A multifactorial analysis of contact-induced constructional change in speech reporting in White South African English (WSAfE)

Haidee Kruger (Macquarie University / North-West University)
Bertus van Rooy (North-West University)

Abstract
In settings of prolonged language contact, language change may be the consequence of overt cross-linguistic influence (CLI) where one language adopts constructional forms from another, giving rise to a new form-meaning pair in the adopting language (Mougeon et al. 2005: 102). The process in which a new construction is created through CLI is classified as a form of “instantaneous constructionalisation” by Traugott and Trousdale (2013). Change may also result from covert CLI, where a shift in the frequency distribution of competing constructional forms occurs under influence of differences in the frequency of similar constructional forms in the contact language (Mougeon et al. 2005: 102-103). Covert CLI may initially only lead to constructional changes in the sense of Traugott and Trousdale (2013), or changes from minor to major use pattern in the terminology of Heine and Kuteva (2005), but in time, constructionalisation may result as the semantic or pragmatic associations of the forms change. Hilpert (2013: 16) subsumes all these processes in his definition of constructional change: “Constructional change selectively seizes a conventionalized form-meaning pair of a language, altering it in terms of its form, its function, any aspect of its frequency, its distribution in the linguistic community, or any combination of these.”

In this paper we present a corpus analysis of constructional changes in the broader sense of Hilpert (2013) in a set of reported-speech constructions in White South African English (WSAfE), a native variety of English that has been in extensive contact with Afrikaans throughout its history. The analysis is based on comparable diachronic corpora of WSAfE (Wasserman & Van Rooy 2014), its parent variety British English (BrE) (represented by ARCHER), and the contact language, Afrikaans (Kirsten 2015). Three registers, fiction, newswriting and letters, are selected, and the time-frame is the 19th and 20th centuries (split in four half-century periods) for the two English corpora, but only the 20th century for Afrikaans. Three related sets of reported-speech constructions are analysed: (1) the position of the reporting clause in direct speech and thought, (2) quotative inversion in reporting clauses in non-initial position in direct and indirect speech and thought, and (3) the presence or absence of the complementiser that in indirect speech and thought. Features (1) and (3) represent potential instances of covert CLI, while feature (2) combines possibilities of overt and covert CLI. We undertake a multifactorial analysis of the effects of Variety, Register and Period on the selection of alternate constructions for each of the three features, to retrace the course of constructional change associated with language contact in this particular contact setting.

The findings indicate divergent contact effects for the three features analysed. For feature (1), there is evidence of constructional change in an increasing preference for the final position of the reporting clause across both English varieties. This is particularly evident in newswriting, but with a steeper trajectory of change in WSAfE compared to ARCHER. In this case, an existing change in progress in English is amplified by contact with Afrikaans, also undergoing a similar change. For feature (2), overt transfer from Afrikaans does not take place. WSAfE follows the pattern of BrE in shifting from the inverted to non-inverted order. However, WSAfE lags behind BrE in the rate of change, which might be attributed to the preserving effect of Afrikaans inverted order. Here contact therefore slows down change.
For feature (3) there is constructional change in the form of an increase in *that* omission over time in both English varieties, but at different rates in different registers. Published registers show more convergence between WSAfE and Afrikaans (which demonstrates a very high omission ratio) than letters, which are not subject to an editorial process, suggesting a role for **converging editorial norms** in the shared publishing context of WSAfE and Afrikaans.

**References**


