Beliefs regarding accommodation of dialects

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate non-linguists' ideas about dialect accommodation. That is to say, the research questions concern people's beliefs about whether they accommodate their dialects to their interlocutors. In addition, one research question concerns people's suggestions as to why they adjust their speech and if differences between native and foreign languages can be found.

The investigation was carried out as an informant survey and a total of 26 participants, between the ages 20 and 30, answered the questions. The data were analysed and discussed from a sociolinguistic and a sociopsychological perspective, with the theory CAT as a foundation for the interpretations.

The results show that people believed they change their speech depending on conversation partner. This was thought of as subconscious behaviour and was mainly reflected upon afterwards. Furthermore, comments from the questionnaire concern changes in speech when talking to friends, when the interlocutor's dialect is distinct and when the informants visit a different geographical area. In addition, the informants have ideas about efficient communication when it comes to comprehensibility between the conversation partners' vocabularies as well as being on the same communicative level.

The results from a native language accommodation situation and a foreign language accommodation situation showed similar ideas. That is to say, people's perceptions about accommodation did not differ much depending on what language they used.

Keywords: perception, adjustment, language varieties, interlocutor, native, foreign, communication.
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1. Introduction

It has been discussed that humans have an innate ability to accommodate their communication in various ways in interaction with others (Miczo et al. 1999:464). For instance, people have a tendency to accommodate their speech so that they try to talk in a way that is similar to that of the interlocutor. This creates smoothness in the conversation and/or a feeling of similarity between the interlocutors (Knapp 1999:310).

This paper will focus on people's views concerning accommodation and/or change of their dialects depending on their conversation partner. Do people believe that they change their dialects, and if so, do they perceive this action as part of our innate ability to accommodate communication patterns in order to, for example, create in-group identity? As mentioned by Trudgill (2000:13), “language can be a very important factor in group identification, group solidarity and the signalling of difference”. Moreover, this is particularly the case with people who live closely together during a longer period, since they are likely to learn the linguistic habits of each other (Knapp 1999:310). In addition, dialects can be used to convey information about a speaker for instance, the social background. In other words, from a social point of view, there are two important aspects of language behaviour, namely, the function of establishing social relationships, and the conveying of information about the speaker (Trudgill 2000:2).

I have chosen Trudgill's (2000) definition of dialect when writing this paper. Basically, this definition would be that dialects are varieties of a language, however, in this paper, only including regional dialects. Differences between the dialects are found in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. However, there are other fashions as how to explain this concept.

If we accept dialects as parts of interaction patterns and a means of communication, can we apply the above mentioned theory that we adapt to each other in interaction, to dialects as well? The first principle of this theory states that we have a biological factor urging us to accommodate our interaction patterns to those of our interlocutor (Miczo et al.1999:462). We know that people shift accents (i.e. manner of pronunciation) (Trudgill 2000:85) and in some communities even dialects as wholes (Trudgill 2000:94), depending on styles and situations. But what about accommodating one's dialect to that of the interlocutor? And, what about shifting or accommodating to regional dialects of a language other than one's own? This is the topic of the present paper.

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1 Within sociolinguistics and social psychology this is referred to as convergence and will be discussed in section 2.
2 In this paper, dialect is used about regional language varieties. This will be discussed in further detail in section 2.
3 More in-depth discussion about this in section 2.
4 Style will be further discussed in section 2.
1.1 Aim and Scope

Trudgill (1994) claims that “it is a matter of common observation” (1994:55) that people change their dialects depending on who they are communicating with. If this is a common perception within sociolinguistics, how then, do those who are not involved with linguistics perceive this? This is what the present paper sets out to investigate. More specifically, the aim is to chart non-linguists' thoughts about dialect accommodation in terms of the following research questions:

- Do people believe that they change their regional dialect depending on conversation partner?
- What are people's beliefs as to why dialect accommodation occurs?
- What (if any) are the differences in informants' accommodation depending on their native and foreign language?

The data will be discussed mainly in terms of the disciplines of sociolinguistics (e.g. Trudgill 2000) and social psychology (e.g. Giles & Robinson 1991), even though there are several other, overlapping fields (such as ethnolinguistics or psychology) that also may be of interest. However, due to the limitation of data, such areas will not be taken in consideration.

