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Internet-mediated Phonetics

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Internet-mediated Phonetics

Abstract/Resumen

Facebook is a medium of social interaction producing its own style. The present study analyses how users from Malaga create this style through phonetic features of the local Spanish variety and how they reflect on the use of these features. Moreover, the use of non-standard variants by users from Malaga is examined and compared to an oral corpus. Results demonstrate that social factors work differently in real and virtual speech. Thus, the electronic medium constrains the phonetics of the local variety employed on Facebook. Facebook communication is seen as a style serving to create social meaning and to express linguistic identity.

Facebook es un medio de interacción social que produce su propio estilo. Este estudio analiza cómo los usuarios malagueños crean dicho estilo a través de rasgos fonéticos de la variedad local de español y cómo reflexionan sobre el uso de estos rasgos. Además, el uso de las variantes no estándares por parte de los usuarios malagueños se examina y se compara con un corpus oral. Los resultados muestran que los factores sociales funcionan de manera diferente en el habla real y virtual. Así, el medio electrónico influye en la fonética de la variedad local empleada en Facebook. La comunicación en Facebook se considera un estilo que sirva para crear significado social y para expresar identidad lingüística.

Keywords/Palabras clave

Facebook, Identity, Phonetics, Style / Estilo, Facebook, Fonética, Identidad

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1. Introduction

The Internet is becoming increasingly more popular and more important for communication due to the enormous influence of the new media. Hence computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a relatively new field in linguistics. Within CMC, social network sites are an even more recent and little studied phenomenon. The Internet has affected our lives and society in manifold ways, and partly, in fundamental ways. Therefore, it is no surprise that one of the affected areas is language and communication itself (Stein, 2006). Social network sites are not a static entity, but change continuously, and innovations for the use of the social network sites are frequently introduced because of the constant evolution of technology. These innovations are conditioned by the electronic medium, which, for its part, has an influence on the communication style used on social network sites, such as Facebook.

Over the last few years Facebook has turned into a widespread and continuously expanding medium of communication. Being a new medium of social interaction, Facebook produces its own communication style. This new medium does not only condition communication in general, but also phonetics, as this study shows. My focus of analysis is how Facebook users from the city of Malaga create this style by means of phonic features typical of the Andalusian variety of Spanish and how the users reflect on the use of these phonic features. The research is based on a theoretical framework that combines sociolinguistics with CMC. To start, these two concepts are briefly presented and then the methods employed in the research are explained in order to continue with some tendencies found in this study. Firstly, the aim is to examine how the social factors *zone*, *sex*, *age* and *addressee* influence the use of phonetic non-standard features on Facebook and in spoken Andalusian Spanish. Secondly, some findings of the survey made about how participants reflect on the use of non-standard features on Facebook are presented.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Style in Sociolinguistics

The study of style is a central component in sociolinguistic research since Labov's pioneering work in 1966. However, the understanding of style changed over time. A linguist who suggested a modified meaning of style is Coupland:

Style refers to ways of speaking – how speakers use the resources of language variation to make meaning in social encounters [...], how speakers project different social identities and create different social relationships through their style choices, and how speech-style and social context inter-relate. (Coupland, 2007, p. i)

In Coupland's concept, style is interpreted as a multidimensional entity. Style is not only one axis of variation, but it is *the* multidimensional axis of variation. It is how the speakers construct a "way of being" or identify themselves by combining the social and linguistic resources available in a community. This way, speakers do not transfer meaning to the variants in an abstract sense, but create meaning for the variants and for themselves through negotiating combinations of variants (or styles) that are relatively similar or different to the combinations negotiated by other speakers sharing their sociolinguistic space. Therefore, style is in the first place the variety of forms of language use that the individual speakers employ in dialogue with others. According to Baron (2002) people necessarily make stylistic decisions (consciously or not) every time they speak or write. Thus, Baron (2002, p. 406) proposes the following functional definition of style: "language 'style' is the outcome of the choices we make about how to communicate what to whom."

Another influential linguist who presents a notion similar to Coupland's is Eckert. According to Eckert (2004) the meaning of variation lies in its role in the construction of styles. This brings along various implications to our understanding of variation. First, the variables do not appear in a style with a specific and fixed meaning but assume this meaning in the process of style construction, which leads to the second point, that style is not a 'thing' but a practice. People actively create meaning because style is the visible manifestation of social meaning. In the same way as social meaning is not static, neither are styles. Eckert states that:

Things in the world become stylistic resources by virtue of their place in local discourse – in the collaborative work of sense-making. While individuals make stylistic moves [...], they do so in cooperation with, or with reference to, the people around them. Since a stylistic move is to be put out into a community for the purpose of being interpreted, speakers select resources on the basis of their potential comprehensibility in that community. (Eckert, 2004, p. 44)

What matters is not whether a particular speaker chooses a particular variant in a particular predefined context, but how the speakers create the sociolinguistic meaning by manipulating the range of social and linguistic variants available in a community. The use of a certain style is not only a way by which we construct and maintain social interactions, but also a way of

expressing who we are and with whom we interact. These interactions play a crucial role in creating our social and personal identities (Schiffrin, 1996).

