

# **Variation in Language Acquisition 6 (ViLA6)**

18-19 March 2025, University of Potsdam, Campus Griebnitzsee

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# From imitators to innovators: children and language change

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Labov (2001: 307) observes that ‘the vernacular that we speak, the first language that we have mastered perfectly, and use without doubt or hesitation—is our mother’s vernacular’. At the same time, we know that ‘children must learn to talk differently from their mothers’ (Labov 2001: 416); otherwise, there would be no such thing as language change. These observations pinpoint two key stages in the life cycle of sociolinguistic development: transmission and incrementation. In transmission, children ‘replicate faithfully the form of their parents’ language, in all of its structural detail’ (Labov 2007: 349). In incrementation, ‘successive cohorts and generations of children advance [a] change beyond the level of their caretakers and role models’ (Labov 2007: 346), moving year by year in the direction of the change in the community. In the move from transmission to incrementation, children undergo vernacular reorganization, which ‘may take the form of increases in frequency, extent, scope, or specificity’ of a particular feature undergoing change (Labov 2007: 346). As Labov points out, ‘vernacular reorganization must take place in the window of opportunity between first learning and the effective stabilization of the linguistic system’ (2001: 416).

In this paper I examine transmission, incrementation and vernacular reorganization through a real time analysis of preschoolers (age 3-4) and preadolescents (age 12-13) in a community in north east Scotland. I compare their patterns of use across three linguistic variables and four groups: community, caregivers, preschoolers, preadolescents, allowing us to track the dynamics of linguistic change as the children move the caregiver-dominated norms of the home to the community-dominated norms of the wider world.

# Categorizing and producing variation: Putting the pieces of a complex puzzle together

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Although adult language attitudes (LA) have been the focus of most research, children's LA have gained an increased interest in the last decade or so. These have been studied mainly via indirect and experimental methods. There is a general consensus that by age of eight, children start preferring the more prestigious, normative, variants (Kinzler & DeJesus, 2013). Despite the substantial body of work investigating LA towards languages or language varieties in different sociolinguistic contexts, there are still several areas to be explored. To our knowledge, not many studies have combined quantitative and qualitative measures to investigate LA via indirect (e.g. speaker evaluation design with a matched guise design) and direct methods. Indeed, experimental and quantitative methods are seldom combined with qualitative investigations of the children's language exposure and production.

## **Research questions (RQs)**

- 1) Do monolingual and bilingual children's categorizations differ with regards to their attitudes towards normative practices?
- 2) When are children's LA the reflection of their family language socialization practices or of broader normative practices?

This study investigates monolingual and bilingual children's LA towards normative (N) and non normative (NN) realizations of the French Variable Liaison, FVL (e.g. 'Il est très embêté' realized [ilɛtʁɛzabɛtɛ] (N) versus [ilɛtʁɛabɛtɛ]) (NN). To answer the RQs, we have used both indirect methods (speaker evaluation design) and direct methods (reading task, spontaneous interactions and focus group interviews). We first collected data from 65 children of which 45 monolinguals and 20 bilinguals, (6-12 years) who performed a speaker evaluation task comprising

21 trials each containing two sentences: a normative and non-normative variant of the FVL. The two sentences were identical in semantic content but differed only in that one sentence the FVL was realized (N) whilst in the other it was not (NN). The children had to select one of the two sentences that best corresponded to their preferences or to the speech of an intelligent or friendly speaker. We then proceeded with the direct methods of observation. Three children from the experiment's sample were selected and recorded during family dinners, followed by focus group interviews with all the family members. Each participant's FVL production was coded. The focus group interviews tapped into the family's language socialization practices (e.g. views on language practices, literacy). We then conducted a large-scale reading task (using the same sentences in the experiment) administered to literate children (N=30) and adults (N=60) in order to measure the FVL realization frequency in a highly controlled situation (reading). Preliminary results showed that whilst children chose by and large the normative FVL realizations, speaker categorizations varied according to the children characteristics (e.g. family socioeconomic status). Comparing the children's categorizations to the FVL realization rates observed in the reading task, we found that the children were most likely to choose the normative variants more often for the FVL with a high realization rate. Yet for the FVL with a low realization rate, the non-normative variant was selected more often. Children's social categorizations seemed to be sensitive to the different FVL forms that were likely to be realized (or not) in their environment: The higher the realization rates (in the reading task) the more likely it was for children to choose the normative variants.

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# How do children produce and recognize frequent words with variable pronunciation?

## Evidence from Russian

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One and the same word can be pronounced differently in casual speech because of phonetic reduction, i.e. omission of sounds (Ernestus 2000; Johnson 2004; Brouwer 2010; etc.). The reduction can be facilitated by different linguistic factors (Dayter, Riekhakaynen 2022), but it is impossible to predict which variant a speaker will choose in a particular context. Our research aims to describe the processing of such phonetic variation by Russian-speaking children.

To study speech production, we asked 60 children (4–6 years old) to play a role-playing game, which was supposed to provoke the use of high-frequency words that have several pronunciation variants. We received 657 realizations of 22 frequent words. For all words, we found more than one pronunciation variant in our data. However, each child normally preferred one variant of each word, either canonical or reduced. Among the reduced variants, those in which only one or two sounds are omitted predominated. We assume that preschoolers choose one pronunciation variant because they cannot figure out how all possible variants are distributed in adult speech. This finding is in line with a more general tendency of children to overgeneralize while processing linguistic variation (MacWhinney 2017, etc.).

