

New avenues in panel research

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Ever since Sankoff & Blondeau's (2007) call for linguists to explore the post-adolescent intra-speaker malleability, language sciences have collected and analysed a wealth of panel corpora. These datasets have amassed a growing body of evidence that post-critical age speakers can and do change aspects of their native language (see Sankoff 2019). And while they have provided some insights into the broad trends of intra-speaker malleability, we are yet to fully understand the determinants and limits of linguistic malleability across the full lifespan of the adult speaker. MacKenzie (2017) outlines three fundamental challenges for the investigation of changes in language use across the lifespan:

- The “what” question: What kind of change in later life is likely? Is later-life change more likely at a particular level of grammar or with cases of variation that fit a particular social profile?
- The “why” question: Why and what constrains and enhances linguistic change as an adult? To what extent can social and biological mechanisms be disentangled?
- The “how” question: How is linguistic change affected? Does it involve change in mental representations of speakers? (Mackenzie 2017:1)

To address these questions, we have invited leading players in the field of language change across the lifespan from various linguistic disciplines, covering variationist sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and dialectology to report on their ongoing research. Overall, the panel explores language change across the lifespan of the individual:

- from a greater breadth of geographical coverage than previously reported, specifically, the USA, Britain, Australia, Japan, Germany;
- across different levels of linguistic architecture, including phonology, morphosyntax, orthography, and prosody; and
- with a focus on the theoretical issues that arise from intra-speaker variability.

References

Mackenzie, L. 2017. Frequency effects over the lifespan: a case study of Attenborough's r's. *Linguistics Vanguard*, 1–12.

Sankoff, G. 2019. Language Change Across the Lifespan: Three Trajectory Types. *Language* 95(2):1-36.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, lifespan change, panel studies, language change, critical-age hypothesis

1. A comparison of panel and trend results in a demographically homogeneous population

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The past several years have seen a surge of research into both community and intraindividual linguistic variation and change in real time, using both panel and trend studies (for reviews of these studies and the issues involved, see Sankoff 2005; Bowie & Yaeger-Dror 2015; Pichler, Wagner & Hesson 2018). However, because trend studies are simpler to conduct, it is worth investigating whether panel studies offer additional information, so researchers designing studies can make better informed choices.

To address this, an archive of recordings covering several decades with several demographically similar speakers appearing repeatedly was used. Two parallel studies were conducted: A panel study of the 10 speakers appearing across more than two decades, and a trend study of 13 speakers in each of 1940 and 2010. Since these speakers came from a Western Vowel System community, those vowels were analyzed.

Overall, the panel and trend studies show similar results, but the panel data is noisier -- the intraindividual variation it captures makes the picture look less “clean”, with some speakers not participating. It is suggested that the panel results better reflect the linguistic reality in which speakers operate, with more variation than trend data would lead us to expect.

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Keywords: Sociolinguistics, panel study, lifespan change, linguistic variation, language change

2. Career and phonetic changes in the lifespan: A case study of a French speaker

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The focus of this study is on the relationship between changes to a career path and phonetic change in a French-speaking public figure, Michaëlle Jean. The general background is that adult pronunciation is influenced by experience, that is, by the interlocutor's contact with others during the lifespan (Sankoff 2004). The further issue to be considered is whether lifespan phonetic changes are also influenced by the type of profession and audience(s) the interlocutor repeatedly addresses in a professional capacity. For this purpose, a study was made of five different stages in Michaëlle Jean's career using 60 recordings spanning three decades (1988-2020). The principal analysis was of the high vowels /iyu/, for which in Quebec French, but not in Hexagonal French, there is a tense/lax phonetic distinction driven by consonantal context (Dumas 1987).

The results suggest considerable variation between Jean's time as a journalist in Quebec (1988-2005) when she produces the tense/lax distinction, and her later, more internationally oriented career as Secretary-General of La Francophonie (2014-2018) when the distinction is reduced. The latest years (2019-2020) also show a potential reversion of the trend (Reubold & Harrington 2018). These results may account for some of the substantial heterogeneity observed across speakers in many longitudinal studies since a speaker's phonetic trajectory might be as unique as their life trajectory.

References

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Sankoff, G. 2004. Adolescents, young adults, and the critical period: Two case studies from 'Seven Up'. In Fought, C. *Sociolinguistic Variation: Critical Reflections*, 121-139. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, lifespan change, panel studies, Quebec French

3. Lifespan change and social mobility: Vowels in Australian English

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Australian English vowels have undergone substantial change over the past 40 years, moving away from working class, male realisations towards more “general” Australian English realisations (e.g., Cox & Palethorpe 2012: 313), a change which was predicted to have been led by Greek- and Italian-background second-generation migrants (Horvath 1985:175-6). Here, we consider this community change at the level of the individual, and ask to what degree individuals participate in these sound changes over their lifespan.