2.2 Computer-mediated communication

Another important theoretical field is computer-mediated communication (CMC). A ‘classic’ definition of computer-mediated communication is Herring’s (1996, p. 1): “CMC is communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers.” In the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, various linguists tried to classify CMC. It was normal to work with two basic modalities of language – spoken and written. Herring (2010) exposes that the users experience CMC fundamentally similar to oral conversation, even though it is produced and received through written media. The majority of linguists agree on showing that this imitation of speech functions as a compensation of the absence of the paralinguistic mechanisms of communication (Covarrubias, 2008). Frehner (2008) suggests that the relationship between the written and the oral is considered a continuum and not a dichotomy because “[c]omputer-mediated communication is not identical to either speech or writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both” (Crystal, 2001, p. 79). According to Frehner (2008, p. 177) CMC has to be situated “somewhere beyond speech and writing”: even though it uses oral and written features, it also has its own properties, which are neither characteristic of the oral nor of the written. Hence, the Internet – and all the technological, social and contextual factors that come into play – mediates how we express ourselves online. However, we should bear in mind that:

For both researchers and participants, a central aspect of understanding the dynamics of mediation is to ‘disaggregate’ the Internet: not to look at a monolithic medium called ‘the Internet’, but rather at a range of practices, software and hardware technologies, modes of representation and interaction that may or may not be interrelated by participants, machines or programs (indeed they may not all take place at a computer). What we were observing was not so much people’s use of ‘the Internet’, but rather how they assembled various technical possibilities which added up to *their* Internet. (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 14)

That is, the users appropriate the numerous possibilities ‘their’ Internet offers them and make use of these possibilities for different purposes, one of them being to communicate social meaning. In the case analysed in this study social meaning is conveyed through the use of non-standard phonetic variants

of Spanish (in a written form). These Internet-mediated phonetics mark local identity.

Androutsopoulos (2006) claims that comparatively few linguistic studies in CMC use quantitative methods, and even less are of variationist nature. The anonymous type of communication taking place online “raises problems for traditional variationist methods which assume that reliable information about participant gender, age, social class, race, geographical location, etc., is available to the researcher” (Herring, 2001, p. 621). Moreover, Androutsopoulos (2006) adds another issue, namely the absence “of the main type of linguistic variable in the correlative paradigm, that is, phonetics/phonology.” However, we would argue that phonetics/phonology is not completely absent from CMC, but occurs in a mediated form. No doubt more variationist research (especially about Internet-mediated phonetics) is required to investigate how social meaning in online communication is co-constructed by language variation.

Within CMC, social network sites are an even newer and less studied phenomenon. Boyd and Ellison define social network sites as the following:

As web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, online)

Social network sites are not a static entity, but change constantly and new functions are frequently introduced. Social network sites present a cheap and easy method to communicate via Internet, extremely popular among young people. One of the most famous social network sites is Facebook. It is almost globally accessible and has an enormous number of users in constant expansion. Currently it has more than 1.3 billion users. Communication on Facebook is an interesting model of virtual communication, and, in addition, it is quite new. It started in the US in 2004 and from 2006 onwards access was also possible from other countries. In these few years it has turned into an important communication mode for many people (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

3. Methods

This project is based on a corpus compiled from 90 informants’ utterances on Facebook, which is the corpus of virtual speech. All participants are residents of Malaga city and gave their permission for data to be collected on the walls of their Facebook profiles. The participants live in one of the following zones of Malaga: West, Centre or East. Half of the informants are women and half

are men. Moreover, they are equally distributed into two age groups, one comprising 18 to 29 year olds and the other 30 to 59 year olds. In addition, it was taken into consideration whether the comments on Facebook were directed at a specific addressee (36%), for example via the formula @ + name or in direct answer to a previous comment of another user, or whether the comments were made for a general audience (64%). In total, the corpus constitutes of 6300 tokens.

Table 1. Overview of participants in the virtual speech corpus

Zone	West	Centre	East	Total
N	30	30	30	90
Sex	Women	Men		Total
N	45	45		90
Age	18-29	30-59		Total
N	45	45		90
Addressee	General	Specific		Total
%	64	36		100

A corpus comprised of broad transcriptions of recordings with people from Malaga serves as reference corpus, which is the real speech corpus. The corpus of real speech is almost identical in its dimensions to the corpus of virtual speech. Recordings have been made of 90 informants in the same three zones of Malaga: West, Centre and East. Furthermore, 46 of the participants are women and 44 men, equally distributed into the same age groups of 18 to 29 and 30 to 59 years. The corpus of real speech contains 6300 tokens as well.

Table 2. Overview of participants in the real speech corpus

Zone	West	Centre	East	Total
N	30	30	30	90
Sex	Women	Men		Total
N	46	44		90
Age	18-29	30-59		Total
N	45	45		90

In addition, I resorted to a survey to collect data to examine why people use these variants on Facebook. The analysis is quantitative and qualitative, whereby I resorted to the Goldvarb X program for the quantitative part. The following phonetic variables and their variants are investigated:

- | | | |
|---|---|---------------|
| 1. /s/ in final position, as in <i>playas</i> | → | [s], [h], [ø] |
| 2. /s/ in preconsonantic position, as in <i>estar</i> | → | [s], [h], [ø] |
| 3. /d/ in final position, as in <i>universidad</i> | → | [ð], [ø] |
| 4. /d/ in intervocalic position, as in <i>pescado</i> | → | [ð], [ø] |

- 5. /r/ in final position, as in *llamar* → [r],[ø]
- 6. /x/, as in *juerga* → [x], [h]
- 7. /l/ in preconsonantic position, as in *alcalde* → [l], [r]

The social factors, or in other words, the social independent variables, analysed, which constrain the use of the dependent variables, are:

- Zone
- Sex
- Age
- Addressee

Research on this project was guided by these research questions:

1. With which frequency are the analysed features used?
2. How do the social and linguistic variables condition the use of these features?
3. How do the informants' attitudes towards the different variables have an influence on their online use?
4. How is a peculiar online social network style created through these phonic features?

