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## On the role of intra-speaker variation for language change

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Intra-speaker variation as implied by register has long been shown to exist in the “styles” used in variationist analysis (conversation, reading, word-lists), i.e., controlled by the researcher. In his search for intra-speaker variation within conversation, Labov (2013) found that the most vernacular speech is in oral narrative of events that the speaker has personal knowledge of, and even more so when those events revolve around three “universal centres of interest” that invite “dramatic” verbalization: (i) death and danger of death (including violence, illness, etc.); (ii) sex (including marriage, affairs, etc.); (iii) moral indignation (blame, injustice, social norms etc.).

This finding is of interest to diachronic linguistics. A popular assumption in historical linguistics is that innovations may originate in potentially hyperbolic, dramatic speech and then spread, by rhetorical devaluation, across the speech community (e.g. Haspelmath 1999, Detges & Waltereit 2002). The implication of Labov’s findings is that it may be the other way round, namely that dramatic speech is simply the most vernacular register, and that its features may spread through the community by ordinary linguistic diffusion without the need to invoke any rhetorical devaluation. A prediction of this hypothesis is that new variants of a variable have a higher concentration in discourse contexts that relate to the three centres of interest referred to above than elsewhere. In my talk, I will assess this hypothesis for the spread of French bipartite negation (e.g. *ne...pas*) at the expense of simple negation (*ne*) in Old and Middle French (cf. Detges & Waltereit 2002, Hansen 2009).

**References:** • Detges, U. & R. Waltereit (2002): Grammaticalization vs. reanalysis: a semantic-pragmatic account of functional change in grammar. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 21, 151-195. • Hansen, M.-B. M. (2009): The grammaticalization of negative reinforcers in Old and Middle French: a discourse-functional approach. In: M.-B. M. Hansen & J. Visconti (eds.), *Current trends in diachronic semantics and pragmatics*, Bingley, 227-251. • Haspelmath, M. (1999): Why is grammaticalization irreversible? *Linguistics* 37, 1043-1068. • Labov, W. (2013): *The language of life and death. The transformation of experience in oral narrative*. Cambridge.