versus* non standard variants
 - Examples
 - American English: *car* produced [kɑ:r] or [kɑ:]
 - French: negation produced with “*ne* [verb] *pas*” or only with “ [verb] *pas*”

Dialectal variation in children

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- 40 publications in 40 years

- And yet the issues at stake are important...
 - Societal stakes
 - Integration at school

 - Scientific stakes for psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics



Understanding how children construct linguistic knowledge on the basis of variable input

A favourable context ...

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CONVERGENCE

Social
Sciences

Cognitives
Sciences

Cognitive sociolinguistics

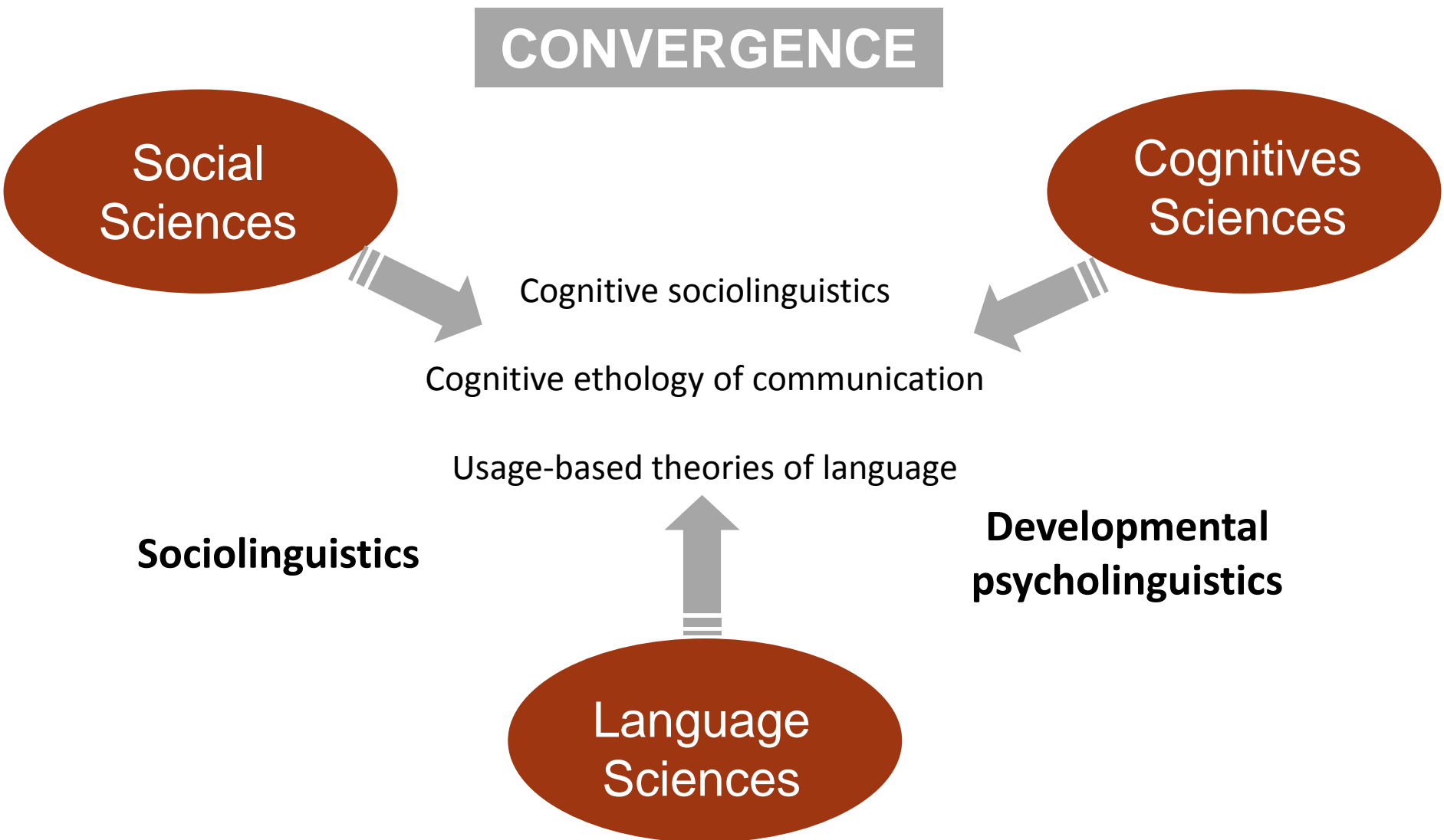
Cognitive ethology of communication

Usage-based theories of language

Sociolinguistics

Developmental
psycholinguistics

Language
Sciences



Acquisition of phonological variation

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- How are sociolinguistic patterns established during development?
- What is the motor for development: learning of norms or implicit learning of regularities?
- What relationship is established between the linguistic environment and the acquisition of social dialects?

Social status of the family

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7 studies; children aged 3-10; 3 languages: English, Spanish, French

Reid, 1978; Martino, 1982; Romaine, 1984; Chevrot, Beaud & Varga, 2000; Martin, 2005;
Díaz-Campos, 2005; Nardy, 2008; Chevrot, Nardy & Barbu, 2011

- In informal speech
 - 7 studies: the higher the social status, the more standard variants the child produces (from the age of 3)
 - 1 study: status-related differences increase between 2 and 6 years of age

Gender

7

11 studies; children aged 2-10; 2 languages: English and French

Romaine, 1984; Ingram et al., 1985; Chevrot, 1991; Patterson, 1992; Roberts, 1994;
Roberts, 1997; Chabanal, 2001; Foulkes et al., 2001; Docherty et al., 2006;
Smith, Durham & Fortune, 2007; Smith, Durham & Richards, 2013

- All possible tendencies have been found
 - 7 studies (ages 2 -9)
 - no gender effect on production of variants in informal situation
 - 2 studies (ages 6-10)
 - more standard variants in girls in informal situation
