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Socio-cognitive salience and the role of the local

Jensen, Marie Møller

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Socio-cognitive salience and the role of *the local*.

Keywords: salience, morphosyntax, socio-cognitive approach, language change, indexicality

This paper adopts a socio-cognitive approach to the investigation of language variation and will focus on the role of salience in this connection. Salience is here seen as *the association of social content and linguistic forms in the cognitive domain* and it will be used in the interpretation of results of a study of Tyneside English morphosyntax. In particular, it will be argued that *the local* as a social index of vernacular forms may be linked with the salience of forms (similar results were found by Honeybone & Watson 2013 for Liverpool English).

The Tyneside study consisted of three empirical studies: a corpus study (based on the NECTE corpus patterning frequency of use over time), a questionnaire study (investigating participants' awareness of features) and a popular dialect literature study (which linked the two other studies). Among the 12 variables investigated (pronouns, sentential negation, verbal morphology), in particular the unique local variables *divn't*, *wor*, *telt*, and *hoy* proved particularly salient to the questionnaire participants. Suggestions for the interpretation of these patterns include social indexicality (Silverstein 2003, Johnstone 2009) and enregisterment (Agha 2003, Beal 2009) to account for how the variables come to carry social meaning in the local community and exemplar theory (Pierrehumbert 2001; Hay, Warren and Drager 2006) to account for how the link between the social and the cognitive aspects of language might be combined in the mind. Overall, the results of the three studies indicated that social factors such as perceptions of uniqueness and indexical value in the form of localness might influence the salience of forms.

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