

The interplay between explicit awareness and individual speakers' attitude in dialect contact

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The effects of speaker attitudes in speech production are often discussed in sociolinguistic studies, but how this correlation might be affected by the level of awareness of the linguistic variable could be explored more. Drager (2009) claimed that speakers with positive vs. negative attitudes behaved differently in a linguistic variable although they were not aware of it. But recent work by Nycz (2016) claimed that speakers' acquisition of new dialect features could only be affected by attitudes when they have explicit awareness. So this paper explores whether explicit awareness is a threshold for attitudes-language correlation.

The locality examined is Hohhot, a Chinese immigrant city, where the contact between local Jin dialect speakers, and migrants, who arrived in the 1950s, led to the formation of a dialect mixture. 66 speakers were interviewed, with their attitudes quantitatively measured by questionnaires. The linguistic feature examined was the plosives [p', t', k'] and the glottal fricative [h]. Jin speakers tend to produce them as [p'x, t'x, k'x, x] with a velar fricative [x] followed. This feature has been documented as a Jin feature (Hou, 1999), but speakers were not explicitly aware of it. About 2000 tokens were collected and coded for whether a [x] sound was involved in the pronunciation. These data were hand fit into binomial mixed effects models using the lme4 library in R (Bates, Maechler & Bolker, 2011; R Core Team, 2013).

The results suggest that speakers' production of the fricative variable was predicted by their attitudinal scores. Speakers are more likely to use this Jin feature if they demonstrate positive attitudes towards Hohhot. This indicates that explicit awareness is not a threshold for attitudes-linguistic behavior correlation. Speakers' production could still correlate with their attitudes even when they are not consciously aware of the variable.