When intuitions (don't) fail:
Sociosyntax in the analysis of Scots
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In the examination of non-standard morphosyntactic forms such as those in (1), a perennial problem for sociolinguists is that the 'linguistic features of interest are of such low frequency that quantitative studies are not feasible' (Labov 1996:78).

(1)   a. Aye the floor *needs renewed*.   (needs +ed)
         b. Ken, and if you *div* mess up, which you will.   (*div* for *do*)
         c. The windows *didna* have *nae* glass in them.   (negative concord)

An obvious solution to this problem is to adopt methodologies from syntax, specifically acceptability judgment data gleaned from speaker intuition. However, sociolinguists have been generally reluctant to adopt such a technique, perhaps due to the repeated observation that speakers may 'agree that a certain form is completely unacceptable, yet use it themselves freely in every-day speech' (Labov 1996: 78).

In this paper we present a new digital resource which employs both sociolinguistic methodologies in spoken data and intuitions captured through acceptability judgments in the analysis of non-standard morphosyntactic forms. By having access to both these data types from the same speakers, we have the opportunity to assess the reliability of the judgment data as measured against spontaneous speech.

The data come from the Scots Syntax Atlas which maps syntactic structure across time and space in 140 locations across Scotland. We gathered speakers' intuitions through an acceptability judgment questionnaire (e.g. Schütze 1996, Barbiers & Bennis 2007), carried out with over 500 speakers across 200 data points. In addition, we collected spontaneous spoken data through sociolinguistic interviews (Labov 1966) between pairs of speakers in each location, c.300 hours in total.

In this analysis, we target the three non-standard morphosyntactic forms in (1), which are said to be differentiated both geographically and socially: the needs +ed form (1a), the auxiliary verb *div* (1b) and negative concord (1c). For each of these morphosyntactic structures, we first map the results from the acceptability judgment data. We then turn to the corpus of spoken data to test whether the patterns of acceptability from the judgment data map on to production data. Our results show that the reliability of judgments is variable-dependent. The needs +ed form (1a) is accepted in most varieties across Scotland and also appears in a diverse range of dialects in the spoken data. The auxiliary *div* (1b) is much more geographically circumscribed in the elicited data, and so too it is in the spoken data, appearing in the north east and the borders only. The results for negative concord (1c) are much more mixed in the judgment data, with no clear pattern of acceptability. However, there are clear geographic and socially distributed patterns of use that arise from the spoken data, suggesting that 'intuitions fail' (Labov 1996) with this particular variable.

We discuss these results in the light of constraints on a speaker's ability to tap intuitions about non-standard morphosyntactic forms, specifically how both social and linguistic pressures may operate in governing the reliability of judgment data.

References

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