Co-variation and varieties in modern Dutch ethnolects

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Abstract

Ethnolect features typically have different origins. In emerging ethnolects, features are moreover in flux and structural relations between variable phenomena have not yet fully crystallized, so that the strict co-occurrence, conjunction or disjunction between variants is probably rare. In this contribution we focus on the co-variation of a range of linguistic variables in emerging Moroccan and Turkish varieties of Dutch spoken in the Netherlands. We address the question whether features with different origins can be freely and randomly mixed. Is the variation entirely free and consequently co-variation as well, or are there co-occurrence restrictions on their use? When correlated usages are encountered, are they better understood as consequences of internal factors, or as indicators of social (specifically ethnic) coherence? In our data for young Moroccan and Turkish varieties of Dutch, both linguistic and social or ethnographic factors make the linguistic variables cohere, although the linguistic rhyme and reason is the first one to catch the eye. On a more refined level of analysis, one cluster of features shows no social differentiation whatsoever, while one cluster of features appears to be areally defined and two others by the speakers' ethnic background in interaction with both their age and areal belonging.
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1. Co-variation: logical, statistical and structural aspects

In most socio-dialectological studies, the emphasis lies on separate, individual linguistic variables and their variants, sometimes including intermediate variants and hyperdialectisms. Much less attention has been paid to language varieties as a whole, i.e. at the level of more or less coherent language systems.

With respect to sets of variable phenomena ('linguistic variables') in specific linguistic systems some of the main questions are: (a) in which ways can linguistic variables cohere? (b) What does that mean in terms of the organization of linguistic variation and, more generally, of linguistic competence? Are the varieties of language that are commonly referred to as standard languages, vernaculars, speech styles, dialects, ethnolects, etc. coherent objects or diffuse abstractions? They are typically characterized in terms of clusters of linguistic elements: entire grammars and lexicons in the case of languages and dialects, or sets of linguistic variables in the case of sociolects, ethnolects and speech styles.

If speakers are using the available linguistic resources randomly or if they are doing relatively unconstrained 'bricolage', i.e. if they actively and idiosyncratically select from a palette of variants available in their communities of practice to construct identities, stances, and styles (Eckert, 2008), varieties are fluid. In that case the separate variables, which may have subtly distinctive social meanings ('indexicalities'), will not co-vary and show zero to low patterns of

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correlation; cf. Guy (2013). If varieties are coherent, the variables associated with them should co-vary in the usage of individuals of groups of speakers.

Co-variation is a non-accidental relation between two or more variable phenomena in the language use of a speaker or members of a specific (geographical, social or cultural) group. Statistically this relation manifests itself as a correlation, i.e. the situation where the occurrence of a phenomenon *x* systematically increases the probability of occurrence of a phenomenon *y* – or, contrarily, where the occurrence of a phenomenon *x* systematically lowers the chances of occurrence of a phenomenon *y* in an utterance, in a conversational turn, in a narrative, in a community grammar etc. The latter is generally the case for two (or more) phenomena which belong to extremely different style levels, as in e.g. the case of the use of the coronal variant [ɪn] of the (ing) variable in many varieties of English on the one hand and the heavy use of impersonal constructions (including passives) common in academic prose. In such cases of systematic positive or negative relations, co-variation is statistical in the sense of: not categorical. In general, stronger correlations should indicate greater levels of lectal coherence between phenomena.

The nature of this type of relation can vary across different sectors of a speech community. The relation can be motivated internally by structural relations. Two or more morpho-syntactic phenomena can e.g. be brought about by the same parametric change; several processes of vowel change can be part of the same chain shift. A correlation between several variable phenomena can also be extra-linguistically (and sometimes *only* extra-linguistically – Becker this volume) grounded, e.g. in stylistic and/or social connections. The latter can in turn concern geographical (traditional dialects), social (social class, network, community of practice and the like) or cultural dimensions (e.g. ethnic or religious background).

In a divergent dialect, i.e. a dialect that is structurally relatively far removed from e.g. the standard variety, typically almost every single word or phrase is simultaneously marked by several dialect features. Sometimes these features vary independently from each other. An example concerns the various dialect variants of the standard Dutch past participle *gewerkt*, 'worked', in Ripuarian dialects of Dutch (spoken in the far southeast of the Dutch language area):

(1a)   ɣˑ˩əwɪʀᵉkt 'worked' past part.
(b)   ɣˑ˩əwɪʀᵉk
(c)   jəwɪʀᵉkt
(d)   jəwɪʀᵉk

(1a–d) are all wellformed in these dialects; (1b) has undergone word-final [t] deletion (WFtD), which is a very frequently yet variably occurring feature of these dialects, (1c) shows the effect of the weakening of the voiced palato-velar fricative, [ɣˑ˩] → [j], which is a productive and equally variable process in these dialects; (1d) has undergone both WFtD and [ɣˑ˩]-weakening. These and similar cases involve several dialect features which can meet (as it were) in the realization of a given word, although in principle they vary independently of each other; yet it is often the case that they co-vary in the sense that their use is correlated, positively or negatively. This is co-variation in the sense in which the notion is commonly used, e.g. in the Anglo-American sociolinguistic literature, including Horvath and Sankoff (1987) on Sydney English, but also in studies such as Brouwer and van Hout (1984), van Hout (1989:247ff) for features of the Amsterdam and Nijmegen urban dialect varieties, respectively.

Categorical rather than probabilistic relations between two or more linguistic phenomena also occur; in a way, they constitute the outer limiting cases of a probabilistic relation. In one extreme case, phenomenon *x* always occurs when phenomenon *y* occurs – in a case of strict conjunction, such as implication (e.g. feeding or counter-bleeding order; Koutsoudas et al., 1974). For example, in Ripuarian dialects of Dutch, variable [ɣˑ˩]-weakening can be fed by the dialect variant /lɪɣˑ˩/ of the derivational suffix, the more common variant of which is /lɪk/; hence

(2) iˑəʀlijə < iˑəʀlɪɣˑ˩ə 'honest INFL'

The form [iˑəʀlɪkə] would bleed the weakening process; here the fricative variant of the derivation suffix feeds the weakening process (although weakening need not apply). One phenomenon supports the other; applying one feature, one creates the context for application of the other feature. Therefore, conversely, in words of this formal type, [ɣˑ˩]-weakening implies the use of the fricative variant of the suffix – in such cases the relation between the two linguistic variables is one of logical implication. Work by Auer (1997) argues that in a similar Old World traditional dialect setting, implicational relationships of strict co-occurrence can occur between certain types of variable phenomena, motivated by structural relations among the variants.

In the other extreme scenario, phenomenon *x* never occurs when phenomenon *y* occurs, i.e. in cases of disjunction (e.g. bleeding or counter-feeding rule ordering). An example from the Ripuarian dialects of Dutch: one of the features which sets these dialects apart from most other varieties of Dutch is dorsal fricative deletion (DFD). In lexical morphemes