 - 2 studies (ages 3 -7)
 - more standard variants in boys in formal situation

- Hypothesis
 - Variants with clear social value may be passed on to girls at an early stage

Context

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10 studies; children aged 3-12; 3 languages: Spanish, English and French

Reid, 1978; Macaulay, 1977; Chevrot et al., 2000; Romaine, 1984; Patterson, 1992; Roberts, 1994, variable (ing); Roberts, 1994/1997, variable (t,d); Díaz-Campos, 2005; Martin, 2005; Smith Smith, Durham & Fortune, 2007, Smith, Durham & Richards, 2013

Several settings

Spoken interaction *versus* reading aloud
More or less formal setting
One child with different addressees
Different topics within the same interaction

- 9 studies: more standard variants in formal context
 - At the age of 3-4
 - Speaking to an adult *versus* to another child
 - Disciplinary/educational interactions *versus* daily activities/games

Input-output relationship

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2 studies; children aged 2-4; 1 language: English

Foulkes et al., 2005; Smith, Durham & Fortune, 2007, Smith, Durham & Richards, 2013

- Mothers of girls address more standard variants to their 2-4 year-old daughters than mothers of boys (idem with twins of both genders)
- Correlation between usage of variants by mothers and their children

Peer group (1)

2 studies; children aged 4-5 and 10-11; 1 language: French

Buson & Billiez, 2009, Buson & Billiez 2013, Nardy, 2008, Nardy, under preparation

- Longitudinal follow-up of 11 children in kindergarten (4-5 years old, different social background)
 - Convergence of children's usage after one year of frequenting each other (spontaneous conversation, informal situation)
 - Relationship between frequency of interactions between children and proximity of their usage
 - Children addressed most often by their peers use non standard variants the most often → convergence of the group toward the non standard
 - No relationship observed between children's usage and (1) teacher's usage (2) the capacity to make normative judgments (3) children's popularity

Peer group (2)

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2 studies; children aged 4-5 and 10-11; 1 language: French