4. Results

The variants were grouped by standard and non-standard variants in order to obtain a better overview about the general tendencies going on in my data. The data shows some interesting trends in how the participants use the standard and non-standard features and how the different social factors constrain them.

4.1 Virtual speech versus real speech

If we compare the overall use of non-standard and standard variants in the virtual speech and the real speech corpus, more non-standard variants are used in virtual speech than in real speech, as table 3 and figure 1 show:

Table 3. Distribution of variants by corpus

	Real speech		Virtual speech	
	%	N	%	N
Standard variants	24	1514	17	1071
Non-standard variants	76	4786	83	5229

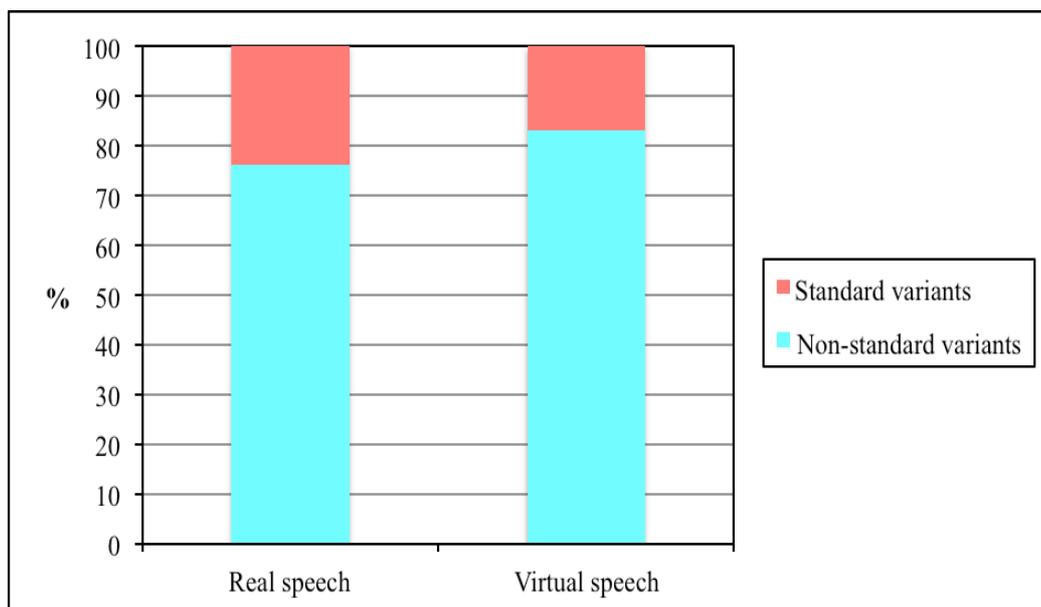


Figure 1. Distribution of variants by corpus

4.2 The social factor *zone*

It is interesting to observe that the social factor *zone* is significant in real speech, but not in virtual speech, as we can deduce from table 4 and figure 2. In real speech we have a stratification of the frequencies of use from 90% in the zone *West* to 64% in the zone *East*, whereas in virtual speech non-standard variants are employed with a constant frequency across all three zones:

Table 4. Distribution of non-standard variants by zone

Non-standard variants			
	Zone	%	N
Real speech	West	90	1889
	Centre	74	1553
	East	64	1344
Virtual speech	West	83	1764
	Centre	82	1722
	East	83	1743

