

## Defounding the Effects of Competition and Attrition on Dialect Across the Lifespan

Under constant attack by the standard language, linguists generally conclude that individuals 'lose' their native dialects 'observationally' in lieu of the standard language; yet this supposition makes a highly questionable assumption: that the sound patterns and morphology of a dialect (or language) exist independently of the lexical knowledge of speakers. This assumption is particularly relevant to the study of dialect usages across the lifespan because the distributional properties of natural languages guarantee that the lexical knowledge of individuals increases continuously throughout their life and that the overwhelming majority of lexical types any individual knows have low token frequencies. The distributional properties of low frequency forms require that their morphological forms and phonetic realizations be continually inferred in context (i.e., the lower the frequency a form, the less likely all possible inflectional variants are attested in a speaker's experience), a process that depends crucially upon the entire lexicon.

These statistical considerations in turn offer an alternative account of the apparent change in individual speech patterns. Rather than lose dialect, speakers gain a vast amount of new lexical knowledge that is not dialect, and this new knowledge exerts a cumulative (and competitive) influence on patterns of morphological and phonetic generalization. This alternative account also makes clear predictions as to how frequency and context influence the degree to which speakers' later speech reflect their roots: rather than experiencing general attrition, the morphological and phonetic forms speakers use typically reflect more dialect when form frequencies are high or where the context makes early experiences most relevant, and less dialect when form frequencies are low and where context makes life experiences more relevant.

This paper examines these hypotheses by analyzing the speech of 20 panel speakers of the Swabian dialect of southwestern Germany, recorded in 1982 and again in 2017. The panel study approach demonstrates a comparative research method for investigating how the speech patterns of individuals change across their lifespans as a result of differing life events and trajectories. Through the evaluation of factors such as lexical frequency, linguistic context, and life experiences, the findings shed new light on the principles involved in language change as individuals age.