

Micro-diachronic language change and its interaction with the age variable

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In a nutshell

Linguistic habits are changing. Although we know (e.g. from Labov's (1994) apparent time hypothesis) that the age variable has an important role for language change studies, old age is only marginally represented in related research. Latter very often fails to consider sufficiently the influence of the individuality of biographies diachronic variation. Relevant topics in this regard are the role of the language use in young age, the educational factors, physical and mental conditions in old age, and also particular characteristics of a specific generation. In other words: Is the language use in old age effectively a window on the generation's language use in young age? And if it is not, what other influencing factors do we have to account for? This project analyses the heterogeneous use of French *parce que*, for which functional change is repeatedly hinted at (Sanders & Stukker 2012: 134-135, Fagard & Degand 2008: 220), from a diachronic point of view comparing it in three diachronically distinct corpora.

Research questions

- Can a diachronic variation be observed for a specific element in language use (the use of *parce que*)?
- What can the change be due to?
- What role does the age variable play?

Hypothesis: We expect to find an interaction between old age and the uses of *parce que*

Data

A balanced set of interviews and speakers has been extracted from the corpora ESLO1&2 (Abouda & Baude 2006) and LangAge (Gerstenberg 2011).

	Diachronic category I		Diachronic category II	
	ESLO1	ESLO2	LangAge (1st set)	
What kind of data selected?	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews	
When recorded?	Around 1970	Around 2010	2005	
Where?	Orléans	Orléans	Orléans	
Meta data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Sex • Socio-professional information • Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Sex • Socio-professional information • Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Sex • Socio-professional information • Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Sex • Socio-professional information • Education
Representation of old age	-	-	+	

Two *parce que* constructions

The most frequent underlying distinction of the uses of *parce que* groups the occurrences into a syntactic/ subordinating category and a pragmatic category.

	LEVEL	Syntactic type/ pole	Pragmatic type/ pole
FORM	Prosody	One intonational unit	Intonationally separated
	Syntax	Syntactic dependency	Syntactically independent
FUNCTION	Information Structure	Presupposed p	Asserted p
	Speaker Involvement	Low degree (objective)	High degree ((inter-) subjective)
	Semantics	Content domain	Epistemic/ Speech act domain

(Among others: Simon & Degand 2007, Zufferey 2012., Lambrecht u.a. 2006, Groupe Lambda-1 1975, Sweetser 1990)

Some examples...

ESLO1_FC716: *ça a été très dur au départ parce que j'étais pas j'étais pas tellement de j'aimais pas tellement le contact des gens*

- Prosody: One intonational unit (no pause between p (*parce que*) and (*parce que*) q
- Syntax: Syntactically dependent (ça l' a été pourquoi? Parce que j'aimais pas tellement le contact des gens; C' est parce que j'aimais pas tellement le contact que ça a été dur au départ)
- IS: p presupposed (because repetition), q asserted
- Sem: Content domain

LangAge_A45: *je suis resté même après même quand alors que j'étais déjà au collège à ce moment-là [pau] parce que j' y ai été au collège à partir de douze ans*

- Prosody: Separated by pause
- Syntax: Syntactically independent (*J'y étais pourquoi? Parce que j' y ai été au collège à partir de douze ans; *C'est parce que j' y ai été au collège à partir de douze ans que j'étais déjà au collège à ce moment-là)
- IS: p asserted, q asserted (?)
- Sem: Epistemic domain

ESLO2_MX953: *donc voilà espérons que qu'il fasse beau [pau] parce que si il pleut*

- Prosody: Separation by pause
- Syntax: Syntactically independent, 2 speech acts
- IS: p asserted, q asserted (?)
- Sem: speech act domain

Why annotate form and function?

- For comparing the frequencies of the two types/ constructions
- For including constructions that are situated between the syntactic and the pragmatic poles

Why old age? Why *parce que*?

If we accept the assumptions that (1) the syntactic type of *parce que* is the conservative form (Simon & Degand 2007) and that (2) we are witnessing an ongoing pragmaticalisation process of *parce que* (Sanders & Stukker 2012), we can expect the following interactions:

- Apparent time phenomena:
 - We can expect older speaker to use the conservative type more frequently than young speaker. Why is that?
 - Generational differences, cohort effects
 - Genre: Did the interview genre become less formal?
 - Language change: The mentioned ongoing pragmaticalisation
- Age grading phenomena
 - Or do older people rather use the progressive pragmatic type once left the working environment (the effects of retirement)?
- Age related declines
 - Primarily the formal level is affected. Now why that?
 - Decreasing working memory (Kynette & Kemper 1986): Are paratactic structures preferred?
 - Physiological changes (breathing): Impact on prosody?

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