Although children seldom use highly reduced variants in their speech, we hypothesized that they could recognize them in adult speech. We chose 12 reduced pronunciation variants which are very frequent in Russian speech and thus are supposed to be present in the input of every child (*ochen'* 'very' [otɐ:], *sejchas* 'now' [ɕ:əs], etc.). With each of them we composed a five-word sentence, the reduced word always being the third one. Then we removed the last word from each phrase. 21 children aged 4 to 7 years and 21 adults listened to each phrase, looked at the picture with an object on it and were asked to repeat the whole phrase they heard, adding a word from the picture. Then, participants listened to isolated reduced words extracted from the phrases and explained what these words meant. Adults performed well in both tasks (more than 90% of correct answers in both parts of the experiment). Children were significantly worse at recognizing reduced variants when presented in isolation than in context ( $\chi^2=59.25$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), and even for the

recognition in context their results were significantly worse than those of adults. The accuracy of recognition in context depends on age ( $\chi^2=18.55$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), but even 7-year-old children recognize reduced variants worse than adults.

We assume that, when producing speech, children prefer to extract one variant for each word from the mental lexicon, whereas adults use different variants. When recognizing speech, children restore even frequent reduced variants to canonical ones using the context, while adults can extract frequent variants from their mental lexicon (see (Raeva, Riekhakaynen 2016) for the discussion of reduced word forms recognition strategies in adults).

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# Who's asking? Effects of experimenter on children's accent-based preferences

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In typical studies on children's language biases, when asked by an experimenter whether they prefer a locally accented (LA) speaker or an other-accented (OA) speaker, children tend to choose the LA speaker (Imuta & Spence, 2020). Are children's responses in these tasks situation-dependent? Here, we examined whether 7- to 9-year-olds' expressed preferences change based on two contextual factors, (1) the identity of the experimenter (LA or OA speaker), and (2) whether children's responses are public or private. If children's responses reflect rigid preferences, they should not vary by context, but if they are influenced by social factors, preferences might be reduced when tested by an OA experimenter, especially when children respond directly to them.

In Exp. 1, Canadian children completed a preference task, where they listened to pairs of British- and Canadian-accented speakers and were asked to choose who they liked more (liking trials) and who they thought would be a better teacher (teacher trials). Crucially, children interacted either with a Canadian-accented experimenter—who they shared their answers with—or a British-accented experimenter—who they shared their answers with or where they responded privately. Results show that in teacher trials, children expressed significantly less preference for Canadian speakers when interacting with the British compared to the Canadian experimenter (see Fig. 1), but only when answers were shared, suggesting that children considered how their responses would be received by the experimenter.

Since children tend to evaluate foreign-accented speech more harshly than regionally accented speech, Exp. 2 tested whether expressed preferences also decrease after interacting with a foreign-accented experimenter (Brazilian Portuguese). Similar to Exp. 1, children preferred Canadian speakers less when sharing answers with a Brazilian experimenter compared to a Canadian experimenter (see Fig. 2), both in liking *and* teacher trials.

This is the first study to show—in two experiments—that experimenter identity affects children's reported language biases. Biases were reduced *only* when children responded publicly

to the OA experimenter, suggesting that children's biases did not change after a positive interaction with an OA experimenter; instead, they were concerned with how their answers might be perceived. These results highlight the importance of considering experimenter identity (and children's interaction with them) in assessing language attitudes (St. Pierre et al. 2024).

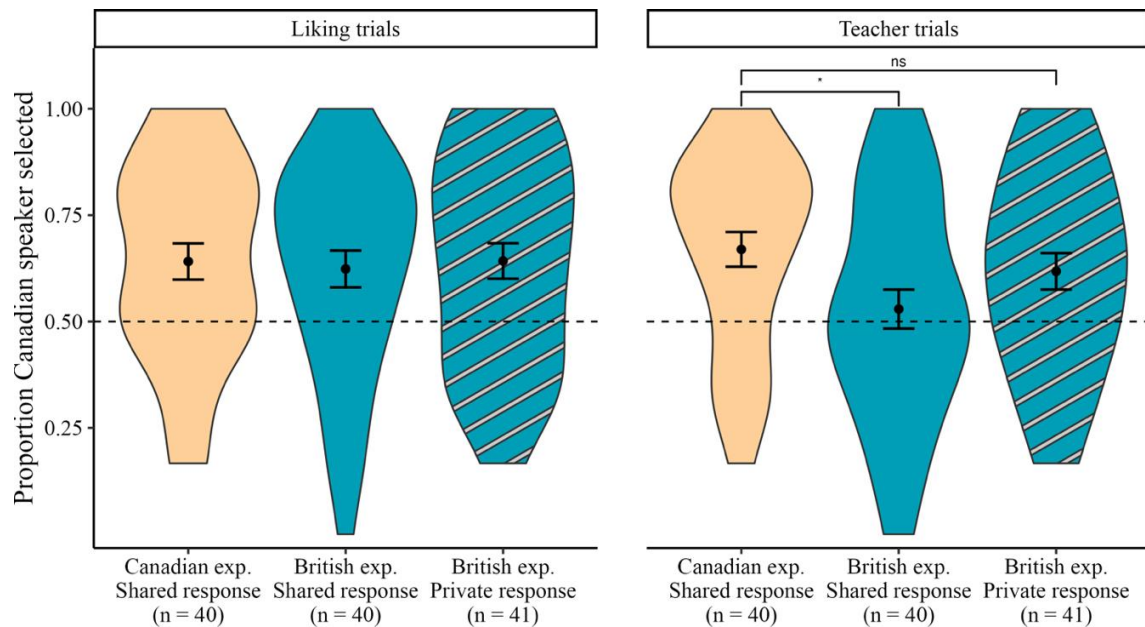


Figure 1. Results of Experiment 1, showing less bias for Canadian speakers in teacher trials when sharing responses with the British experimenter.

