

The roles of stereotypes, phonetic knowledge, and phonological knowledge in the evaluation of dialect authenticity.

Introduction

The Viennese dialect belongs to the East Middle-Bavarian dialect group and, consequently, shares the specific dialect features of this group. However, the Viennese dialect also shows some specific characteristics which are, at least historically, restricted to the area of Vienna. When asked for typical characteristics of the Viennese dialect, people spontaneously mention the mono-lateral articulation of the lateral, the monophthongization of the diphthongs, and a drawn-out (=long duration of segments) articulation, referring to specific timing relations. In addition, of all the dialects spoken in Austria, the Viennese dialect is the most negatively evaluated one, connected with unfriendliness and even aggressiveness.

Salient features are strongly susceptible to stereotyping; i. e., the production of the above mentioned features are linked up with attributes such as “Viennese”, “uneducated”, “plebeian”, or “aggressive”. In imitation, speakers employ stereotypical features (Preston 1992, Torstensson 2004, Neuhauser & Simpson 2007; for a different view see Evans 2002). Again, in evaluating a dialect or an accent as authentic or imitated, listeners strongly rely on stereotypical phonetic and phonological patterns and fail in correctly teasing apart the authentic from the imitated voices (see e.g. Sjöström et al. 2006, Neuhauser & Simpson 2007, Brunner 2009).

The current presentation will add to the discussion whether, in judging imitated speech samples, listeners rely on stereotypes only or whether they additionally make use of phonological and phonetic knowledge. Focus will be put on the production of the lateral.

The monolateral articulation of the lateral in the Viennese dialect

Phonologically, the Viennese dialect distinguishes one lateral approximant (Wodak-Leodolter & Dressler 1978) with an occlusion made on the alveolar ridge. However, one very salient and specific characteristic of the Viennese dialect is the mono-lateral articulation of the lateral, whereby the tongue body is lowered and retracted, and the air escapes on only one side of the tongue. The configuration of this articulation renders a low F2 and a very prominent anti-formant in the region of approximately 2000 – 2100 Hz. In the Viennese dialect, the mono-lateral variant is to be observed

- word-initially,
- after morpheme boundaries,
- after alveolar and post-alveolar consonants,
- in V_1lV_2 sequences, where both vowels are back vowel, and
- in cases where the vocalization of the lateral has been suppressed, as e.g. [gɛLɔ]¹ instead of [gœ:d] “Geld” (money).

The alveolar bilateral lateral occurs in all other positions, that is,

- after labial, palatal, and velar consonants,

¹ The symbol [L] is used to denote the monolateral articulation of the lateral.

- in V₁IV₂ sequences, where either V₁ or V₂ is a front vowel.

Sociolinguistically, authentic Viennese dialect speakers try to avoid the mono-lateral articulation of the lateral. This holds especially for women who hardly ever produce the mono-lateral variant of the lateral.

Method

Five actors and actresses were asked to transform a list of approx. 100 sentences into the Viennese dialect. None of the actors/actresses were raised in this variety². Up to now, 20³ listeners judged a list of 45 sentences with respect to their authenticity.

Results

Overall, none of the actors/actresses passed off as a Viennese dialect speaker, because for any speaker, some speech samples were judged as inauthentic. This result corroborates the view that inconsistency in performance is perceived and evaluated accordingly.

However, stereotypes strongly guide the judgments of the respondents. The mono-lateral articulation of the lateral is expected in any of the conceivable positions, although, in authentic speech, the mono-lateral is not necessarily applied throughout. And, most interestingly, the mono-lateral is expected to be realized by women.

In prosodically weak positions, stereotypes override phonetic and phonological misapplications, as e.g. exaggerated final lengthening or mono-lateral articulation after a bilabial plosive in “l**ö**blich” (laudable) is not assessed as inauthentic.

Yet, a misapplication in a prosodically strong position is judged as inauthentic, as e.g. the application of a mono-lateral after the bilabial plosive in “bleib**e**” (stay).

From these preliminary results it can be concluded that, in evaluating authenticity, listeners concentrate on the phonetics and phonology of prosodically strong positions, whereas prosodically weak positions enter evaluation to a lesser extent. This is in line with the theory of foregrounding and backgrounding of Natural Phonology, as outlined e.g. in Dressler 1984 or Dressler & Madelska 1989.

References

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³ It is planned to substantially increase the number of listeners.

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