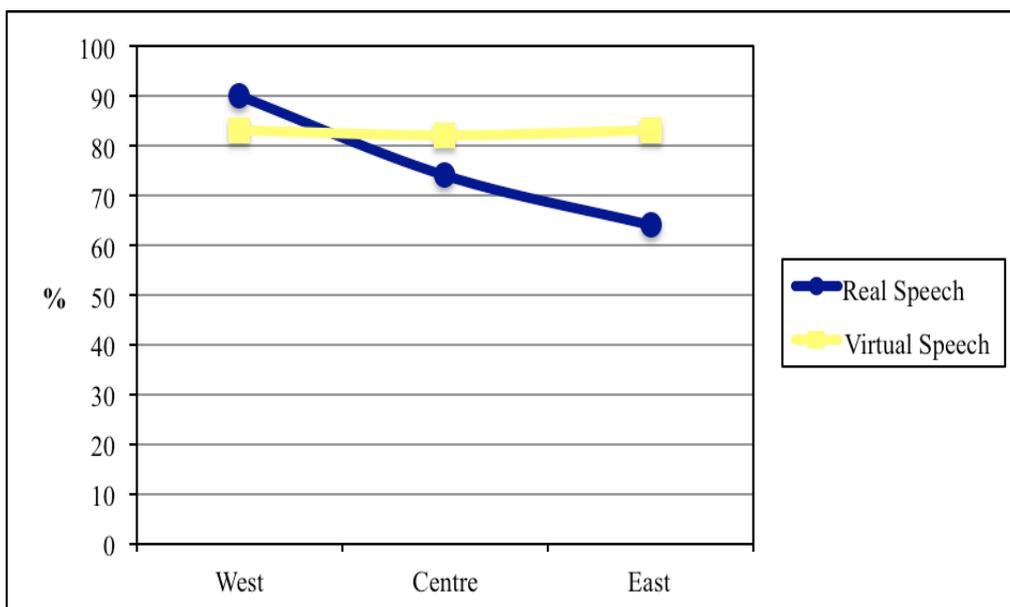


Figure 2. Distribution of non-standard variants by zone

4.3 The social factor *sex*

Another influential factor is *sex*: in real speech men employ 12% more non-standard features than women; however, in virtual speech women use 12% more non-standard variants than men. Thus, the men's scores are not much different in real speech and virtual speech, as can be observed in table 5 and figure 3:

Table 5. Distribution of variants by sex

		Non-standard variants		Standard variants	
		%	N	%	N
Real speech	Women	70	2259	30	961
	Men	82	2527	18	553
Virtual speech	Women	89	2804	11	346
	Men	77	2425	23	725

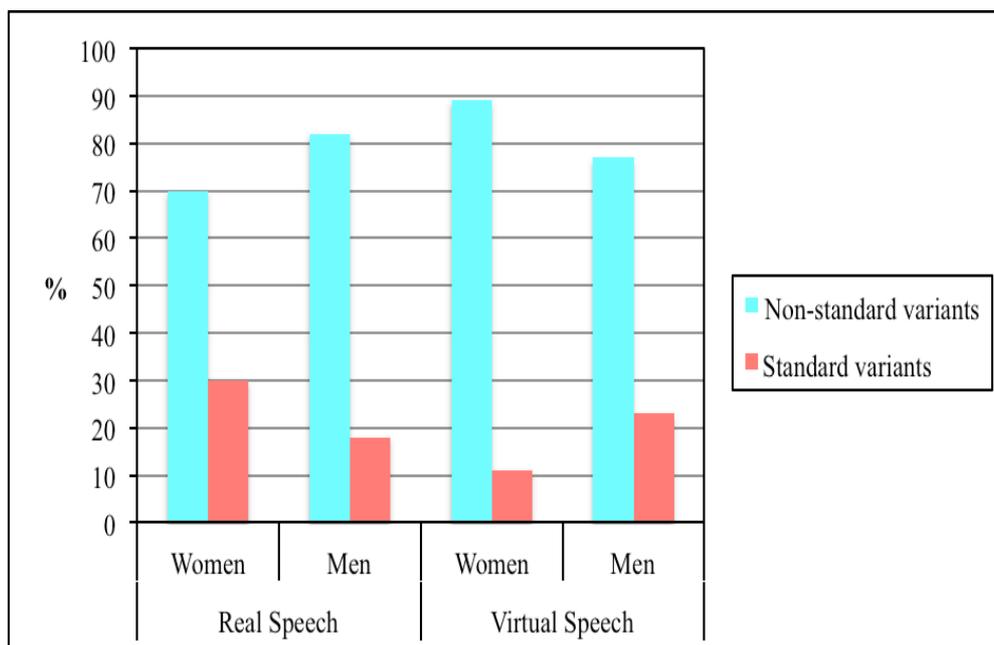


Figure 3. Distribution of variants by sex

4.4 The social factor *age*

The social factor *age* constrains the use of non-standard features in a curious way: In real speech there is not much difference (2%) between the two age groups. Nevertheless, in virtual speech the informants aged 18-29 employ 12% more non-standard features than those aged 30-59, as table 6 and figure 4 demonstrate:

Table 6. Distribution of variants by age

		Non-standard variants		Standard variants	
		%	N	%	N
Real speech	18-29	75	2361	25	789
	30-59	77	2424	23	726
Virtual speech	18-29	89	2804	11	346
	30-59	77	2425	23	725