1.2 Design of the study

To be able to answer my research questions, I have carried out an informant survey for the age group between 20 and 35, which was conducted via e-mail and at Linneaus University. The survey questions concerned both native and foreign language accommodation, what aspects of the language were adapted (if any) and if the informants had any thoughts about why they adapt their dialects. The full questionnaire is available as an appendix at the end of the paper. The data from the survey were analysed as the basis for a discussion about people's awareness and beliefs regarding accommodation of dialects.

In total, 26 informants answered the survey, 20 of them are women and the other 6 are men. In addition, since the survey was carried out amongst students, most of the informants are between 20 and 25 years old. No other criteria than age was used when selecting the informants. Some of the informants answered the questions via e-mail and were therefore able to keep the survey for a while before returning it, others filled out the answers as I gave them the paper. I did not discuss the questions with the informants or coached them in any way, thus some of them gave multiple
answers. In questions 1 and 3 informants had the opportunity to write comments if they chose the answer option “other”. Question 5 is an open question, i.e. the participants were able to write comments about their speech adjustments. The different languages and dialects per se are not mentioned in the survey, but rather viewed from a general perspective.

2. Theoretical background

Defining the terms language, dialect and accent is more complex than one may at first assume. As regards language, first, Trudgill (2000:4) states that “we could say that if two speakers cannot understand one another, then they are speaking different languages. Similarly, if they can understand each other, we could say that they are speaking dialects of the same language” (2000:4 emphasis original). However, in some cases this statement does not hold true; rather it seems that the most important factors here are political and cultural ones. For instance, a national border may define which standard language a person belongs to, although he or she may speak a dialect that is much more similar to the language of another adjacent country (Trudgill 2000:4).

As regards dialects next, dialects are varieties of a language, which include both standard and nonstandard varieties, also referred to as “kinds of language” by Trudgill (2000:4). According to Trudgill (2000:5), the term refers (linguistically speaking) to the differences between these kinds in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Grammar refers to the structure of words (morphology) and the structure of phrases and clauses (syntax) (Yule 2010). There are also distinctions between social dialects and regional dialects (Trudgill 2000:2), which convey information about the speaker’s social and geographical background respectively.

Finally, the term accent refers only to the different manners of pronunciation (Trudgill 2000:5) and accents are also used to convey information about the speaker, for instance the social background.

Moving on, Giles et al. (1991:32) distinguish two different accommodation fashions: on the one hand psychological accommodation and, on the other hand linguistic accommodation. The former is described as “individuals' beliefs that they are integrating and differentiating from others” (1991:32), whereas the latter is further explained in terms of linguistic convergence and divergence, which are explained as the speaker's speech moving towards or away from that of the conversation partner. In other words, convergence (similarity) is when peoples' speech converges towards the person they are talking to, whilst divergence (dissimilarity) is when the speech moves away from the person they are talking to (Holmes 2008:242-4).

Moving on, Giles et al. (1991:24) bring up studies regarding accommodation awareness with
interlocutors. The authors suggest that low levels of accommodation awareness in communication production are to be found. They take it as far as saying that speech accommodation, in most cases, may be a scheduled behaviour, i.e. that the behaviour would already have been constructed for us and would, therefore, not be noticed by the interlocutors.

2.1 Social psychology

In 1966, the linguist William Labov conducted a study regarding accents and formality. Based on some aspects of critique to this study, Howard Giles reinterpreted the formality-informality of context (i.e. how people shift accents depending on how formal a situation may be) and came up with the “phenomenon of interpersonal accent convergence” (Giles et al. 1991:5). In 1973, Giles founded the speech accommodation theory (henceforth SAT) (mentioned in Giles et al. 1991:5). In its early days, SAT's focus was on reporting motivations behind different speech styles and possible social consequences (Giles et al. 1991:6). From this starting point, SAT, which focused on specific linguistic variables only, developed into the notion of CAT (communication accommodation theory) which also included nonverbal and discursive properties of (social) interaction (Giles et al. 1991:7). Briefly, these theories concern strategies used to create similarity and/or dissimilarity in interaction- i.e. convergence and divergence strategies (c.f. the previous section). Moreover, the use of these strategies (together with our speech styles) is influenced by stereotypical beliefs. Giles et al. (1991:28) state that in addition to stereotyping one's conversation partner, one will also adopt what is believed to be the prototypical communication patterns of a group (1991:28). According to CAT, speech convergence reflects the need for social integration or identification of a speaker or a group (Giles et al. 1991:18). The reduction of linguistic dissimilarities between interlocutors will result in a feeling of similarity between them (Giles et al. 1991:18). In addition, Giles et al. (1991:18) state that by increasing similarity through speech, the speakers' “attractiveness, intelligibility and interpersonal involvement” will increase. They add that other research suggests communicative efficiency as a result of similarity in, for instance, speech rates, languages and accents (Giles et al. 1991:19).

