

Persistence in Spoken English: A Variationist Approach

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The paper, which is a partial summary of my PhD dissertation (Szmrecsanyi 2006), demonstrates that persistence (a.k.a. priming) can be neatly operationalized in variationist research designs. Drawing on data from several corpora of spoken English and utilizing binary logistic regression, the paper investigates, as case studies, two well-known alternations in the grammar of English – future marker choice (John will see Mary vs. John is going to see Mary) and complementation strategy choice (John starts to wonder vs. John starts wondering) – with regard to the explanatory power yielded by persistence. The paper presents evidence that the corpus data dovetail nicely with psycholinguistic findings on priming, and that variationist models omitting persistence would leave a substantial share of the observable variation unaccounted for, or even erroneously identify it as ‘free’ variation although it is clearly patterned.

References

Szmrecsanyi, Benedikt (2006). *Morphosyntactic persistence in spoken English. A corpus study at the intersection of variationist sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse analysis.* (Series: Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs). Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.