Buson & Billiez, 2009, Buson & Billiez 2013, Nardy, 2008, Nardy, under preparation

- Influence of peers on stylistic ability (10-11 years-old)
 - Children from lower-status families who attend a socially mixed school show greater stylistic adaptation (adult-addressed *versus* peer-addressed utterances)

7 studies; children aged 2-12; 2 languages: English and French

Romaine, 1984; Patterson, 1992; Roberts, 1994; Chabanal, 2004; Foulkes et al., 2005; Chevrot et al., 2000 ; Smith, Durham & Fortune, 2007, Smith, Durham & Richards, 2013

- 3 tendencies
 - 1 study: no change between ages 3 and 4 in informal situations
 - 3 studies: increase in non standard variants between ages 3 and 4 in informal situations
 - 3 studies: increase in standard variants in formal situations

- 2 explanations
 - Caregivers favour standard variants in child-directed speech and introduce more non standard variants when the child grows older (Foulkes et al., 2005; Smith et al.; 2007)
 - Entering the educational system may favour standard variants in formal contexts

Evaluation of variables and link with production (1)

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6 studies; children aged 2-12; 2 languages: English and French

Martino, 1982; Lafontaine, 1986; Buson, 2009; Chevrot et al., 2000; Martino, 1982;
Nardy, 2008; Barbu, Nardy, Chevrot & Juhel, 2013

- 4 studies: evaluation based on context or status takes place between 9 and 12 years of age

- 1 study (children between 2 and 6 years-old)
 - Task : Indicate which toy is speaking well
 - Only the 5-6 year-olds from a higher social status background demonstrated identical evaluation to adults

Evaluation of variables and link with production (2)

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6 studies; children aged 2-12; 2 languages: English and French

Martino, 1982; Lafontaine, 1986; Buson, 2009; Chevrot et al., 2000; Martino, 1982;
Nardy, 2008; Barbu, Nardy, Chevrot & Juhel, 2013

- Positive correlation between evaluation and production between 4 and 6 years of age
- The progress in evaluation does not precede the progress in production

How are sociolinguistic patterns established during development?

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- **Social status**
 - ▣ Differences according to the social status of parents appear from the age of 3-4 years and could increase till the age of 6 years
- **Gender**
 - ▣ Differences according to the gender of the child : much work is needed
- **Context**
 - ▣ Stylistic ability is shown from the age of 3 within family interactions

Sociolinguistic patterns appear very early, at the very time that the child is constructing his language.

The frequency effect due to input seems to be cumulative.

Thus, regularities in children's production become manifest with a slight delay or are accentuated with age.

What is the motor for development: learning of norms or implicit learning of regularities?

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- A lot more work still necessary, but both possibilities of learning are not mutually exclusive
- From an early age, familiarity with variants may guide both production and evaluation
- Later, when the child enters the school system, awareness of the social value of usage may guide evaluation and production in formal situations

In the future, observation will need to determine how implicit learning of regularities and influence of social norms interact during the course of development.

What relationship is established between the linguistic environment and the acquisition of social dialects?

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- Effect of parental input apparent from the age of 3
- Caregivers adjust the frequency of variants according to the age of the child
- Input received from peers in kindergarten at age 5-6 years could lead to the homogenization of usage, converging towards the non standard in informal situations
- At age 10, children attending socially mixed schools show greater stylistic adaptation in formal situations

Social differences stemming from the family environment are not permanent characteristics imprinted upon individuals.

On the contrary, they are expressed differently according to the situations, the variables and the peers frequented by the children.

What is the cognitive nature of the mechanisms responsible for the acquisition of variation ?

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Variable rule-based formation

(Labov, 1989; Roberts, 1997)

Exemplar-based learning and schema formation

(Foulkes & Docherty, 2006; Nardy, Chevrot & Barbu, 2013)

The issue at stake over the coming years:

to draw up predictions allowing the learning paths involved in both models to be differentiated and to test them.