
Register variation across social media

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It is known that speakers can vary their use of linguistic features across different channels and discourse situations, but little previous research has addressed the question which linguistic phenomena are affected. In one exception, Tagliamonte & Denis (2008) study linguistic features of teens in spoken and instant-messaging conversations, who show a mix of conservative and innovative behaviors in text messaging vs. speech. Our contribution investigates intra-speaker variation across different social media platforms, which eliminates the differences wrt. transmission mode (oral vs. written). Research questions are: (i) Does the same speaker's language differ across social media platforms? (ii) Are the observed differences of the same kinds, i.e., can we observe the formation of register norms? (iii) Which phenomena show variant vs. stable expression across the different registers? We analyze tweets and blog posts for the same speakers with respect to the following frequent "non-standard" phenomena: across-the-board capitalization, letter duplication, intensifiers, abbreviations, novel sound and emotion words, sentence particles, and neologisms. We observe both inter-speaker variation in the usage of the above features, as well as intra-speaker variation across the two types of platforms. All speakers make much greater use of non-standard linguistic features in their tweets than in their (full-length) blog posts. In particular, we find: (i) Each speaker in our study adapts their language use to the platform in both conscious and unconscious ways. (ii) The direction of the observed difference in feature frequency is always the same, indicating the development of register norms. (iii) The studied non-standard features all vary across the platforms, though other phenomena such as word order (Rehbein, 2014) have been shown to be more stable in previous work.

References: • Tagliamonte, S. A., & Denis, D. (2008). Linguistic ruin? LOL! Instant messaging and teen language. *American speech* 83(1), 3-34. • Rehbein, I. (2014). *Using Twitter for linguistic purposes: three case studies*. Slides, DGfS 2014.