

Sociolinguistics as a way of adjustment in conversation



INTRODUCTION

This study is aiming to examine how different strategies and processes are used in sociolinguistics as a way of adjustment of the writer's manner of address in relation to his or her perception of the addressee. This is a complex process of change within the dynamics of conversation and writing. (Giles/Powesland 1975).

It is often said that convergence seems to be the rule in media language. For instance, phonological features in radio broadcasting showed that presenters use measurably more informal pronunciations in stations which primarily address lower class, less educated, and younger listeners (Bell 1991. Ch. 6). As far as newspapers are concerned, the followed classic hypothesis of convergence has been made by S. Hall, who claims that there is a reciprocity of producer/reader, what he called the *public idiom* of the media. However, this does not mean that the readers actually speak what they read or listen to, but there is evidence to suggest that a convergence takes place and that each paper makes its own convergence toward what it sees as a mode of discourse acceptable to its readership (Hall 1978, 61).

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Bell (1991. cb 6) has carried out research into determiner deletion; that being words found within the English Language that (which produces phrases like *superstar Cher, newsagent's manager Martin Gilbert, Defence Secretary Michael Portillo* (all from The Sun, January 6, 1996). Several studies show that the deletion of articles in such phrases distinguishes tabloids from broadsheet British Newspapers. These are correlations with assumed class

and education and the deletion seems to imply modernity, populism, and journalistic raciness.

-Medienwissenschaft: ein Handbuch zur Entwicklung der Medien und Kommunikationsformen

Joaquin-Félix, Hans-Werner Ludwig)

(Media Science: A manual for the development of the media and communication forms)

Ryden (1975) and Bell (1985) both investigate the use of noun phrase name appositions in newspapers language and in particular the spread of phrases like *Opposition leader Neil Kinnock* with descriptive noun phrase appositive without a determiner preceding the name.

This format is relatively recent and is in Britain largely but not entirely restricted to the two categories of tabloid papers

-Social Stylistics: Syntactic variation in British Newspapers – Andreas H. Jucker-

The influence of the reader in newspaper style is supported by the research carried out by Bell (1991) and Jucker (1989).

Bell (1991: 107-108), in his studies on naming expressions, states that this practice was more common in papers like “ The Sun, The Mirror, The Express” than in “ The telegraph, The Guardian and The Times”.

The deletions were found in greater numbers in papers catering for lower socio-economic classes.

After studying the deletion of determiners Jucker (1989) divided British newspapers into three categories below. He found that determiners were

deleted more often in Down markets papers than in Midmarket papers, while there were very few deletions in style with a certain type of reader. Using this information Jucker (1989) divides British newspapers into three categories:

Up market: The Times, Financial Times, Guardian, Independent, Daily telegraph

Midmarket: Daily Mail, Daily Express, Today

Down-market: Daily Mirror, Star, Sun.

The writers mentioned in this section all maintain that TABLOIDS and BROADSHEETS are different in almost every way.

-A Genre Approach to Re-Entry Patterns in Editorials – BARRY PENNOCK Methodology

Many considerations were taken in terms of which method would be best to use in order to carry out the investigation into the use of determiners in the media. The first decision that had to be made was which branch of the media would be used as a source for the study. The options ranged from television programs, magazines, internet websites, radio and newspapers. The choice of newspapers was made based primarily on access to previous research, mentioned in the Background Research section of this report. The fact that a similar study had been carried out by Bell et al in the comparison of determiner usage between the different types of newspaper gave a good basis on which to base our own study. Added to this is the intrigue of

whether the results obtained will have a similar outcome to those obtained by these linguists twenty years ago.

The next step was to realise that in order to study determiners, a content analysis was the only possible method that could be used. It was also the same method used by Bell et al. in their study. However there are many advantages and disadvantages of using this process that led to many limitations to the practical side of the study. It is fairly time consuming which can often limit the researcher to a smaller sample than a less time consuming method. The chance for a margin of error is increased particularly if relational analysis is used. This study does require a level of relational analysis, that being the assumption of what by today's standard of English counts as a missing determiner and what does not; which limits the validity of the results, especially if the intention is to directly compare the results found by Bell et al. It is also difficult to computerize and therefore the results obtained have to be manually automated which adds to the total time consumption that using a digital content analysis could perhaps have avoided.

Our study therefore began firstly by selecting a number of different newspapers to compare. This was done by initially selecting an equal number of British papers that are considered 'heavyweight'[1]newspapers, i. e. The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, and an equal number of tabloid or 'middle-market'[2]newspapers such as The Daily Mail and the 'redtops',[3]such as The Sun and The Daily Star. The six papers aforementioned were picked from those available from the University Shop on campus, with each category of newspaper represented and to be used in <https://assignbuster.com/sociolinguistics-as-a-way-of-adjustment-in-conversation/>

comparison with each other. They were then grouped into the retrospective classes: Group 1 included The Times, The Daily Telegraph and The Guardian; Group 2 included The Sun, The Daily Mail and The Daily Star. Our hypothesis, that fewer determiners will be deleted from the papers in Group 1 than the amount deleted from Group 2, was then decided upon. On the other hand there are many advantages to using content analysis such as the fact that it can combine quantitative and qualitative operations through the ability to see clearly the context of the deletion or inclusion. This method also has very few ethical issues as it is available to the public and no permission is needed in order to access it. It is also a very unobtrusive means of analysing the use of the English Language. It is also reliable as this study has been done before and can be repeated by the same or other researchers.

After the newspapers were selected the specific details of how this content analysis would be carried out was then agreed upon. It was decided that two articles would be analysed from each of the six papers; one regarding a political subject and the other focussing on sport. This was done in order to firstly observe if there was any difference between the uses of determiners between the papers and then secondly if there was a difference within the different papers when the subject matter was different. It was clear that in order to increase the validity of this research the newspapers analysed would have to all be taken from the same date and then the articles chosen were to be about the same topic within politics and sport. The newspapers were therefore collected for analysis on the 6th May 2010 and the similar stories of the day in the two subject areas were then analysed. It was decided that the headlines and tag lines of all the articles would be included

in the study. However it was recognised that headlines in general tend to have determiner deletions as standard.

After the articles were selected the exact process of working out the determiner deletion was decided upon. Firstly the article word length was counted and recorded, then the entire article was analysed and all the determiners within the article were highlighted and totalled. Then a second analysis of each article was carried out in order to locate where the determiners were missing in accordance with Standard English practice.

[4]These would again be totalled and recorded in a spread sheet where the number of determiners which have been deleted would be calculated as a percentage of the total determiners that could have been used in the entire article.

Although every measure has been taken to improve the reliability, validity and practical issues posed by any method of research, this study is not without its limitations. Firstly not all the variables can be controlled. Firstly, the sex of the journalist whom had written each article is not being taken into account. This means that the results obtained could be reduced in validity, due to the fact that gender could have an influence over the amount of determiners used within the articles. In a similar vein, the age of the journalist is also unknown, which could similarly have an impact upon the amount of determiners used or deleted. It is also a fairly subjective study and it is likely that some determiner deletions could be overlooked depending upon the researcher carrying out the study. In order to improve this limitation the same person shall be carrying out the content analysis on each of the papers. Due to the time consuming nature of this method as <https://assignbuster.com/sociolinguistics-as-a-way-of-adjustment-in-conversation/>

aforementioned the sample size had to be kept quite small to three newspapers of the two different categories. This reduces the representativeness of the study as not all newspapers have been analysed therefore it is probably unlikely that any generalisations can be made from this study - only suggestions.