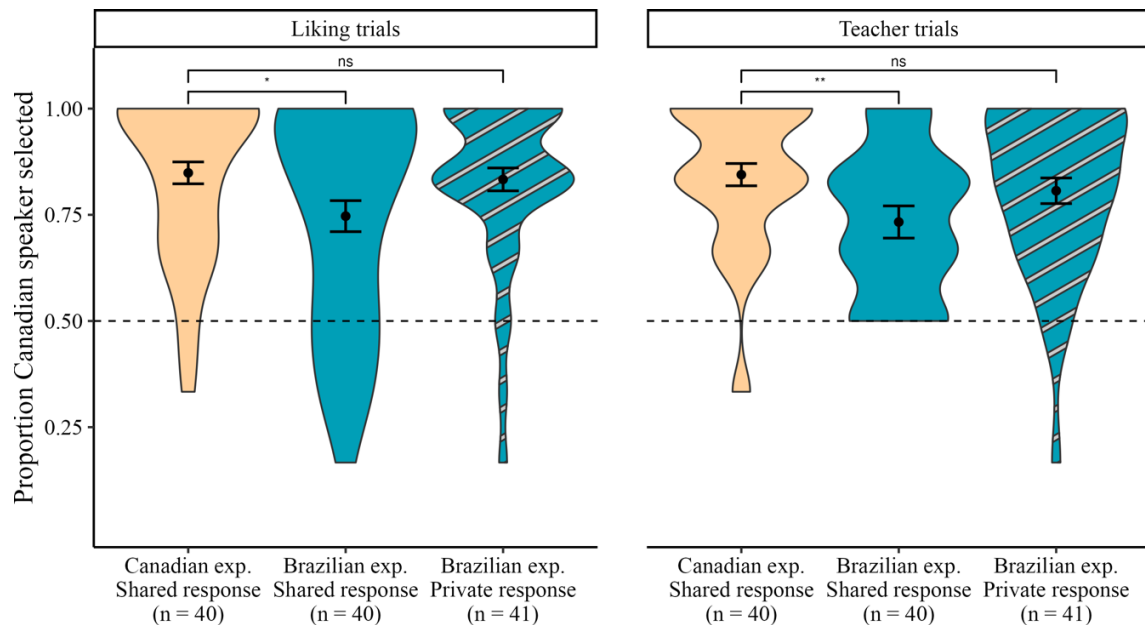


Figure 2. Results of Experiment 2, showing less bias for Canadian speakers in both trial types when sharing responses with the Brazilian experimenter.

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# Significant life events as drivers for sociolinguistic development across the lifespan

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Eckert (1997: 157) argued that “life is about change” and thus “development is lifelong.” While sociolinguistic development may indeed decelerate post-adolescence, it does not come to total stagnation (Buchstaller 2015; Bülow & Vergeiner 2021; Pfenninger et al. 2023). This raises the question as to what drives fluctuations in lifespan sociolinguistic developmental trajectories. Major life events (MLEs) such as entering the workforce, parenthood, and retirement have long been used as post-hoc explanations for shifts in the post-adolescent sociolinguistic repertoire (Eckert 1997; Sankoff & Laberge 1978). Surprisingly, however, only few studies in linguistics have actually set out to measure the extent to which MLEs impact sociolinguistic development, despite an accumulating number of claims that “targeted studies of critical turning points in the life course can contribute to the understanding of individual life span change” (Wagner 2012: 197).

In this talk, I present a cross-sectional study exploring the interindividual effects of 16 MLEs on retrospective perceptions of linguistic change across adulthood. Meaningfully combining quantitative and qualitative data, I explore *what type* of sociolinguistic development can take place during adulthood, *why* such change occurs, and *when* during the life course such change is likely to happen.

Data were collected from 701 participants with L1 German from Austria (491 women, 207 men, 3 diverse;  $M_{age}=44y$ ,  $SD=16y$ ). Participants completed an online survey in which they were asked to identify an MLE that significantly influenced their use of language (varieties). Following, they retrospectively judged the extent to which the same MLE impacted on both their productive use of language varieties (20 survey items measuring MLE-related changes in cross-contextual use of standard German and Austro-Bavarian dialect) and affective-attitudinal factors (10 survey items measuring MLE-related changes in, e.g., dialect identity, attitudes towards standard German [Steiner et al. 2023]). In a final step, participants could provide qualitative narratives about the perceived MLE-related linguistic change.

Bayesian regression analyses of participants’ retrospective perceptions of MLE-related change suggest that, e.g., entry into the workforce, relocation and (grand-)parenthood are related to an increased use of and more positive attitudes towards standard language, whereas, e.g., retirement

is associated with the opposite trend (i.e., increase in vernacularity). That said, MLEs can influence the sociolinguistic repertoire in different ways, to different degrees and for different reasons. Qualitative content analyses show that the individuality in perceived MLE-related change relates to differences in language ideologies, shifts in social networks and contacts, and differential participation in the linguistic marketplace.

