

Measuring language attitudes in context: exploring the possibilities of the P-IAT

A case study on regional varieties of Dutch in Belgium

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There has been little methodological innovation in language attitude research since the 1960s (Speelman et al., 2013). In social psychology, on the contrary, a multitude of new experimental methods to measure implicit attitudes has been developed in the past two decades. Only recently have linguists begun to explore the potential of these social psychological measures for linguistic attitude research (e.g. Speelman et al., 2013 for affective priming; Redinger, 2010, Pantos & Perkins, 2012, Campbell-Kibler, 2012 for the Implicit Association Test).

In our own research, we have adapted the Personalized Implicit Association Test (P-IAT, Olson & Fazio, 2004), to measure language attitudes towards regional language variation. The P-IAT is a reaction time based method that measures the association between two binary concepts (e.g. ‘variety a’ + ‘variety b’ and ‘I like’ + ‘I don’t like’) using a series of categorization tasks. After successfully employing the P-IAT to measure attitudes towards standard Belgian Dutch and regional varieties of Dutch in Belgium in a pilot experiment (Authors, 2015), we set out to further explore the potential of this method. We aimed to address the issue that attitudes in a P-IAT are measured completely void of any context. Hence, a version of the P-IAT was developed that allows to import situational context into the experiment design.

In our paper, we will present the results of an implicit attitude measurement using the contextualized P-IAT, as well as an explicit measurement which explore attitudes towards standard and regionally accented Belgian Dutch in formal vs. informal settings. While the explicit attitudes show the expected pattern of preference for the standard variety in formal contexts, results from the implicit measurement show a picture that is not quite as clear-cut. We will discuss potential explanations for these findings and reflect on the consequences for future linguistic attitude research using the P-IAT.