

Comparing language attitudes and folklinguistic methods, and their insights into variation within Australian English

Since 1960, the primary methodology for understanding the social evaluation of language has been subjective reaction tests (SRTs) or the matched/verbal guise technique. Folklinguistic approaches allow more open reporting in contrast to the scale-based approach of SRTs (Garrett, 2010), but little work has been completed contrasting these indirect/direct methodologies, despite suggestions they may lead researchers to fundamentally different understandings (e.g., see conclusions in Garrett, Coupland, & Williams, 2003). Research usually employs samples of very different accents (e.g., McKenzie, 2015) or audio manipulated to vary in just one variant (e.g., Campbell-Kibler, 2008). This study investigates the effect of method on language evaluations and further stretches the usual project design by using similar, unmodified voices (four young women from Melbourne).

The study was designed to examine the differences in SRT and folklinguistic data and the response to similar, local, voices. Data were collected from visiting secondary school students from a large number of schools. The participants included in this study were all 15–20 years of age and assessed as (likely) Australian English speakers based on detailed background information they provided. The programme for the visitors was repeated on two days. Those present the first day completed the SRT (participants, $n = 159$). On the second day, student-participants ($n = 213$) commented on the speakers in an open response item, after they were played the same four audio files. Participants were currently studying Australian English and had been exposed to the ideas of linguistics, making this open task easier. Previous analyses have shown that such cohorts still evaluate language in similar ways to those with no training in linguistics (Penry Williams, 2019). The day-one data, nine semantic differential scales and an assessment of sociolect/broadness, were analysed for their means and standard deviations as individual measures and in meaningful collections of the nine items. Folklinguistic data were analysed via the keywords methodology (Garrett, 2010), quantifying comment content and therefore allowing for comparable analyses.

Results show that the two tasks produce quite different evaluations. These are presented for their insights into variation in Australian English. Discussion then focusses on comparing the results from the two tasks. The personal traits of the SRT were not a focus in the written data, in which the students pointed out specific linguistic features (especially use of *like* and high rising tones), demographic factors (age group, ethnicity, nationality, social class) and sociolect labels, alongside some negative evaluations. The influence of the similar voices is examined, especially in terms of if this resulted in participants creating diversity when it did not appear or opting out in later items. Whether the SRT results relate to evaluations of

linguistic features made salient in the open data is also explored. The contemplation of limitations focusses on the role of the content of the speakers' narratives.

The study adds to ongoing discussions regarding dimensions of attitudes (Pharao & Kristiansen, 2019; Rosseel & Grondelaers, 2019), considering the boundaries of direct/indirect methods.

References

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