These findings align with the assumption that the sociolinguistic repertoire remains flexible even in post-adolescent phases, and that shifts therein are shaped by an individual's lived experiences.

# Predicting SLA pathway variation using a simulation of learner-internal dynamics

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In our presentation, we address computational and methodological considerations in investigating pathway variation in second language (L2) acquisition. We focus on the phenomenon of L2 simplification and explore the role of learner-internal dynamics in the evolution of different developmental pathways. We argue that the dynamics within the L2 learner's interlanguage system are crucial in shaping these pathways, ultimately determining whether the learner stabilizes. We have developed a computer-based tool that can simulate interaction in the learning environment, allowing for the use of different variants. In this paper, we outline the design of the simulation, demonstrate how it simulates specific SLA processes and relate the simulated developmental pathways to actual empirical L2 learner data. We simulate these dynamics in a model designed to address the influence of specific computational constraints on a learner's developmental pathway. Our software dynamically calculates indices of linguistic features based on a turn-by-turn analysis of the interaction between the learner and their interlocutors. The index is updated as new turns occur and is displayed in real-time on a graph. There is no restriction on the number of turns over which the index can be calculated, allowing the software to capture emerging patterns far beyond what is possible in real-time studies.

The learner-internal dynamics are operationalized using key components of the mathematical framework of Dynamical Systems Theory (DST) (e.g., Feldman 2019). The model simulates interactions between a learner and an interlocutor to determine the selection of variational options related to diverse linguistic units, among them the copula. This approach enables us to model the effect of specific computational constraints on the learner's use of specific linguistic units and, in the long run, predict their developmental pathway (based on this usage and the initial state).

Currently, our simulation includes two sets of computational constraints, labelled 'forgetting' and 'entrenchment'. The simulation models the influence of these constraints on the patterns

occurring in the learner's use of specific linguistic units during simulated interactions between the learner and their interlocutor.

We compare the simulations of learner development with natural learner data from six longitudinal studies spanning 12 to 18 months. This comparison reveals a close match between the simulated data and the actual learner data, thus validating the simulation of the dynamics inherent in a learner's interlanguage (see Pienemann, Lanze, Nicholas & Lenzing 2022).

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# Multicompetent argumentation: Results of a long-term study on the development of plurilingual competence in German, Italian and English

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The Autonomous Province of Bolzano-Alto Adige in the north of Italy has always been a multilingual region. Multilingualism is part of everyday life and is therefore a key objective of education in the officially trilingual region. In recent years, there has been a growing number of scientific studies investigating the question of how plurilingual competence is expressed and developed as multicompetence (Cook 2013) in written language (Cenoz and Gorter 2011; Riehl 2021; Berthele and Lambelet 2017; Usanova and Schnoor 2021). However, assuming, with Hyland (2022), that what is considered appropriate writing and persuasive argumentation depends on the institutionalized practices of society or the social environment, the question arises in the context of plurilingual literacy as to the cross-linguistic transversality of genre-specific competences.

The presentation will examine these questions from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, focusing on the development of argumentative skills. Based on texts from more than 150 students who were followed between 2015 and 2018 as part of the project "One School, Many Languages" at South Tyrolean lower secondary schools, the first step is to show how multicompetent learners use connectors for their communicative purposes in argumentation-oriented texts across languages in German, Italian and English. In a second step, changes in the use of connectors will be traced in order to ask in a final step in what context these changes are to be seen, i.e. as the development of an individual cross-linguistic writing style or as an adaptation to an institutionalized language group-specific argumentation style.

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# Acquiring dialect and standard speech in the German, Swiss and Austrian Alemannic region: the development of discrimination abilities under the influence of different sociolinguistic conditions

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Research into the acquisition of language varieties, particularly individual variational competence, remains a significant gap in both variationist linguistic studies and language development research. Only recently has the simultaneous acquisition of different varieties in children internationally become the focus of research interest (cf. de Vogelaer/Chevrot/Katerbow/Nardy 2017; Johnson/White 2020). Given the prevalence of nonstandard varieties and vertical variation in the German-speaking areas, the limited number of studies from the German-speaking area is astonishing. A few pioneer studies from Switzerland (Häcki Buhofer/Burger 1998), Germany (Katerbow 2013) or Austria (Kaiser 2022) have investigated multi-varietal first language acquisition under very different dialectal and sociolinguistic circumstances.

The trinational project "Language Acquisition across Varieties in the Alemannic Area" (LAVA), funded by the DFG, FWF, and SNF, addresses this research gap by investigating typical language acquisition in children aged 2 to 8 years in the Lake Constance region. The project aims to build an empirical database for (present and future) research on the acquisition of dialect and standard German in children and on variational competence within the diverse sociolinguistic contexts of Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. The interdisciplinary approach combines methods from variationist linguistics, psycholinguistics, language acquisition research, and sociolinguistics.

In addition to insights into the overall structure of the project and its research questions, comparative results from different Alemannic regions on the development of perceptual-discriminatory abilities will be presented for the first time. Perceptual discrimination is essential for acquiring sociolinguistic competence. Specifically, we examine the trajectory of children's ability to distinguish between local dialect and standard speech. Data are collected through quasi-experimental settings, i.e. matching tasks for variety discrimination. Initial data and analyses will be discussed against the background of the overall different sociolinguistic circumstances in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, as well as in relation to children's exposure to dialect and standard speech within the family.