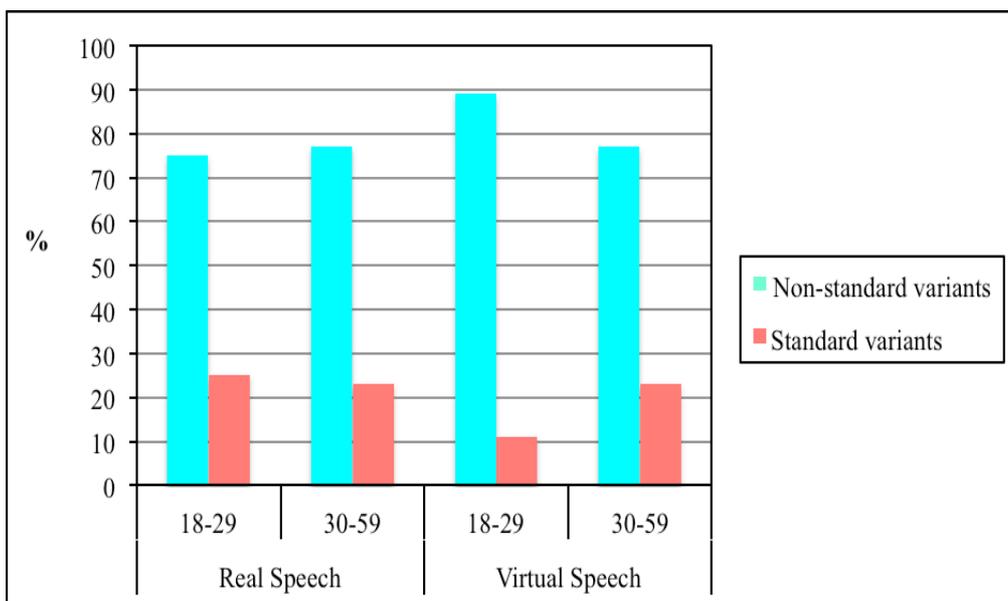


Figure 4. Distribution of variants by age

4.5 Correlation of *sex* and *age*

If we correlate the two factors *sex* and *age*, the results are even clearer: In virtual speech young women use most non-standard features (97%) and middle aged men the least (73%). In real speech it is diametrically the opposite, 18-29 years old women only employ in 69% of the cases non-standard variants and men aged 30-59 use 83%, as we can see in table 7 and figure 5:

Table 7. Distribution of variants by sex and age

		Non-standard variants		Standard variants		
		%	N	%	N	
Real speech	Women	18-29	69	1113	31	427
		30-59	71	1146	29	464
	Men	18-29	81	1248	19	362
		30-59	83	1279	17	261
Virtual speech	Women	18-29	97	1528	3	82
		30-59	81	1247	29	363
	Men	18-29	81	1276	19	264
		30-59	73	1149	27	391

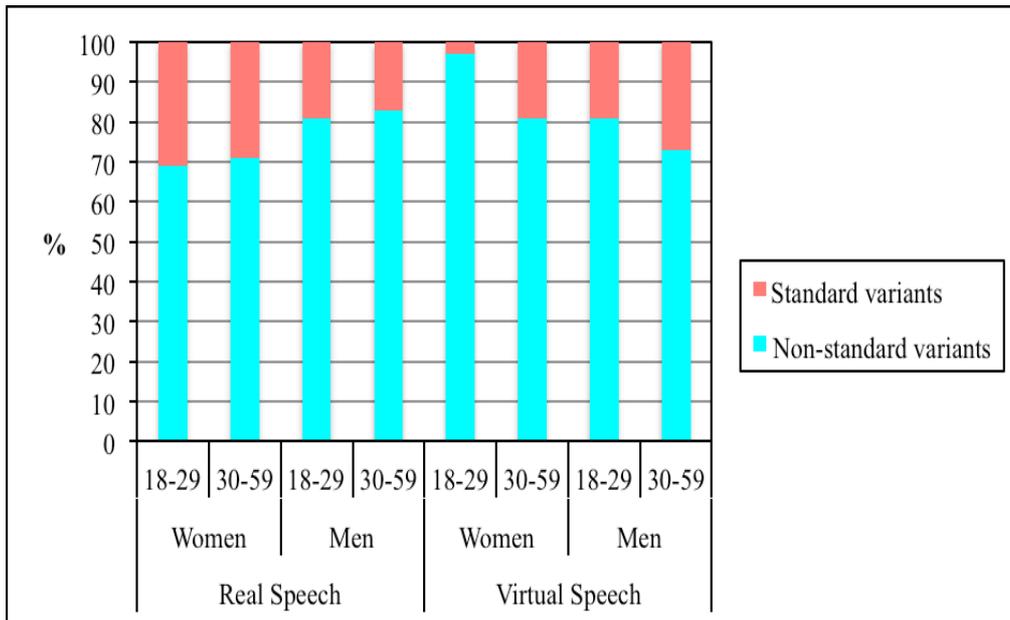


Figure 5: Distribution of variants by sex and age

4.6 The social factor *addressee*

The social factor *addressee* has only been taken into consideration in the virtual speech corpus. Table 8 and figure 6 show that the use of non-standard variants is more frequent in conversations with specific addressees (92%) than with general addressees (74%):

Table 8. Distribution of variants by addressee in virtual speech

	Non-standard variants		Standard variants	
	%	N	%	N
General addressees	74	3315	26	1165
Specific addressees	92	1674	8	146