We do this by comparing vowel realisations in sociolinguistic-interview data from five Italian-Australians and five Greek-Australians recorded twice over a forty-year period, first in the late 1970s as teenagers (Horvath 1985), and then again in 2019 as adults (Travis, Grama, and Gonzalez In Progress). We conduct acoustic analyses of four vowels considered to be characteristic of Australian English: FLEECE, FACE, GOAT and PRICE (Cox & Palethorpe 2012: 297-99). These vowels were strongly associated with socio-economic differences in 1970s Australia, with these social distinctions being greatly diminished today (Grama, Travis & Gonzalez 2019). We find that these ten speakers continue the trend towards more ‘general’ realisations, but they do so to different degrees. We interpret this in light of each speaker's upward social mobility, and consider the role of social conditioning and social standing in lifespan change.

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Keywords: Sociolinguistics, panel studies, lifespan change, language variation and change, Australian English

4. Lifespan development and community change in Austria

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One key question in the study of language variation and change is the relationship between the individual and the community. Today, variationists acknowledge the lack of panel research as one of the crucial desiderata to link the individual with the group level (Buchstaller & Wagner 2018: 2). Panel studies, for example, indicate that individual lifespan trajectories such as ‘age-grading’ or ‘retrograde change’ may affect (accelerate/decelerate) a community change in progress. Therefore, such studies are urgently needed to validate results from apparent-time and/or real-time trend studies (Bülow & Vergeiner 2020).

This paper aims to bring together panel and apparent-time data to better understand ongoing language change in a small village in Austria. Our study examines the use of nineteen phonological variables (n=24.748) over the life-course of twelve panellists (see Wallner in prep.) against the backdrop of the community-wide trend in Austria’s Central Bavarian dialect area. Each panellist was recorded in two settings (informal conversation vs. formal interview) in 1975/76 and 2018/19. These real-time data will be compared to apparent-time data that were recently recorded by means of a dialect questionnaire as part of the ongoing SFB-project “German in Austria”. The analysed sub-sample encompasses 43 informants (balanced for gender) of 10 locations from two age groups (18-35; 65+).

Panel data indicate the existence of two types of dialect variants: type 1 is subject to language change; type 2, however, is not, since these variants are even used more frequently in 2018/19. The apparent-time data support this differentiation, demonstrating, however, stability for type 2 and a gradual loss for type 1. Thus, we argue (1) that the apparent-time interpretation underestimates the rate of change and (2) that the distinction between age-grading and retrograde change is hard to make when several types of variants differing in its quality of change.

Keywords: panel and trend studies, real-time change, apparent-time change, Austrian German, regional dialects

5. Modelling (Dia)lectal coherence across time: Exploring the relationship between lifespan and community change

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Forty years ago, Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968:188) observed that “idiolects do not provide the basis for self-contained or internally consistent grammars,” rather it is the grammar of the speech community, governed by social factors, that reflects regularity and coherence and where linguistic change occurs. Recently, increasing focus has been placed on the role of the individual in ongoing language change and whether individual lifespan trajectories can “speed up” or “slow down” a community change in progress. This conundrum precipitates the question as to how well the grammars of individuals and the grammars of a community may cohere or “behave in parallel” (Guy & Hinskens 2016:1).

One common method for evaluating linguistic coherence is the concept of covariation which implies “that variables are correlated” (Guy 2013:63). Another method utilises implicational patterns to identify types and levels of coherence across sociolects (Ghyselen & Van Keymeulen (2016). To explore the concept of sociolectal coherence and how it shapes variation and fosters or constrains language change, this paper examines language usage in two Swabian speech communities through a combined real-time panel study and real-time trend study. Coupled with concepts from implicational scaling and the order theory of mathematics, the Llectal Lattice analyses 20 phonological and morpho-syntactic features of Swabian along with five social factors to build a model of linguistic coherence. The Llectal Lattice offers a new method for evaluating (dia-)lectal coherence across the lifespan, providing insight into whether less coherent lects are more vulnerable to change and convergence to the standard language, while more coherent lects are less susceptible.

References

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Keywords: Sociolinguistics, language variation and change, linguistic coherence, lifespan change, community change