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# Dialect-standard variation in interactions between parents and their children: A longitudinal corpus study on Alemannic in Southwestern Germany

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In our talk, we will explore the question of what spontaneous parent-child interaction can tell us about language change. We present different comparative dimensions for analyzing variation between the Alemannic dialect spoken in Southwestern Germany and Standard German. We use a longitudinal corpus that comprises 200 hours of natural parent-child interactions from three families with children aged 1;6-4;6 (*Longitudinalkorpus Eltern-Kind-Interaktion LEKI*, see Pfeiffer/Anna 2021).

Firstly, our analysis of two phonological variables (s-palatalization and diphthongization; cf. Schwarz 2015, Streck 2012) shows that the children use more standard variants than the parents.

Second, there are differences between the families regarding the use of the two variables. We discuss whether these differences between generations and phonological variables can be interpreted as an apparent time manifestation of language change.

Finally, we reflect possibilities of the comparison of different time points in order to being able to investigate longitudinal changes. However, this is limited by the small number of deviant (either dialect or Standard) cases.

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# Socially meaningful language variation in child-directed praise and reprimands: a mixed-methods approach

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**Aims.** In their paper on child-oriented control acts, Zenner and Van De Mieroop (2021) drew a link between the Western-European ideal of democratic parenting and the hyperstandardised linguistic situation in the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium, indicating that caregivers seem to reserve standard language (the “best language” in the speech community) for softer control acts (the “best parenting” in a Western-European context). In like manner, this study focuses on language variation in child-directed praise and reprimands, examining to which extent these specific pragmatic phenomena in the family home serve as a source of information about the social meaning of the varieties at hand and caregivers’ language regards (Preston, 2013).

**Data and analysis.** The data consist of approximately 30 hours of self-recorded dinner table conversations for eight Belgian Dutch families, comprising a corpus of nearly 25,000 utterances of spontaneous language production. The data is analysed through a mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative variational analyses of standard and non-standard pronouns of address in the contexts of praise and reprimands on the one hand, and qualitative discursive analyses of selected cases on the other. Such approach enables us to cross-validate our findings and enrich our insights, ultimately providing a more comprehensive understanding of the sociolinguistic implications of variation in child-directed praise and reprimands.

**Findings.** Considering the prominence of democratic parenting in the Western-European context on the one hand (Pećnik, 2007), and the long-established standard language ideology in Belgium on the other (Van Hoof & Jaspers, 2012), we expect that caregivers will associate standard forms significantly more with praise than with reprimands, given the respective positive and negative valence of the two and consistent with how they seem to associate the standard variety more with softer control acts than with more direct ones (Zenner & Van De Mieroop, 2021).

**Originality.** New to this study is the systematic and mixed-methods approach to examine specific pragmatic phenomena in the family home as a possible source of information about the status of the varieties in the community at large. By integrating quantitative variational and qualitative discursive analyses, this approach helps to explore caregivers' perception of "the best language for the best type of parenting", thus providing a new angle in their language regards as well as in children's acquisition of community norms.

**Significance and implications.** Expanding on the traditional monolingual settings and the growing focus on multilingualism in the family home, this study underscores the potential of the family for variationist sociolinguistics. Through specific pragmatic phenomena, i.e. praise and reprimands, it provides a fresh perspective on caregivers' language regards and on the status of the varieties under scrutiny. Moreover, it accentuates the value of incorporating mixed-methods research in studying family language discourse.

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# Analyzing dialectal variation in early adult L2 acquisition

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The present study reports from investigations of dialectal features in the early L2 Norwegian of a group of adult immigrants. The subjects all reside in the same city, and it would be easy to infer that they all acquire the same variety of Norwegian. However, Norway has a great deal of dialectal variation and people are assumed to use their dialects in all or most spheres of life, including in media and other public domains (Sandøy 2009). Norwegian does not have an official spoken language standard. Still, there is one variety that is closely related to one of the written standards of Norwegian, that works as a spoken standard for some people and/or in some contexts (Røyneland 2009). There is no official consensus of how the linguistic system of this variety looks like and how much variation it contains.

Regarding the use of this “standard” in an L2 learner setting, anecdotal evidence suggests that a specialized version of it is used in many Norwegian language courses offered to adult immigrants, but some research also finds teachers who use local dialects in L2 classrooms, typically passionate about preserving the dialects (Høyland 2021). From the learner perspective, some studies have found that using dialectal forms has a high value, and there may be strategic reasons to do so if given a choice (see Røyneland & Jensen 2020 and Cornips 2020 for discussion).

In any case, the Norwegian language situation entails that the input L2 learners get may consist of differing and even conflicting grammatical systems that they need to navigate in. Few studies have been done so far on dialectal features and sociolinguistic variation in adult L2 speakers’ Norwegian output. The present study seeks to fill in this research gap and provide empirical data from 20 L2 speakers of Norwegian learning the language at an official language program. In the presentation we will discuss what linguistic features are possible measures for use of the local dialect(s), and then investigate the learners’ language regarding specific features (pronominal forms, question words, uvular R etc.). We investigate oral data from both experimental tasks and more informal conversations, involving field workers who all to some extent standardize their way of speaking.

Preliminary findings suggest that we do find some dialectal features, but they may often be considered results of priming of some sort.

