

Auditory affective priming: Exploring new methods to measure attitudes to language varieties

Despite the abundance of new methods to explore implicit attitudes in social psychology over the past two decades (e.g. neuroimaging, IAT, affective priming (AP)), the application of these techniques in linguistics has been limited. Recently, however, Speelman et al. (2013) have developed auditory affective priming (AAP) for linguistic applications. This technique is based on the extensively studied AP paradigm used in social psychology. A classic AP experiment measures the reaction time a respondent needs to categorise a target picture as negative or positive after being presented with a prime picture. If the prime has the same polarity as the target, it has been found that the reaction time is shorter than when prime and target are contrastively polarised. Analysing reaction times, then, allows to determine whether a stimulus is experienced positively or negatively. Speelman and colleagues bring innovation to this method by replacing the visual primes from the original technique by auditory ones which allows linguists to study language attitudes (see Degner 2011, 2012, and Gohier et al. 2013 for experiments using (non-)verbal auditory primes in other fields).

However, the linguistic technique has only been tested once on a relatively small sample and further research is needed to assess its possibilities and compare it to existing methods in language attitudes research. Questions that need to be addressed concern the characteristics of the auditory primes (e.g. can we go beyond the phonetic level?) and the possibilities to enter sociolinguistic variables in experimental designs without overloading this sensitive method. In addition, a number of practical concerns need to be considered (e.g. the problem of the technique's transportability).

Given the relative novelty of AAP in linguistic research, the paper will present a systematic survey of the possibilities and difficulties of implementing the technique in linguistic attitude research, with specific attention for research into language varieties. This survey will be illustrated by results of an ongoing pilot study that aims to develop a stable experimental design for the use of AAP in variational linguistics.

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