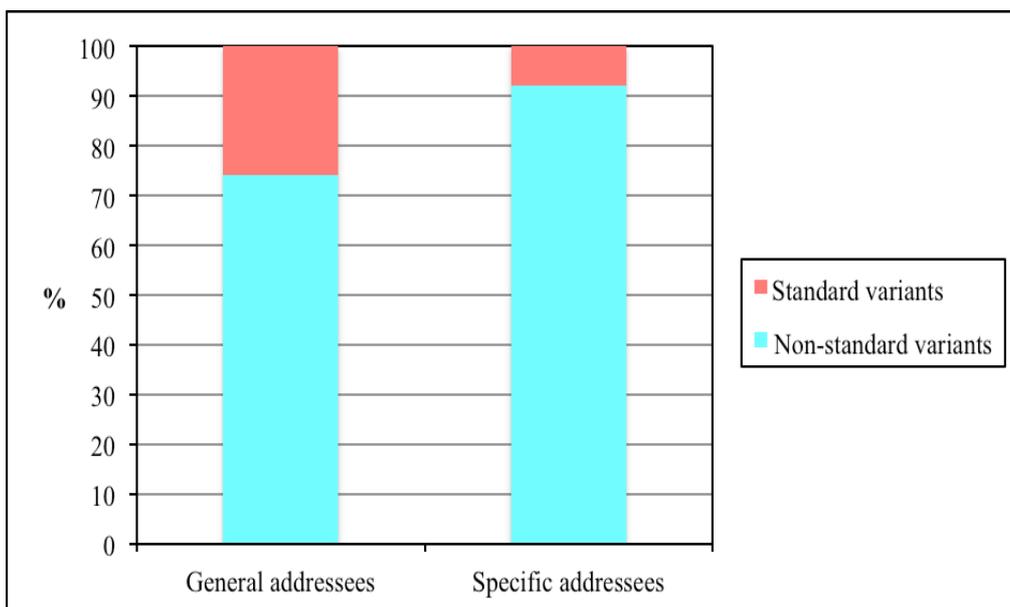


Figure 6. Distribution of variants by addressee in virtual speech

4.7 Addressee and sex

The correlation of the independent variables *addressee* and *sex* displays that more non-standard variants are used if the informant and the addressee belong to the same sex. If men communicate with women, they reduce the use of non-standard variants, whereas women in conversation with men maintain the high level of non-standard variants, as table 9 and figure 7 illustrate:

Table 9. Distribution of variants by participants and addressees' sex

	Non-standard variants		Standard variants	
	%	N	%	N
Women + Women	97	431	3	16
Men + Men	89	318	11	37
Women + Men	95	414	5	19
Men + Women	66	241	34	127

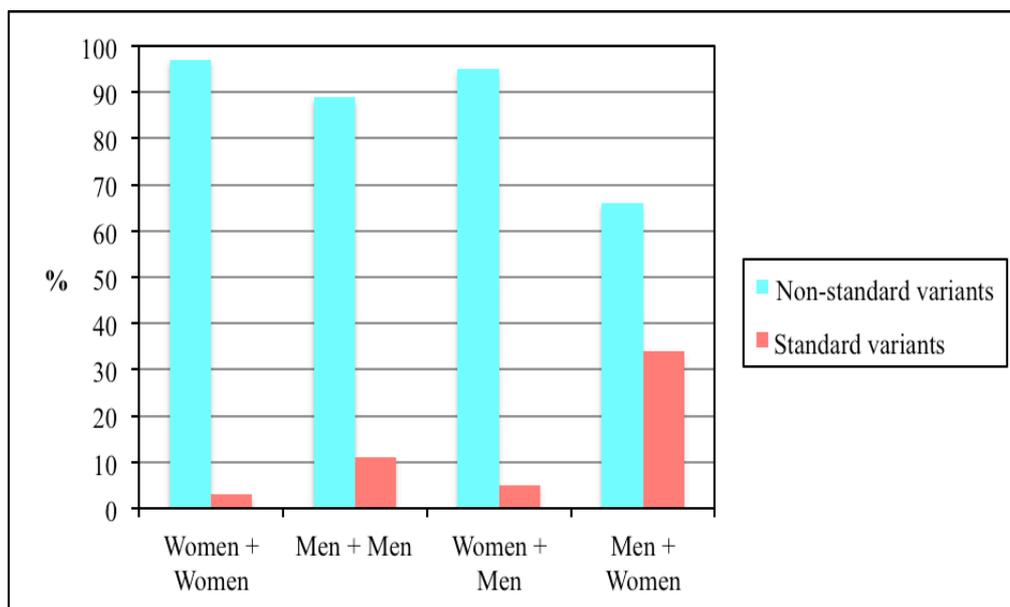


Figure 7. Distribution of variants by participants and addressees' sex

4.8 Addressee and age

A similar effect can be observed with the factor *age*. Young users employ more non-standard features if the addressee belongs to the same age group. However, they use less non-standard features with middle-aged addressees. Conversely, 30-59 years olds use more non-standard variants in conversation with 18-29 years olds. If middle-aged people communicate with addressees of the same age group, their use of non-standard variants slightly decreases, as it can be seen in table 10 and figure 8:

Table 10. Distribution of variants by participants and addressees' age

	Non-standard variants		Standard variants	
	%	N	%	N
18-29 + 18-29	99	404	1	10
30-59 + 30-59	86	332	14	53
18-29 + 30-59	88	358	12	44
30-59 + 18-29	93	373	7	29