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# Closing the gap: Multilingualism and sociolinguistic variation in Second Language Acquisition

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"Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker listener, in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance." (Chomsky 1965:3).

This quote by Chomsky (1965) perfectly sums up the limitations of linguistic theory, particularly in the lack of a multilingual perspective in language acquisition and variationist research. The assumption that hardly any variation exists in speech communities (especially in present-day classrooms) has resulted in the lack of language acquisition research within the context of sociolinguistic variation, which is so prevalent in our society (De Vogelaer et al. 2017: 2). This variation includes not only non-standard grammar and dialects but should also include the ubiquitous status of multilingualism, due to globalisation and migration (Lorenz 2023). Furthermore, in his empirical study on multilingualism in Africa, Bokamba (2014, p. 43), argues that "multilingualism provides scholars with incomparable empirical data at both the societal and individual levels", which can allow insight into language attitudes, language power, ideology, language and gender, language contact, planning, variation and change. Bokamba (2014, p. 44) also postulates that by conducting multilingual acquisition studies comparatively with monolingualism, "we would gain unparalleled insights that would far better advance our knowledge of linguistic competence than our currently monolingually and monodialectally approach," as expressed earlier in Chomsky's quote. Moreover, in her study on L2 repertoire usage in Swiss-German speech communities by L1 English and Turkish speakers Ender (2021) finds that attitudes toward language variation in the L1 can be transferred to language attitudes in the L2. Her findings indicated that all participants were able to detect dialect-standard variation in the L2 and each constructed their own dialect-standard repertoire, through their sociolinguistic knowledge in the L1. This type of transfer from the L1 in the context of variation in acquisition research can also be seen as a "closing the gap" study to linking previous knowledge from the learner L1 to the L2. My study intends to similarly place L1 transfer in the sociolinguistic context of multilingualism and sociolinguistic variation.

Furthermore, I will also focus on the role that L1 grammatical variation plays in children's acquisition of a second/foreign language in correlation to the learner's bi-/multilingual background. In doing so, I examine the acquisition of a grammatically challenging tense-aspect marker for learners, i.e. the Present Perfect (PP), compared with that of the Simple Past (SP) by German and Spanish school-aged learners of English (grades 5-12). Data was extracted from the ICCI corpus (International Corpus for Crosslinguistic Interlanguage), which is comprised of school-aged learner data from seven different regions/countries: Hong Kong, China, Spain, Israel, Austria, Taiwan, and Poland and was created to be comparable to the Japanese EFL Learner Corpus (JEFLL) (Tono 2012: 28). In the ICCI project approximately 100 learners from each school year (Years 5-12) per country/region contributed to the data collection totalling an amount of 700 files and a size of 70,000 to 100,000 files per region were expected (Tono 2012: 28). Thus, the corpus consists of 533,924 tokens (6,700 files) across all subcorpora (Tono 2012: 28). For my study only the Austrian and Spanish subcorpora were used. In order to achieve the aim of this study as mentioned above, the following research questions are addressed:

- i. **L1 transfer:** Do school-aged learners (grades 5-12) with temporal aspectual L1s such as Spanish acquire and master temporal grammatical structures earlier than learners with different aspectual L1s (i.e., German)?
- ii. **Multilingual variation:** Do young learners with a bilingual/multilingual background present higher frequency of the Present Perfect than their monolingual peers?

In terms of L1 transfer, results, surprisingly, showed that the learners with a typologically similar L1 to English (i.e., Spanish, in which there are few grammatical variations to English) acquired the Present Perfect (PP) much later than their German peers. Nevertheless, by addressing these gaps in second language acquisition research – to include the sociolinguistic aspects shaping language communities today – this presentation seeks to initiate and address a much-needed discussion and link sociolinguistic variation, multilingualism in acquisition research.

**Keywords:** L1 transfer; bi-/multilingualism; Second Language Acquisition; Present perfect; sociolinguistic variation

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# **“You really can’t speak English, hey?”: teenagers’ evaluation of socially meaningful language use in interaction**

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Teenagers are masters of evaluation: they excel in evaluating their lives, the world and above all each other (Taylor 2001). This peer evaluation, often targeted at physique, clothes and personality, focuses on language use as well. For instance, through matched-guise experiments teenagers have appraised a variety of socially meaningful variation patterns used by their peers (see e.g. Schleef 2017). This paper aims to add to this experimental perspective by focusing on (pre)teenagers’ *in situ* evaluation of their peers’ language use in interaction. To this end, we focus on the Dutch-English contact setting in Flanders, investigating how (pre)teenagers evaluate each other’s insertion of socially meaningful English lexemes in Belgian Dutch.

To address the research aim, we studied a sample of 26 Belgian Dutch-speaking (pre)teenagers (6-13 y/o), 12 boys and 14 girls, recruited in a local sports club in Flanders. In order to elicit English lexemes, we implemented a roleplay task (Schuring et al. 2024) targeting the link between English and specific social roles. In particular, in groups of 3-5, the participants performed a range of roles that orient towards English (e.g. *rapper*, *gamer*) and away from English (e.g. *farmer*). The resulting corpus amounts to 9 hours of video data (18,228 utterances) and was mined for English lexemes (N=1,921). In a next step, we scanned the interactions for peer evaluation, taking a multimodal discourse analytical perspective.

