

Sociolinguistic Perception

Broad Research Questions:

How do we take in and interpret language variation as listeners?

How are links between language and social groups/types/meanings represented in the mind?

- Stems from an interest in “socio-cognitive” models of language variation
- Focus on the *listener* perspective
- Where sociolinguistics and dialectology meet psycholinguistics, speech perception, and social psychology
- Typically uses experimental methods

Useful overview of research questions, methods used, and further possible directions in Drager (2010)

Methods:

Perception-based studies of sociolinguistic variables’ social meanings, methods largely determined on your *research question*, and what level of *awareness* you’d like to access. An example process in choosing between matched-guise and identification tasks:

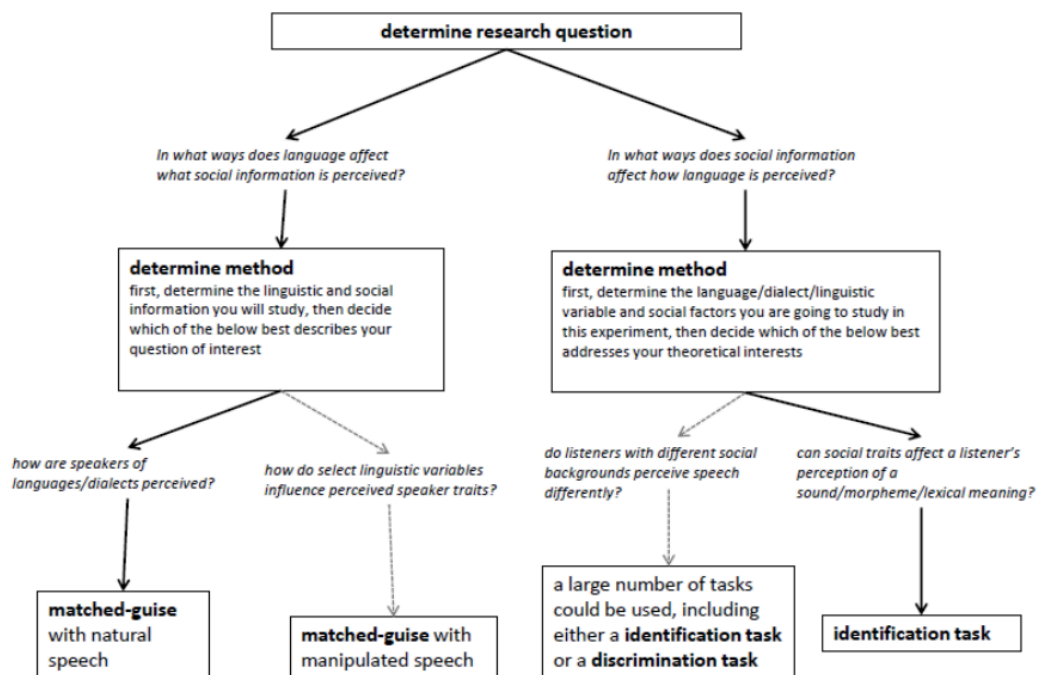


Chart from **Drager, Katie (2013)**, *Experimental Methods in Sociolinguistics: Matched guise and identification tasks*, in Janet Holmes and Kirk Hazen (eds.) *Research Methods in Sociolinguistics: A Practical Guide*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Two primary types of methods used commonly:

- *Matched guise task*
 - Tests listener social evaluations of a particular language, dialect, or sociolinguistic variable
 - Traditionally deployed in work on language attitudes/ideologies (more explicit relationship between language and social meanings)
 - Some listeners hear one version of a sound clip (“guise”), other listeners hear a different guise, listeners rate speaker on a number of attributes based on the sound clip
 - To create guises: same voice recorded using different languages/dialects (unmanipulated), or one sound clip digitally manipulated to contain different variants of a variable
 - If listener ratings differ based on guise, can identify attributes or social information ideologically associated with that guise
 - **Some recommended readings using this method:**
 - Lambert et al. (1960)
 - Giles (1970)
 - Campbell-Kibler (2007)
 - Levon (2007)