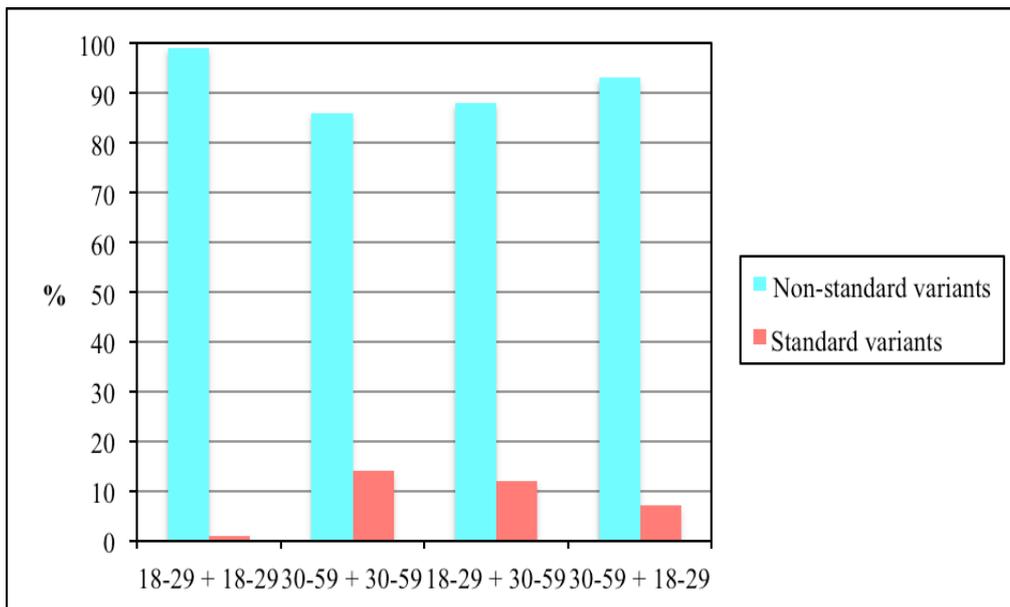


Figure 8. Distribution of variants by participants and addressees' age

4.9 Systematic use of non-standard variant: /l/ in preconsonantic position

Some participants even go as far as systematically using the non-standard variant in position in which in real speech it would never appear. This phenomenon can best be illustrated with the following variable: /l/ in preconsonantic position. In real speech the non-standard variant [ɾ] is only used before consonants; however, on Facebook some users substitute all instances of /l/ with [ɾ], such as in example (1):

- (1) <Ehtá prohibio dá de comé a roh animare en rah ciuaeh porque se evita su contror naturar y se convierten en pragah. Rata, gato, perro y paroma son roh principare beneficiario de esah accione. Ehto animare son tranmisore de enfermeae y ensucian rah calle y roh edificio, llegando a provocá su deterioro. Yo ehtoy con roh vecino. ¿¿Cómo te va [name]?? ¿¿Y tuh prane de vorá con ra paroma santa??> (Woman, 24 years)
 [‘It is forbidden to feed animals in the cities because it avoids their natural control and they turn into a plague. Rats, cats, dogs and doves are the main beneficiaries of theses actions. These animals transmit diseases and dirty the streets and buildings, deteriorating them. I am with the neighbours. How is it going [name]? And your plans to fly with the holy dove?’]

In this extract the user systematically writes [ɾ] for each instance of /l/, no matter what the context is. Nevertheless, she would not speak like that, as in spoken language the non-standard variant [ɾ] is only used in preconsonantic

position. A main feature of the communication style used on Facebook by users from Malaga is the use of non-standard features typical of the Andalusian variety of Spanish. However, the use of these non-standard features on Facebook does not exactly correspond to the use of the same non-standard features in real speech, that is, the medium constrains their use. Thus, the initial use of the grapheme <r> is based on the non-standard phonetic variation of preconsonantic /l/, [r]. However, as it is a highly iconic feature for the people from Malaga, it became an identity marker and hereby losing the constraint of only occurring in a preconsonantic position. That is, on Facebook <r> can substitute any <l>, but in real speech the use of [r] is still limited to the preconsonantic position. In sum, the phonetic feature through being mediated acquires emblematic social meaning in virtual speech and consequently is used more frequently.

4.10 Users' reflections on the use of non-standard variants

The research also included a survey about why participants use non-standard features on Facebook. The answers were grouped together by topic and on the following pages some of the reflections are presented: Several answers emphasise the positive aspects that the use of non-standard features evokes, such as in (2) and (3):

- (2) <eh superchulooo!!> (Woman, 20 years)
[‘it is supercool’]
- (3) <¡¡¡¡¡hay muuuuuuuuuuuuchísimo glamou en eto!!> (Woman, 31 years)
[‘there is much glamour in this’]

In some cases participants refer to implicit comparisons in order to explain their use of non-standard variants, as in example (4) or it is due to personal appraisal, as (5) and (6) illustrate:

- (4) <e ma rapio> (Woman, 22 years)
[‘it is faster’]
- (5) <me encanta nuestro acento jajaja> (Woman, 33 years)
[‘I love our accent’]
- (6) <a vece uno tiene k fotoshopeá lo comentariroh k escribe> (Woman, 29 years)
[‘sometimes one has to photoshop the comments one writes’]

Another common strategy is to make reference to fashion, as for instance in (7) or it happens because of their friends' influence (8):

- (7) <bueno eta dde moa ahora> (Man, 30 years)
[‘well it is the fashion now’]

- (8) <mis amigo escriben asi tb jajaja> (Man, 34 years)
[‘my friends also write like this’]

In other cases the informants justify their use of non-standard features with their way of being, as (9) and (10) show:

- (9) <Para ser más guay...> (Man, 48 years)
[‘in order to be more cool’]
- (10) <e ma logico prque es lo k soy y me encanto> (Woman, 30 years)
[‘it is more logical because it is what I am and I love myself’]

An important reasoning for employing non-standard features is also their own way of expression, such as in (11):

- (11) <e nuehtra lengua> (Man, 26 years)
[‘it is our language’]

Another reflection, which also shows that the participants are conscious of the new medium and that its way of expression can diverge from that of real speech, is the mention of Facebook, as in (12) and (13):

- (12) <nuetro futuro e facebook ke lo habitamo como fuera real>
(Woman, 37 years)
[‘our future is Facebook let us inhabit it as it were real’]
- (13) <fihate e er *etiro feibucote*> (Woman, 27 years)
[‘note that it is the Facebook style’]

5. Discussion

According to the findings analysed and presented in the previous section, in virtual speech more non-standard features are used than in real speech. At first this seems striking, since we could suppose that in the virtual speech corpus less non-standard variants should be used because it is written. However, if we consider its oral character, the association of Facebook with youth language and the fact that it is fashionable, it is no longer so surprising that more non-standard features are employed in virtual than in real speech.