CAT has also been combined with the ethnolinguistic identity theory (ELIT) to explain the motivations behind immigrants' convergence over time in a new community (Gallois & Callan 1991:247). That is to say, ELIT concerns both accommodation to interlocutors in ethnic outgroups and individual differences in the desire to speak and learn an other language (Gallois & Callan 1991:247).

5 Labov was a sociolinguist who pioneered in the field with his study of accents and language change.
2.2 Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguists have used Giles's theories about convergence and divergence strategies when studying language change, but also to explain accent accommodation, mainly in informality-formality contexts (Giles et al. 1991:5 and Trudgill 1986). Such accommodation may also be referred to as style shifts (Trudgill 2000). According to Trudgill (2000), styles and dialects do not have a necessary connection, although a style can be seen as a variety within a dialect. What is more, Holmes (2008:242) states that in communities with several stylistic varieties to choose from, people accommodate by choosing such a variety on the basis of the addressee and the social situation. Holmes (2008:246) also adds that this shifting or accommodating can occur subconsciously in casual contexts but may not be suitable in formal situations.

Moreover, foreigners can use accent and/or vocabulary to express “inadequate” control of the language (Holmes 2008:244). Conversely, Holmes claims that if a foreigner sounds too much like a native speaker it may be to their disadvantage. This might be because the reasons behind convergence are not clear and, hence, the convergence can appear as “manipulative” (Holmes 2008:245) or misunderstandings can occur if a foreigner does not know the acceptable norms about convergence (Gallois & Callan 1991:248).

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results from the questionnaire will be presented and discussed. As was indicated in section 1.2, and as can be seen in fuller detail in the appendix, the informants were given three main questions- (i) whether or not they believe that they accommodate to their interlocutor; (ii) what features they believe get affected if they accommodate; and (iii) what reasons they can think of for accommodation (see Question 5 in the appendix). Each of these was presented for native language as well as foreign language interaction. In the following section, the questions will be presented and discussed in turn, first in terms of native language accommodation and then in terms of foreign language accommodation. In questions 1 and 3 (shown in Figures 1 and 3), some of the informants gave multiple answers.
3.1 Accommodation in native language interaction.

Figure 1 below shows the informants' answers about whether they believe that they accommodate their dialects to their interlocutor.

![Diagram showing responses to Question 1](image)

**Figure 1** Response to Question 1.

From a total of 26 informants, only 5 answered “no, never” to the question concerning adjustment of dialects in their native language. This means that 75% of the informants actually believe that they adjust their native dialect, depending on the person they are talking to. Only 1 informant answered “I don't know”, which can be tied to the informants' comments that this action would be subconscious behaviour and that they only reflect over it after it happens (if at all). These comments were posted in Question 5 (see appendix), where the informants had the opportunity to write their thoughts about why adjustments occur, as is shown in the example below:

1) I think you do it without thinking about it.

Further, also amongst those who gave the answer “other” in Question 1, ideas about accommodation being subconscious were found, which the following example illustrates:

2) I've heard that I do change my dialect when speaking with someone from another area of Sweden but I can not notice that myself since it happens unconsciously.
9 of the total 29 comments from questions 1,3 and 5, contained a note about dialect accommodation being subconscious. Moreover, what is interesting, is that the answers show a clear lead in the option “Only when I'm visiting their region”. In addition, some of the suggestions from the answer option “other” contain ideas about the duration of visiting a place:

