Workshop 1: Language Change in Real Time

Apparently a Good Idea?

Age grading, apparent time and real time in the case of the raising of [ε] in Copenhagen from 1986-87 to 2006-07

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The apparent time idea allows us to infer a change from synchronic variation but that presupposes that the phenomenon of age grading is immaterial and that the variation in focus has a direction (i.e. in fact is a change not ‘just’ stable variation).

In the case of the raising of [ε] before [ŋ] in the Copenhagen speech we find that the young Middle Class men in the original (S1) recordings are leading the change — if it is a change — in that they have a significantly higher use of the raised variant than the other groups. Looking at the S1 data only, we cannot say whether we have an instance of age grading here and we cannot ever be sure that a change is directional for all the members of a speech community (Gregersen, Maegaard and Pharao 2009). Taking the new (S2) data into account, the puzzle remains. The young MC men still have a relatively high amount of raising compared to the other groups, but during their life span they have significantly reduced their levels compared to those they had in the S1. This is why age grading may be a factor at play here.

In the paper I review the literature on apparent time versus real time with a special emphasis on age grading, I discuss the delimitation of the variable — first whether there is a general trend towards raising of front vowels, next what to do with the intermediate variant — and finally proceed to show how the variation continues to puzzle us even though we have both apparent time and real time data from the same panel of speakers at our disposal.

References