A comparison of the two corpora demonstrates that in real speech, *zone* is a significant factor for the use of non-standard features with a divergence of 26%, yet *zone* is insignificant in virtual speech with a difference of only 2%. Nonetheless, there are more noteworthy social variables constraining the use of non-standard variants, such as *sex*. In real speech men use more non-standard features than women, whereas in virtual speech women do so. The

factor *age* is not significant in real speech, but in virtual speech it is different; here the younger users employ considerably more non-standard variants than older users. Through the correlation of these two independent variables, we obtain remarkable results. In real speech, most non-standard variants are used by middle-aged men, while in virtual speech most non-standard features are employed by young women. This distribution pattern for the use of non-standard features resembles the one, which is often found in situations of language change. I do not intend to claim that the observations made in the comparison of the two corpora mean language change, rather it could be that young women are not only the leaders in language change, but that they are perhaps also the leaders in the use of a style conditioned by a new medium of communication.

In conversations with specific addressees non-standard features are used more frequently than with general addressees. Among the specific addressees, conversations between users of the same sex cause a higher use of non-standard variants than mixed conversations. Women addressing men only employ slightly less non-standard features; however, men in conversation with women use considerably less non-standard variants. Users aged 18-29 employ less non-standard variants when communicating with 30-59 years olds than when interacting with people of the same age group. Contrariwise, participants aged 30-59 use more non-standard features in conversation with 18-29 olds. Thus, there is some accommodation to the audience at work in virtual speech, be it conscious or unconscious. This finding emphasises the interlocutor's role in this interactional medium of communication.

On Facebook the non-standard variants are deliberately, and in many cases also systematically, used, sometimes even to a bigger extent and in more positions than in real speech. The variable /l/ exemplifies this trend very well: In real speech [r] is only used in pre-consonantic position, whereas, in virtual speech the non-standard variant is also employed in other positions. These findings confirm that a mediated representation of the phonetic non-standard features is used on Facebook that is highly charged with social meaning and, thus, are extremely important for the users from Malaga.

In the survey, participants indicated that they use non-standard features on Facebook because it is cool, glamorous, and fashionable. Some also claim that it is faster for them, which is probably because they are so used to it. Another justification is simply that users like it and find it more "beautiful". Furthermore, the non-standard variants serve as an identity marker for the participants. Non-standard features mark their personal identity but also make reference to a regional identity. In some answers Facebook is mentioned, which shows that the participants are aware of the virtual character of these conversations and that they distinguish it from real speech. It could be considered a *Facebook style* as one of the informants denominates it. Hence, this style used on Facebook serves to convey an identity that is on the one hand, young, cool and fashionable, and on the other hand, related to Andalusia and Malaga. This identity is expressed by means of phonetic variants, which

are very salient features of Andalusian Spanish. Even though these variants are clearly based on the variety spoken in Malaga, they do not function in exactly the same way on Facebook. Thus, the medium Facebook constrains the use of the phonic features. It is the “interplay of technological, social, and contextual factors in the shaping of computer-mediated language practices, and the role of linguistic variability in the formation of social interaction and social identities on the Internet” (Androutsopoulos, 2006, p. 421) that are the key issues for the mediated representation of the phonetics of speech on Facebook.

6. Conclusion

This study is based on a theoretical framework of sociolinguistic theory about style and computer-mediated communication. Phonetic variation in Malaga is compared in two analogous corpora. One of the corpora is composed of data collected on Facebook and the other of broad transcriptions of recordings. The analysis consists of the study of the correlations between various dependent variables of phonetic nature and the following independent social variables: zone, sex, age and addressee. It clearly shows that the non-standard features are not employed the same way in real and virtual speech. Moreover, the findings of the quantitative analysis are backed up by a qualitative analysis on why the users employ non-standard features on Facebook. Results demonstrate that there are differences between the two corpora and that the frequent use of non-standard variants in virtual speech is in most cases a deliberate and conscious choice of the users – it is a Facebook style. These stylistic practices reflect an amalgam of social presuppositions about usage conventions and individual strategies for handling a new medium (Baron, 2002). It is a medium that mediates communication and its phonetics. Stylistic variation is the core of the active creation of the speaker’s identity. In the style employed in virtual speech *identity* has a two-dimensional meaning: The first is personal, it works for the speaker as “pick out as a particular person” (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 2). The second dimension is interpersonal, it exposes that a speaker is “recognized as a part of some larger entity” (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 2). These two dimensions of identity can be found in the style used on Facebook, nonetheless, it has to be noted that the interaction with an interlocutor is necessary for the speakers’ construction of their personal and social identity. The speakers’ linguistic repertoire is employed to, consciously or unconsciously, create social structures, such as sex or age, but also how the speakers position themselves in respect to these structures and to one another (Theodoropoulou, 2007). It is a style conditioned by the virtual medium Facebook as well as by the community of users. The online medium influences the style, which, in the data analysed, is represented through phonetic features. In sum, the virtual style is an initiative deliberately taken by the users, to create their personal and social identities, in real and virtual life,

and to define their language attitudes and stance towards non-standard features – an initiative stated via Internet-mediated phonetics.

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