

Investigating the dialogic relationship of language attitudes and speaker design

Variationist research on style has recently undergone a paradigm-shift towards a 'speaker-design' approach that investigates how speakers' communicative strategies and goals can drive the use of different linguistic varieties in interaction (e.g. Coupland 2001; Schilling-Estes 2002). Under such an agency-focused approach, the speaker-hearer relationship is regarded as dialogic: speaker and hearer co-determine each other's utterances via anticipatory and responsive action (see Bakhtin 1986 [1952-53]; Erickson 1986). This implies that speakers pro-actively shape their talk to elicit a desired hearer response and attain their communicative goals. For example, they may use socially marked linguistic varieties (styles, dialects, languages) to contextualize utterances for interpretation (Gumperz 1982), as when an Austrian native speaker switches from standard Austrian German into negatively regarded dialectal forms to convey a negative, antagonistic stance towards an opponent (Soukup 2006). A condition for such contextualization is that knowledge about the social meanings and attitudes attaching to language varieties be shared by speakers and hearers. Achieving the desired communicative effect furthermore necessitates hearers' *activation* of these social images (attitudes).

Analyses of the strategic use of language varieties and styles routinely point out the above-described dialogic connection between interactional contextualization and language attitudes (e.g. Gumperz 1982). However, few, if any, studies have explored this link in detail, especially the hearer's 'end': the activation of attitudes for utterance interpretation. The present study contributes to closing this gap by connecting a discourse analysis of Austrian speakers' strategic use of linguistic varieties (standard, dialect) to a language attitude analysis investigating the social meanings attaching to these varieties.

For the attitude study, 200 Austrian students participated in a matched-guise-type experiment in which they listened to and rated four different Austrian speakers (two standard and two dialect speakers, one male and one female each) on semantic differential scales. Statistical analysis of the data is ongoing, but preliminary results show that speakers using a form of Austrian dialect are regarded as less educated and sophisticated, but more emotional, honest and natural than standard speakers.

The complement to this attitude study is a discourse analysis of data from an Austrian TV political discussion show (five one-hour episodes). In the discussions, participants switch from standard (the show's 'default' language) into dialect to express negative metamessages such as ridicule and contempt. Further, they use dialect features in emotional outbursts, or to summarize statements in 'Average Joe' terms. I argue that there is a direct and intertextual connection between these rhetoric switches and the stereotypes activated in a hearer by dialect use. For example, negative attitudes such as the perceived coarseness of dialect allow for the exploitation of dialect to ridicule an opponent. Conversely, more positive attitudes such as the 'honesty' and 'naturalness' of dialect allow dialect forms to be used in summaries for laypersons.

In sum, by bringing together tools from different areas of sociolinguistic research (attitude study, discourse analysis, dialectology), my paper contributes to our understanding of the relationship between attitudes and interactive contextualization. More generally, further support is provided in favor of speaker-design approaches to the study of language variation.

References:

- Bakhtin, Mikhail (1986 [1952-53]). The problem of speech genres. In: Emerson, Caryl, and Michael Holquist (eds.) *Speech genres and other late essays*. Transl. by Vern W. McGee. Austin: The University of Texas Press. 60-102.

- Coupland, Nikolas (2001). Language, situation, and the relational self: theorizing dialect-style in sociolinguistics. In: Eckert, Penelope, and John R. Rickford (eds.) *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 185-210.
- Erickson, Frederick (1986). Listening and Speaking. In: Tannen, Deborah, and James E. Alatis (eds). *Languages and linguistics: interdependencies of theory, data, and application*. Georgetown University Round Table in Linguistics 1985. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. 294-319.
- Gumperz, John J. (1982). *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge ea.: Cambridge University Press.
- Schilling-Estes, Natalie (2002). Investigating Stylistic Variation. In: Chambers, J.K., Peter Trudgill, and Natalie Schilling-Estes (eds.) *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Malden, MA; Oxford; Carlton: Blackwell. 375-401.
- Soukup, Barbara (2006). Interactional Functions of Standard-Dialect Switching in Austrian TV Political Discussions. Paper at the Sociolinguistics Symposium 16 in Limerick, Ireland, July 6-8, 2006.