

How individuals' choice of register is influenced by the characteristics of their social networks

Initial ideas for a research proposal

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Abstract

Register is a certain kind of language patterning regularly used in a certain kind of situation. By choosing a certain register, language users show that they are aware of the social situation they are participating in or they intend to impose a particular pattern of social behavior to control that social situation (Ure & Ellis, 1977). However, no language user can have proficiency in all registers in a language and the range of registers mastered by him reflects his language experience. Therefore, the fact that whether the register an individual chooses to use in a specific context is congruent to the norms of that contextual situation or not is the result of either experience or conscious choice.

In this study, I will examine how a speaker's social environments and the structure of their social network can influence their register performance in various settings. Previous research in cognitive studies, language acquisition, second language learning, multilingualism, etc. has proved the effect of the structure and composition of one's social network on their linguistic and communicative skills. The most basic finding of these studies would be that having more interaction partners implies a greater need to adapt to multiple others which in turn helps us to have more successful conversations or performance.

In this study, 12 randomly selected male and female participants will be recorded in 6 different situational contexts¹. The situational contexts in these 6 phases are common and familiar situations that normally most native speakers of a language experience in their social interactions. Taking this into account and by controlling for the participants' level of education, age, and dialectal area, we can assume that we are minimizing the effect of previous exposure (register knowledge) and bring the matter of register choice into play.

¹ The data used in this study is the data which will be collected for the sub-project A06 in the SFB 1412 Register project: disentangling cross-linguistic and language specific aspects of register variation.