- *Identification, categorization, or matching task*
 - Tests how social information affects how language is perceived
 - Listeners are provided with social information about a speaker (can be explicitly stated, or hinted at), then asked to perform a linguistic identification or categorization task, or a matching task (e.g. Niedzielski, 1999)
 - Results have shown influence of many perceived speaker social information on categorization. Examples:
 - Gender (Strand, 1999)
 - Race (Staum-Casasanto 2008)
 - Region of origin (Niedzielski, 1999)
 - Age (Koops et al. 2008)
 - Socioeconomic status (Hay et al. 2005; Squires 2013)
 - Sexual orientation (Mack & Munson 2012)
 - Persona (D’Onofrio, submitted)
 - A number of studies have also tested how listener background and listener productions are related to categorization/identification in perception
 - (e.g. Hay, Drager & Warren 2009; Fridland & Kendall 2012)

Increasing interest in investigations of awareness, consciousness, and salience, which require methods that access even more implicit and automatic processes. Many of these new tasks are borrowed from work in speech perception, psycholinguistics, or social psychology. Some possible examples:

- Eye-tracking tasks
- Implicit association tasks
- Shadowing tasks

Some general things we know from work in sociolinguistic perception, so far:

- Social information *can* influence linguistic perception (mostly shown with regard to macro-social information) (see studies in identification tasks)
- Linguistic cues *can* influence how a speaker is evaluated (see studies in matched-guise tasks), even very small phonetic cues (see Campbell-Kibler 2007). Combinations of features can also have an effect (see Levon 2007, Campbell Kibler 2011)
- These effects can arise even at very early, automatic stages (see Koops et al. 2008, D’Onofrio submitted)
- *Persona*-based information can have an effect on linguistic perception as strongly as macro-social information can (D’Onofrio submitted)

References and resources for examples in sociolinguistic perception (a non-exhaustive list)

Overview

Drager, Katie. 2010. Sociophonetic variation in speech perception. *Language and Linguistic Compass* 4(7):473-480.

Matched-guise task

Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2007. Accent, (ING), and the social logic of listener perceptions. *American Speech* 82: 32–64.

Giles, Howard. 1970. Evaluative reactions to accents. *Educational Review* 22:211-27.

Lambert, Wallace, Richard Hodgson, Robert Gardner, and Samuel Fillenbaum. 1960. Evaluational reactions to spoken language. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 60(1): 44-51.

Levon, Erez. 2007. Sexuality in context: Variation and the sociolinguistic perception of identity. *Language in Society* 36: 533–54.

Mack, Sara & Benjamin Munson. 2012. The influence of /s/ quality on ratings of men’s sexual orientation: Explicit and implicit measures of the ‘gay lisp’ stereotype. *Journal of Phonetics* 40: 198-212.

Purnell, Thomas, William Idsardi, and John Baugh. 1999. Perceptual and phonetic experiments on American English dialect identification. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 18(1): 10-30.

Identification, categorization, or matching task

Hay, Jennifer, & Katie Drager. 2010. Stuffed toys and speech perception. *Linguistics*, 48(4), 865–892.

Hay, Jennifer, Paul Warren & Katie Drager. 2005. Factors influencing speech perception in the context of a merger-in-progress. *Journal of Phonetics* 34:458-484.

Kendall, Tyler and Valerie Fridland. 2010. Mapping production and perception in regional vowel shifts. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics: Selected papers from NWAV 38*. 16: 103–112.

Niedzielski, Nancy A. 1999. The effect of social information on the perception of sociolinguistic variables. *Journal of Social Psychology (Special Edition)*, 18(1):62-85.

Strand, Elizabeth. 1999. Uncovering the role of gender stereotypes in speech perception. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 18. 86–99.

Other types of tasks

Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2012. The implicit association test and sociolinguistic meaning. *Lingua*. 122(7):753-763.

D’Onofrio, Annette. Submitted. Persona-based information and automatic linguistic perception: Evidence from TRAP-backing. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.

Koops, Christian, Elizabeth Gentry, and Andrew Pantos. 2008. The effect of perceived speaker age on the perception of PIN and PEN vowels in Houston, Texas. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics: Selected papers from NWAV 36*. 14:91–101.

Squires, Lauren. 2013. It don’t go both ways: Limited bidirectionality in sociolinguistic perception. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 17(2), 200–237. doi:10.1111/josl.12025

Staum Casasanto, Laura. 2008. Experimental Investigations of Sociolinguistic Knowledge. Dissertation. Palo Alto: Stanford University.

Walker, Abby & Kathryn Campbell-Kibler. 2011. Vocalic accommodation in a cross dialectal shadowing task. Paper presented at New Ways of Analyzing Variation (NWAV), Washington, DC.