3) When I've been in a place a long time

Thus, informants seem to have the feeling that accommodation occurs subconsciously but at the same time they have some perceptions that one adjusts communication patterns when in a new environment. It would seem that humans are affected by their surroundings; by other people, the environment, society etc. In addition, I suggest that we might argue that humans are herd animals, in which case there may exist a biological need to fit in and belong to a group. That is, if this assumption is correct, it would seem reasonable to assume that we have a biological factor that makes us want to be liked by others in our group and not experience the feeling of being different. However, this would only hold to a certain degree, we would also have the need to retain our individual identities, in terms of, for instance, ethnicity. In short, I suggest that some biological factor inside us is affected by our surroundings, and that this constitutes part of the foundation for identities. This identity shaping would, in psychology, be referred to as the influence of heritage and milieu. Hence, when we visit an area different from our own, we might have the need to belong and gain (social) approval from the group we are visiting and this might, therefore, be a reason as to why we change how we speak. This has been explained and studied within several different fields and, as mentioned in section 2, social psychology tries to explain this with the theories SAT and CAT (Giles et al.1992).

As stated in section 2, CAT focuses on the motivations behind convergence (and divergence) and suggests that the strategies show a speaker's need for social approval (see e.g. Giles et al. 1991 and Giles & Robinson 1992). By converging linguistically to one's interlocutor the “intelligibility, predictability and interpersonal involvement” (Sachdev & Bourhis 1992:297) between the interlocutors are likely to increase. In addition, Sachdev and Bourhis (1992:297) state that convergence is most likely to occur when rewards (such as social approval) are gained. Hence, one can argue that, when visiting a new area, people want to gain social approval from the group they are not members of. Language is an important dimension of group identity (Sachdev & Bourhis 1992:298) and by converging, diverging or maintaining one's language variety, one reflects the motivations for including others, and for stressing or maintaining the ethnic identity (respectively).
From a social psychological perspective, intelligibility is gained when interlocutors become more alike, however, sociolinguists stress that being understood (also) lies within purely linguistic intelligibility (Trudgill 1986:21-3).

As regards the answer option “Only with close friends” (in Question 1) next, some of the comments in Question 5 also concerned accommodation with friends, as seen in the examples below:

4) When with friends-naturally fall back into the accent and pronunciation that we grew up together with.

5) When I am at home with my family and close friends I use the local dialect, I pronounce words differently

Arguably, friends develop their own kind of language, which is very much influenced by the situation that introduced them in the first place. Hence, when coming together, friends stress their relationship by using the specific variety connected to it. Wilmot and Shellen (1992) mention that “close friendship dyads develop their own idiolect” (Wilmot & Shellen 1992:417) and add that the special properties of conversations between friends can be explained by their shared history, together with the speech accommodation theory (Wilmot & Shellen 1992:420). In addition, convergence in, for example, switches in languages, dialects and accents has been documented by sociolinguists as evidence for creating and showing solidarity in friendship pairs and social networks (Wilmot & Shellen 1992:420). Thus, it would seem natural to change the way we speak in close relationship encounters.

Furthermore, 1 informant chose the answer option “Only when I think the person is really cool” and suggested that the answer would include whether one likes the person or not. Hence, the idea about creating and showing solidarity via convergence in speech could be applied to this answer option as well.

Finally, in Figure 1 we can see that only 1 informant answered “Only with people older than myself” and no one answered “Only when I'm trying to persuade someone”. In addition, none of the informants gave comments about these alternatives. Seemingly, informants do not see these factors as essential for making adjustments in their regional dialect.
3.2 Features affected in native language accommodation.

Below is the figure of the features considered to be affected in the informants' accommodation.

According to Trudgill (1986:1), dialects of the same language affect each other when they come into contact, even if they are mutually intelligible. For instance, vocabulary can transfer from one dialect to another, “even though there is no strictly communicative point” in doing so (Trudgill 1986:1). Trudgill (1986:2) claims that the reason is not clear as to why this happens but refers to Giles's accommodation theory and he also adds that convergence and divergence can occur at both the lexical and grammatical levels as well as in accent accommodation (Trudgill 1986:2). Furthermore, from a strictly communicative point of view, the need to be understood is an important factor in the accommodation process (Trudgill 1986:21-3). Even though dialects of the same language might be mutually comprehensible, certain items may cause problems for the interlocutors, for instance in a situation where the same word has two completely different meanings. This is also one of the reasons as to why accommodation begins at the lexical level (Trudgill 1986:25).

