STATUS MATTERS!
Syntactic priming in Standard German depends on its sociolinguistic status
Janine Lüthi & Constanze Vorwerg (University of Bern)

contact: janine.luethi@isw.unibe.ch

Architectures & Mechanisms for Language Processing 2015

The issue to be tackled
Experiments on syntactic priming in bivarietal speakers of the Bernese German (BG) dialect and the Standard German (SIG) variety (Vorwerg et al., 2014; Lüthi & Vorwerg, 2014) yielded surprising results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within dialect</th>
<th>Between varieties</th>
<th>Within standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant priming</td>
<td>Very little priming</td>
<td>No priming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical/semantic boost</td>
<td>Hardly any boost</td>
<td>No boost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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 SIG with SIG 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 (Vorwerg et al., 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priming percentages for relative clause structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 (Vorwerg et al., 2015).

Research question
Does sociolinguistic status impact syntactic priming?

Method
Paradigm: Syntactic priming experiment with confederate scribbling technique; same method and material as used in previous experiments (Vorwerg et al., 2014; Lüthi & Vorwerg, 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):
- Pronominal: “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)

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.

References