

New methods to measure language attitudes: Can we use implicit attitude measures from social psychology to study language attitudes?

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Since the introduction of the matched guise technique in the 1960s (Lambert et al. 1960), there has been little methodological innovation in the field of language attitude research (Speelman et al. 2013). In social psychology, by contrast, a considerable number of new methods to measure implicit attitudes has been developed in the past two decades (Gawronski & De Houwer 2014). It is only recently that sociolinguistics has started to explore the potential of some of these social psychological techniques to study language attitudes (Redinger 2010, Pantos 2012, Campbell-Kibler 2012 for the Implicit Association Test; Speelman et al. 2013 for Auditory Affective Priming) and so far only the surface has been scratched when it comes to exploring the possibilities and limitations these new methods have to offer for linguistic attitude research. Moreover many of these measures remain unexplored by linguists altogether.

In this paper, we report the results of a case study using the Personalized Implicit Association Test (Olson & Fazio 2004), one of these recently developed social psychological implicit attitude measures. The P-IAT measures the association between a target concept and an attribute concept (respectively language variety and valence in our study) by comparing participants' reaction times in categorisation tasks in which the target and attribute concepts are paired either congruently or incongruently. We measured attitudes towards two regional varieties of Dutch in Belgium and Standard Belgian Dutch. Results show all participants strongly favour the standard variety over both regional varieties. Yet, between the two regional varieties, participants tend to prefer their own regiolect.

In addition to the implicit attitude measurement using the P-IAT, the case study comprised an explicit attitude measurement based on semantic differential scales. Outcomes of the implicit and explicit measure were not significantly correlated. Potential methodological and theoretical explanations for this lack of correlation will be discussed in addition to a provisional evaluation of the P-IAT as a measure of language attitudes.

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