The statement about accommodation beginning at the lexical level can be connected to what is shown in Figure 2, where 18 of the 26 informants say that vocabulary, together with pronunciation, are the features they change the most. According to Trudgill (1986:25), what follows lexical accommodation differs depending on the dialects (or languages) involved and the differences between them. In his own study (1986:25), phonological accommodation comes after

Figure 2 Response to Question 2.
the lexical one, whereas in a study made by Nordenstam (concerning Swedish and Norwegian, see Trudgill 1986:25), morphological accommodation occurs after the lexical level. One informant commented on accommodation on the lexical level, as is shown in the example below:

6) I choose not to use words that I know they are not familiar with

22 out of 25 answers concerning pronunciation in Figure 2, show that pronunciation is a feature considered to be highly affected in the informants' accommodation. Arguably, pronunciation is a noticeable part in the informants' varieties and would therefore, also be the feature informants are most aware of. Trudgill gives an explanation about this awareness by referring to a work of Labov (Trudgill 1986:10). Labov has labelled some linguistic variables that are subject to both social class and stylistic variation as markers (Trudgill 1986:10) and those that are subject to social class only are labelled indicators. According to Labov (Trudgill 1986:10), markers are those linguistic variables being consciously noticed by speakers while indicators are not. In addition, there are even variables associated with a very high level of awareness, which are called stereotypes. The awareness of stereotypes and/or markers makes people modify or accommodate their pronunciation depending on situations (Trudgill 1986:10; see also Giles et al. 1991). Thus, the informants might have some distinctive markers and/or stereotypes in their pronunciation.

As regards grammatical features next, it seems that the grammar in the informants' native languages does not differ much in the varieties concerned, since 16 of the 26 participants answered that grammatical features do not get affected in their accommodation. On the other hand, it is difficult to assume that the informants have a wider knowledge about grammar in their native language, since grammar is something being learnt automatically from childhood (as opposed to second language acquisition for instance) (see Gardner & Clément 1992:496).
### 3.3 Accommodation in foreign language interaction.

The figure below shows how many of the informants believe they change their dialects in a foreign language.

![Chart showing responses to Question 3 regarding dialect adjustment in a foreign language.](chart)

**Figure 3** Response to Question 3.

In Figure 3, we can see that out of 26 informants, only 5 answered “no, never” to if they adjust their dialect in a foreign language. Here, as well as in Figure 1, informants who chose the option “other” gave comments about visiting different places:

7) I just do it when I'm in a specific area for a longer time.

8) If you stay abroad for example you'll probably adjust to the English dialect of the area you are visiting if you stay there long enough.

Again, several informants give suggestions about accommodation being a subconscious phenomenon, which could be tied to the answer option “I don't know”. In addition, there are ideas about belonging, influence and command of the language being used:

9) I think we change because we want to 'fit in' even though it can happen unconsciously or consciously

10) If that person has a very distinct dialect
11) Also, maybe you change your language more when speaking in a foreign language, since you're not as confident in that language as in your native one.

In this situation, as well as in the native language accommodation situation, CAT can be applied as to explain the need for social approval with the interlocutor. Also, the chance of being perceived as belonging to the group “foreigner” (discussed more by Zuengler 1991) could, arguably, be reduced when accommodating one's foreign language. For interlocutors to be able to create a smooth conversation, similarity is an important factor in the interaction. The more similar we are to each other, the more compliance will be gained (Giles & Wadleigh 1999:427). Arguably, by trying to show adequate control of a foreign language, we reduce the chance of being stereotyped to the group “foreigners” (Zuengler 1991) and, therefore, instead be perceived as alike to our interlocutor, hence we want to be on the same level as the one we are communicating with. This is also mentioned by an informant in Question 5:

12) When I adjust my dialect: I want to communicate on the same level with that person.

Further, the notion of being on the same level as one's conversation partner could be applied to the answer option “Only with close friends”. 4 of the answers in Figure 3 show that people choose to accommodate their dialects when speaking with friends in a foreign language and, in addition, some of the informants' comments touch upon this topic, for instance:

13) when I talk to my American friend, after awhile, I pronounce the words like she does even though I try to use a British pronunciation.

