

STATUS MATTERS!

Syntactic priming in Standard German depends on its sociolinguistic status

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The issue to be tackled

- Experiments on syntactic priming in bivarietal speakers of the Bernese German (BG) dialect and the Standard German (StG) variety (Vorweg et al., 2014; Lüthi & Vorweg, 2014) yielded surprising results:

Within dialect	Between varieties	Within standard
Significant priming Lexical&semantic boost	Very little priming Hardly any boost	No priming No boost

- Why is there a lack of priming with Standard German in Bernese German speakers?

Language situation

Bernese German and Standard German are very closely related. Standard German is the second variety for Bernese German speakers. It is learnt at school and used in formal, mostly written contexts. However, it is often perceived as a rather distant or even foreign language (Scharloth, 2005; Siebenhaar & Wyler, 1997). Consequently, many Bernese German speakers do not feel comfortable using Standard German in oral contexts.

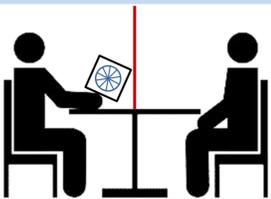
Research question

Does sociolinguistic status impact syntactic priming?

Method

Paradigm: Syntactic priming experiment with confederate scripting technique: same method and material as used in previous experiments (Vorweg et al., 2014; Lüthi & Vorweg, 2014).

Participants: 16 students who grew up in the region of Westfalen-Lippe and speak Standard German and no regional dialect.



Procedure: Two students describe colored objects on cards to each other, while being separated by a partition screen. One of the students is a confederate of the experimenter who only acts as a real participant but who actually reads scripted sentences.

Prime structures: The prime sentences uttered by the confederate vary...

...syntactically (PRIME TYPE):

- Prenominal: "Das blaue Rad" (*the blue wheel*)
- Relative clause: "Das Rad, das blau ist" (*the wheel that is blue*)

...and with regard to the relation of the prime head noun and the target head noun (NOUN RELATION):

- Same nouns: "Rad" – "Rad" (*wheel*)
- Same-meaning nouns: "Kugelschreiber" (*ball pen*) – "Stift" (*pen*)
- Different nouns: "Rad" (*wheel*) – "Stift" (*pen*)

Hypothesis

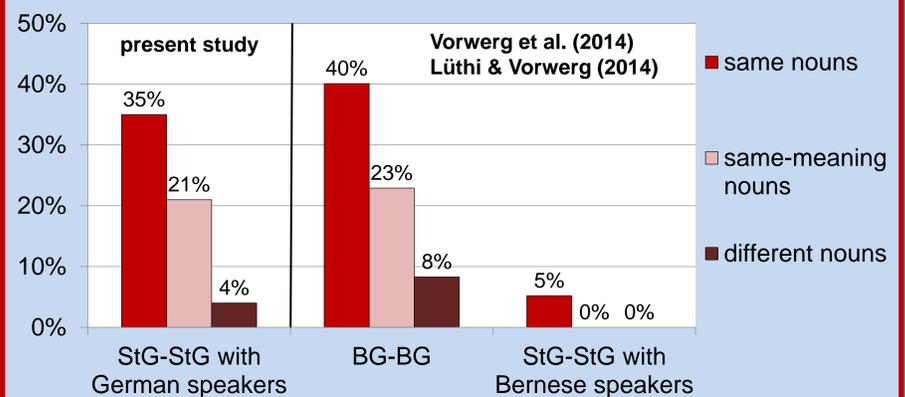
If the sociolinguistic status of Standard German impedes priming, we expect high priming effects within Standard German with Standard German speakers, because Standard German is their everyday language and it is not regarded as a distant language.

Alternative Hypothesis: If priming in Standard German is weak because of inherent language aspects, we expect very little priming within Standard German with Standard German speakers.

Results

- Robust priming and boost effects in StG with StG speakers
- Logit mixed effect model (R, lme4): Significant interaction of PRIME TYPE and NOUN RELATION ($\chi^2(2)=6.14$, $p<0.05$)
- Results are comparable to BG-BG priming (Vorweg et al., 2014)

Priming percentages for relative clause structure



Discussion

The results are consistent with our hypothesis and not with the alternative hypothesis, and thus indicate that the sociolinguistic status of Standard German, rather than an inherent language aspect, impedes priming in bivarietal speakers. We suggest that the lack of priming is caused by controlled language processing, which is triggered by the sociolinguistic status of Standard German (Vorweg et al., 2015).

References

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