

What accommodation in interaction can tell us about language change

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In every day conversation, people often accommodate their realization of different linguistic forms to that of their interlocutors (see e.g. Coupland 1980, 1984, Giles 1973, Nilsson 2014, Trudgill 1986). This is frequently the case when speakers repeat parts of their interlocutors' talk. Such repetition, or reuse, has been investigated in several interactional studies, with focus on the social function of mirrored speech (Coates 1996, Goodwin & Goodwin 1987, Nilsson et al. 2020, Schegloff 1996, Tannen 1989). In this paper, I will discuss the role of accommodation when reusing talk in processes for language change.

Many scholars assume that languages change as speakers adapt their realization of linguistic features to those of their interlocutors (Giles et al. 1991, Hinskens 1998, Trudgill 1986). Here I draw on Auer & Hinskens's model (1996, 2005), where language change is seen as a three-step-process: step 1) Speakers accommodate to their interlocutor's speech in face-to-face interaction; step 2) Speakers change their linguistic form more permanently and use the new form with other speakers, and step 3) Many speakers in a society use the new form, resulting in language change. I will illustrate the first step in this process with examples from every-day conversation, and then draw on these findings to discuss the possible outcome in terms of linguistic change and stability.

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