As stated earlier, shared history between interlocutors affects their communication. That is, the way language use develops between people depends on the nature of their relationship, and how their relationship first came into being. Presumably, just as in a native language situation, friends in a foreign language situation may converge towards each other to show closeness and solidarity. Arguably, the speech accommodation theory can be applied to this situation as well and Wilmont and Shellan suggest that “our friends have the effect of turning us into adaptive social chameleons” (1992:417).

In addition, Zuengler (1991:225) mentions that psychological convergence (as opposed to direct linguistic convergence) can occur between non-native speakers and native speakers. Non-native speakers will converge towards the native speaker when they share social identities (such as
ethnicity, age, education etc.) (Zuengler 1991:225). This type of convergence would be psychological rather than linguistic. That is to say, the non-native speaker may accommodate to, for instance, the ethnicity of the interlocutor and thereby cause a variation in the foreign language (Zuengler 1991:225).

Moreover, only 1 participant chose the answer option “Only when the person is really cool” and, just as in Question 1, the informant suggested that this answer would imply that one likes the conversation partner. Thus, the convergence strategy, used to show solidarity, may explain this answer option as well.

Finally, no one answered neither “Only with people older than myself” nor “Only when I'm trying to persuade someone”. It seems that informants do not see these factors as essential for making adjustments in a foreign language variety. Possibly, factors such as persuasion or age may rather be connected with shifts in, for example, formality styles (cf. section 2).

### 3.4 Features affected in foreign language accommodation.

In Figure 4, below, we can see the features considered to be affected in the informants' accommodation in a foreign language.

![Figure 4](image)

“*If you do adjust your dialect, what features get affected?”*

**Figure 4** Response to Question 4.

Figure 4 shows a clear indication that the informants, first and foremost, change their vocabulary in an accommodation situation involving a foreign language. One informant gives a suggestion about
this in Question 5 as is shown in the example below:

14) When speaking English, I sometimes adjust my dialect (unconsciously?) depending on whom I am talking to. When I talk to my friend in London, I try to use English words instead of American, if I know the difference.

Some English and American words have a totally different meaning (e.g. rubber in EngEng means 'eraser', but in USEng 'condom', see Trudgill 1986:25) and can therefore, as stated earlier, cause comprehension difficulties between the interlocutors. Several comments in Question 5 concern the smoothness in a conversation as well as the importance of being understood, as seen in examples 15 and 16:

15) One way of looking at it is that I want to appear more attentive as a conversationalist. I seek to avoid communicative break-down.

16) To get understood better and lessen the misunderstandings.

The idea about lessen misunderstandings in a conversation may also be connected with the pronunciation feature, which informants claim to be highly affected. Trudgill (1986:23) states that, if a context is not provided in a situation, difficulties in pronunciation comprehensibility can arise (even if the varieties are mutually intelligible). Hence, a reason for accommodating one's pronunciation might also be about avoiding communicative break-downs or misunderstandings. 14 out of 26 informants claimed the pronunciation feature to be accommodated to some extent and one, who chose “other”, commented:

17) sometimes, if the person has a strong accent

Furthermore, several of the informants' perceptions as to why they do or do not adjust their dialects (Question 5) regarded the pronunciation feature and the distinctiveness and/or difference in the interlocutor's accent:

18) It's very easy to change dialect when speaking with someone who uses a different accent than yours
19) If the person I talk to has a strong accent, it's hard not to mimic how that person sounds.

Possibly, the social psychological idea about humans' innate ability to accommodate our communication patterns can explain these situations as well. However, it would seem that a distinct accent makes the informants more consciously aware of this accommodation.

Moving on to grammatical features, Figure 4 shows that 9 informants claim they change grammatical features in an accommodation situation with a foreign language, which is somewhat more than what is shown in Figure 2 (regarding native language). Arguably, because a foreign language's grammar is (generally) being taught (in a more complex way, regarding several settings and ages for instance, see Gardner & Clément 1992) it is, perhaps, something one think more about as opposed to the native language. Perhaps to give the impression that one has an adequate control of and can manage the language, the grammar awareness is greater in this situation. Nevertheless, none of the informants comment about it and their perception of grammar accommodation in a foreign language seems to be low compared to the pronunciation and vocabulary features. Grammar is perhaps not considered as an equally important feature, in accommodation, as the former two. In addition, markers or stereotypes might be distinctive in the pronunciation and vocabulary in their foreign languages as well.