Drawing on four elaborate roleplay excerpts, we show how (pre)teenagers in the sample frequently evaluate their peer’s use of English in Dutch. This evaluation specifically stands out when proficiency issues (e.g. mispronunciations) arise: “You really can’t speak English hey?” or “Are you crazy?”. The proficiency issues are regularly responded to by apologies (“Oh sorry, I

don't know how to pronounce it"), which emically demonstrates the importance of English for (pre)teenagers' social identity in the in-group. Overall, adding an interactional perspective to previous experimental work, this paper provides a deeper understanding of (pre)teenagers' evaluation of their peers' sociolinguistic competence and its interconnection with in-group identity.

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# Testing the Unidimensionality Hypothesis: adult L2 learners' attitudes of Dutch

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Developmental studies on children's linguistic attitudes have found attitudes to emerge in the course of language acquisition, and become increasingly complex over time. This development is attributed to both sociopsychological development and increased exposure to variation (e.g., De Vogelaer & Toye 2017). Remarkably, similar developmental patterns have been observed in studies on adult learners' attitudes, highlighting the importance of exposure. Thus, in a study of both native and non-native speakers' attitudes towards Multicultural London English, Kircher & Fox (2019: 856) concluded that "attitudes in their original state might be unidimensional, and [...] status and solidarity only emerge as distinct evaluative dimensions when pervasive and consensual social stereotypes regarding a particular variety are firmly established" (see Zenner, Rosseel & Speelman 2021: 584-585 for discussion). Other studies (e.g., McCullough, Clopper & Wagner 2019) suggest that prestige attitudes tend to develop earlier than associations relating to solidarity.

Our paper aims at testing this 'Unidimensionality Hypothesis' in adult L2 learners of Dutch. Data was gathered in Ghent, Belgium, from participants with diverse linguistic backgrounds who migrated to Belgium as adults without prior exposure to Dutch, and have now attained intermediate or advanced proficiency in the language. Using a speaker evaluation experiment, the study explores whether these learners can distinguish between national (Belgian vs. Netherlandic) and regional (local/East-Flemish vs. Brabantic) accents of Dutch and how they evaluate these accents in terms of prestige and solidarity.

During our talk, we will not only examine the internal structure of attitudes, but also connect the findings to participants' linguistic backgrounds, proficiency levels and other, sociodemographic factors. The implications for the role of psychosocial development vis-à-vis exposure in the acquisition of linguistic attitudes will also be discussed.

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# Linguistic Stereotypes in British and German Children's TV shows

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Linguistic bias develops early in childhood (Soley & Sebastián-Gallés 2015), and primary school children show robust accent-based social preferences for local/standard accents over non-local accents (Hanulíková 2024, Kinzler et al. 2011, Paquete-Smith et al. 2023). The media may contribute to these biases. In children's TV shows in North America, villains are disproportionately often voiced with foreign or non-standard varieties of English (Harris et al. 2023). The present paper examines whether such linguistic stereotyping also exists in other countries by comparing the UK and Germany. Based on a parental questionnaire, we compiled a list of shows that are currently popular among children between 2-6 years in the two countries (e.g., Peppa Pig, Paw Patrol, Hey Duggee). For each show, we analyzed around 120 min of material, coding each character for gender, age category, profession, character role (major, minor), and specific accent. Each character's level of perceived authority, valence (good, bad), and intelligence were rated on a Likert-scale of 1 to 7 by native speakers of English or German (cf. Harris et al. 2023). Preliminary results show a greater linguistic variety in UK than in German shows (8 German, 6 UK, ~28 h). In Germany, the standard variety largely prevails (93%), with some minor or incidental characters being portrayed with foreign (mostly French) or regional accents (Bavarian, Northern). For the UK, most of the major characters had Standard Southern British English accents (62%). Minor and incidental characters displayed more diverse accents, with non-standard varieties coinciding with lower intelligence ratings. Individual regional accent stereotypes were also strongly perpetuated (Sharma et al. 2022), e.g., Irish-accented characters had more social prestige than those with a Liverpool accent. At the same time, standard language ideology was also preserved, given that non-standard accents are sidelined. These preliminary results suggest differences in accent portrayal in Germany compared to the UK. The representation of accents in the UK reveals an interplay between accent, gender, and class (more so than between heroes vs. villains). The study advances our knowledge on the media's contribution to children's developing sensitivity to accent as a marker of social identity.

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# English as a stylistic resource in the Belgian Dutch of young adolescents: attitudes and beliefs

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This paper investigates how young adolescents evaluate the use of English in Belgian Dutch. The availability of English linguistic resources in information-age Europe provides new opportunities for identification through the use of different linguistic styles, a social practice that is shaped by speakers' beliefs and attitudes about distinctive ways of speaking (Irvine 2009). We focus on adolescents' use of these resources as they engage in particularly rich linguistic practices of asserting distinctiveness (Eckert 2003). Doing so will contribute to the picture of the sociolinguistic knowledge and development of youngsters in late-modern Europe.

More precisely, this study investigates the social evaluations of Belgian Dutch 12-15-year-olds of a peer speaker who uses only Dutch vs. Dutch with English elements. Studying youngsters' social evaluations of their peers' use of a contact-linguistic variable associated with their age group will complement existing research on perceptions of varieties within national or regional languages (e.g. De Vogelaer & Toye 2017; Soukup 2009).