A non-linguistic, but rather sociopsychological, aspect of foreign language acquisition is the quality and willingness “to use the language in interpersonal contexts” (Gardner & Clément 1992:497) and perhaps this willingness can be related to second language speakers' accommodation as well. For instance, the theories CAT and ELIT have addressed immigrants' motivation to converge over time (Gallois & Callan 1991:247). Presumably, by having the willingness to accommodate, one might obtain a greater understanding of the foreign language, both of its sociolinguistic and linguistic features. A language contains several varieties (dialects) and, arguably, if one learns to go beyond the usage of a standard variety (e.g. the one taught in school), one would get a greater knowledge of the foreign language. That is to say, the societal factors and the pure linguistic factors, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, might become more clear when noticing the differences in a language's varieties. Furthermore, it is commonly known that the best way to learn a language is to visit a country where that language is spoken. Gardner and Clément (1992:507) state that research shows that “exposure to, and use of, the second language in the environment” affects the student's accomplishment (in the second language) positively. Also, by visiting an area where people speak differently from one's own language variety (including foreign language varieties), one might increase the understanding of the cultural communication, in addition to open up space for proficiency in the foreign language. Gardner and Clément (1992:510) report
research that shows a positive relation between second language fluency and the “level of acculturation to that group” (1992:510). Further, the authors state that one's language is a mark of belonging to an ethnic group and that language variations are reflections of the contact existing between the groups (1992:509). In addition, Gallois and Callan (1991:246) claim that one must acquire “cultural skills and knowledge about the communication-based norms that facilitate daily interactions with people in all aspects of the host culture”, to be able to operate efficiently in a new culture (1991:246). Furthermore, people in a new cultural group will most likely converge to the prototypical behaviours of that group (1991:248). However, the host community might have norms about how the visitors or immigrants should use the language and if we are not aware of these, or use them inappropriately, misunderstandings or negative perceptions can occur (Gallois & Callan 1991:248).

To sum up, the participants in the survey seem to believe that they change their speech in some way, depending on conversation partner. In addition, the general perception is that accommodation occurs subconsciously. This seems to be related to the sociopsychological idea of convergence as reducing dissimilarities between interlocutors to increase their liking of each other (Giles et al. 1991:18) which would occur at low levels of awareness (Giles et al. 1991:24). The accommodation process takes into account the notions of linguistic and psychological similarity, rather than slavish imitation (Trudgill 1986:58). This was shown in the informants' answers about to whom they accommodate and what features they change in the process. That is to say, they want to become more similar to their conversation partner in terms of being on the same communicative level which also reflects their need for social approval in, for example, new groups.

4. Conclusion

The first research question set out in this paper was if people believed they change their regional dialects depending on conversation partner. As Figures 1 and 3 (in section 3) showed, most informants did indeed believe that they adjust their speech depending on their interlocutor. Both when speaking their native language and when speaking a foreign language, more than 50% of the informants claimed adjustments to occur.

21 of the 26 informants answered that they adjust their dialects in their native language. The features they claimed to be the most affected, were pronunciation and vocabulary. The grammar, however, was claimed not be affected at all by 16 of the given answers in question 2. Most of the comments about when adjustments took place concerned geographical reasons. That is to say, the informants believed that they change their dialect when talking with someone from an other area,
different from their own, for instance when visiting that area. In addition, some of them considered their dialects to change when speaking with their friends.

In a foreign language situation, 21 of the informants claimed they adjust their dialects. The accommodation in this situation was also (according to the informants), mostly, when visiting new areas and when talking to friends. In addition to the conversational partners' geographical background, informants claimed they would make dialect adjustments when being in a place for a long time. Moreover, the vocabulary and pronunciation features were the ones considered to be mostly affected in the foreign language adjustment situation as well as in their first language adjustments.

The second research question concerned informants' thoughts about the reasons for dialect accommodation. According to the comments in the survey, people saw accommodation as subconscious behaviour. Most of the informants mentioned influence from the interlocutor's geographical background, distinctive accent and friendship relations. Furthermore, people seemed to be able to reflect over in what situations and to whom they accommodate. However, most of them did not have further suggestions as to why it happened. That is, the informants noticed accommodation behaviours only after the accommodation had occurred and therefore saw it as being subconsciously controlled. However, as examples 12, 15 and 16 showed, some of the informants had ideas about communicative efficiency as to why they adjust their speech patterns, which indicates that (at least sometimes) accommodation may occur consciously. Perhaps this could be connected to the willingness underlying learning and developing a greater understanding for a language and its cultural communication.

As regards the third research question finally, the speculation was whether there are any differences to be found in the informants' native and foreign language accommodations. When comparing Figures 2 and 4, we could see that adjustments in grammatical features differed somewhat depending on if the native or foreign language was used. Informants regarded their grammar to be affected somewhat more in foreign language accommodation than in native language accommodation. However, we could also see that the informants' pronunciation and vocabulary adjustments did not differ much in the two situations. In both a native language accommodation situation and in a foreign language accommodation situation, these features were considered to be highly affected.

Moreover, most of the informants stated that they adjust their dialects when visiting another area, are in a place for a long time or when they are with friends. As was seen in Figures 1 and 3, this was mentioned in both the native language situation and the foreign language situation and, therefore, no major differences were found. Thus, the informants believe to change the way they
speak according to conversation partner, no matter if they used their first language or a foreign language. Further, in both cases, people believed the adjustment process to be subconscious behaviour, as was shown in examples 1 and 9 for instance. The notion of comprehensibility was also mentioned as important when accommodating one's dialect. Both in sections 3.2 and 3.4 we saw examples of adjustments in the informants' vocabulary, which is another similarity (rather than difference) between the two situations discussed.

To conclude, non-linguists seem to have some perception that dialect accommodation occurs, both in a native language and a foreign language situation. The results from the survey were, mainly, analysed through sociolinguistic and sociopsychological perspectives. However, the human being is a complex entity and therefore, when studying its system and functions within one specific field, it is difficult to draw a line where one discipline ends and the next begins. The questions asked within one discipline might lead to answers in a different field. Hence, future research, concerning accommodation processes, must take into account several of the different aspects of both sociolinguistics, social psychology, ethnolinguistics, psychology etc. to be able to find explanations as to how accommodation functions in communication. That is to say, future research may look at individuals' differences in dialect accommodation, as to why and how it occurs (in relation to several disciplines). What is more, dialect accommodation across languages, in relation to both second language acquisition and cultural communication, would be a possible area to investigate further.
References


Appendix

Survey

Definition: Dialects = regional dialects (You might not have a distinct dialect, but do you change the way you speak anyway?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>25-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. When you speak to someone in your native language, do you adjust your (regional) dialect to that of the person you're talking to?

   No, never
   Yes, always
   Yes, but only when I'm talking to close friends
   Yes, but only when I'm talking to people older than myself
   Yes, but only when I'm visiting their region/area
   Yes, but only when I think the person is really cool
   Yes, but only when I'm trying to persuade someone
   I don't know
   Other ____________________________

2. If you do adjust your dialect, what features get affected?

   vocabulary

      No, not at all
      Yes, to some extent
      Yes, to a high extent

   pronunciation

      No, not at all
      Yes, to some extent
      Yes, to a high extent

   grammatical structure

      No, not at all
      Yes, to some extent
      Yes, to a high extent
3. When you speak to someone in a foreign language, do you adjust your dialect to that of the person you're talking to?

No, never
Yes, always
Yes, but only when I'm talking to close friends
Yes, but only when I'm talking to people older than myself
Yes, but only when I'm visiting their region/area
Yes, but only when I think the person is really cool
Yes, but only when I'm trying to persuade someone
I don't know
Other _________________________________

4. If you do adjust your dialect, what features get affected?

Vocabulary

No, not at all
Yes, to some extent
Yes, to a high extent

pronunciation

No, not at all
Yes, to some extent
Yes, to a high extent

grammatical structure

No, not at all
Yes, to some extent
Yes, to a high extent

5. Do you have any thoughts about why you adjust/don't adjust your dialect?