In an open guise (Soukup 2013) speaker evaluation study, we investigate the social evaluations of 353 Belgian Dutch 12-15-year-olds of the use of English elements in Dutch. Respondents listened to speech samples read by a speaker around their own age either (a) entirely in Dutch or (b) in Dutch with English elements, and evaluated the speaker on a number of personality traits relevant to adolescents' social world on the dimensions of Status, Authenticity, Dynamism and Self- and Group Identification. Respondents then answered a series of open questions (e.g. "What kind of people talk like in Sample 1/Sample 2?") and a sociodemographic background questionnaire.

Factor analysis of the questionnaire ratings revealed the dimensions Self Identification, Dynamism, School-Oriented and Wannabe. No significant relationship is attested between the dependent (mean factor ratings) and independent (language guise, text topic, gender and dialect area) variables. However, the open questions revealed a striking variation in what participants

considered “normal” language use. Further qualitative analysis of the open answers sheds light on the role of English in Belgian Dutch adolescents’ social space, and more broadly on perceptions of the use of multilingual stylistic resources by adolescents in the late-modern European context.

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# A holistic view on sociolinguistic development among adult L2 learners. Dynamics of social, socioaffective, and cognitive variables

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**Aims:** In this talk, I explore the sociolinguistic development in production and perception among L2 learners in the Austro-Bavarian naturalistic context.

**Methods:** In this cross-sectional study, we focus on 40 adult migrants ( $M_{age}=30y$ ,  $SD=8y$ ) with intermediate to advanced L2 German proficiency (L1 English) and who had been living in Austria for 4 years on average ( $SD=3y$ ).

The test battery comprised four tasks to measure sociolinguistic development in production (tasks [1] and [2]) and perception (tasks [3] and [4]):

- (1) Virtual reality (VR) oral dialogue construction task: This task gauged learners' ability to adapt their use of standard German and Austro-Bavarian dialect to that of a standard German-speaking and Austro-Bavarian dialect-speaking VR interlocutor (Wirtz 2022).
- (2) VR open-item verbal response task: The goal of this task was to assess learners' intersituational varietal behavior, i.e., learners' differential use of standard German and dialect varieties across situations with different constellations of social distance and dominance (Wirtz 2023).
- (3) Matched-guise task: The task targeted learners' sociolinguistic evaluative judgements of standard German and Austro-Bavarian dialect on the indexical dimensions of solidarity (friendliness judgements) and status (intelligence judgements) (Wirtz & Pfenninger 2023).
- (4) Meta-awareness task: This task tapped into learners' awareness and knowledge of socio-situational and contextual factors that (can) constrain varietal behavior.

Additionally, we collected data on individual differences in social (e.g., length of residence in Austria, exposure to dialect/standard German), socioaffective (e.g., peer encouragement to learn dialect/standard German), and cognitive (e.g., working memory, alertness) variables.

**Results:** Bayesian multilevel modeling suggests that, within a year of living in Austria, L2 learners acquire target-like attitudes towards language varieties (e.g., higher solidarity ratings of the vernacular, higher status ratings of standard language) and a pronounced meta-awareness of

contextual constraints on sociolinguistic variation. In terms of language production, the majority of L2 learners in this sample ( $n = 28$ ) employ standard language (i.e., the variety of classroom instruction). The use of the Austro-Bavarian vernacular can be observed among learners with high exposure to dialectal varieties (e.g., in the workplace, in the peer group), with high peer encouragement to learn dialect varieties, and with generally more positive attitudes towards dialect. We also found that certain cognitive resources (alertness, working memory) were associated with a more target-like ability to context-dependently switch between standard and dialect varieties.

The present project facilitates the first comprehensive view on L2 sociolinguistic development in Austria, and expands more generally on previous research concerning (a) *why* L2 learners acquire sociolinguistic variation, (b) *which aspects* of it they acquire, (c) *which factors* influence it, and (d) *when* they acquire it.

# From Classroom to Community: Developing Socially Meaningful Language Variation in a Second Language

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Developing sociolinguistic competence – the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts – is a key component of linguistic competence for second language (L2) learners (Bachman 1990; Canale & Swain 1980). These sociolinguistic skills enable L2 speakers to navigate diverse social interactions in the target language and to communicate more effectively and appropriately within their speech communities. However, unlike in first language acquisition, development of sociolinguistic competence in an L2 often requires explicit instruction and conscious effort. This process is also influenced by learners' existing linguistic and cultural knowledge, resulting in variability in L2 acquisition and use of socially meaningful language variation in the target language.

In this talk, I draw from my research on adult second language learners of Spanish in the United States, to provide insights into the capabilities of L2 learners to navigate and acquire socially meaningful language variation of sounds and sound systems, and with respect to all linguistic competencies in the target language – comprehension, perception and processing, and production. These data are interpreted within the social context, in which various extralinguistic factors, such as language ideologies, social networks, L2 identity, and learner attitudes, interact and play critical roles in the dynamic process of developing socially meaningful variation in a second language.

While the field of study has grown significantly since pioneering work on L2 acquisition of sociolinguistic variation in the 1990s (e.g., see contributions in Bayley & Preston's 1996 edited volume, *Second language acquisition and linguistic variation*), multiple knowledge gaps and unanswered questions relating to L2 development and use of socially meaningful language variation remain, and are highlighted in the talk. Moreover, I discuss a crucial need for the creation of pedagogical interventions and resources to assist L2 learners in the development of these sociolinguistic competencies, including research-informed training materials and classroom applications for language educators.

## References

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