

## Lexical alternatives and formal variance in borrowing: Pragmatic and lectal interpretations

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**Research question.** Loanwords may be associated with two sorts of internal variation in a recipient language (RL): formal variance and lexical alternation (Winter-Froemel 2010). The first term describes co-existing realizations of the loanword which differ in their degree of adaptation to the RL, e.g. F. *people/pipole* celebrity (< E. *people*), G. *Club/Klub* club (< E. *club*), I. *chic/scicche* elegant (< F. *chic*). It has often been observed that formal variants can have very different pragmatic and/or lectal interpretations (cf. labels such as “popular adaptation” used in dictionary articles, the attribution of a greater/less prestige, etc.), but these effects have not been systematically related to degrees and modalities of loanword adaptation up to now. The second term relates to onomasiological variation: we observe that certain loanwords (‘non-catachrestic loanwords’, Onysko & Winter-Froemel 2011) have a (near) synonym, so that the concept may also be designated by another expression in the RL, e.g. F. *célébrité*, G. *Verein*, I. *elegante*; for ‘catachrestic loanwords’ such as I. *e-mail*, in contrast, a new concept is introduced along with the loanword. Onysko & Winter-Froemel (2011) show that the pragmatic effects of non-catachrestic loanwords systematically differ from those of catachrestic loanwords. However, it remains unclear what dimensions of pragmatic and/or lectal differences are concerned here, and these differences have not been measured quantitatively.

**Method of investigation.** In this talk I would like to present the results of a set of questionnaire studies on the pragmatic interpretation of loanwords in French, German and Italian. Participants are asked to rate the appropriateness of the test items (catachrestic and non-catachrestic loanwords as well as strongly and weakly integrated spelling variants) in sentences featuring pragmatic markedness, and to comment on the pragmatic effects of the test items in the utterances. As conventionalization and entrenchment have turned out to be further factors influencing the pragmatic interpretation of the test items (cf. Onysko & Winter-Froemel 2011), these aspects will be taken into account by a preliminary analysis of the relative frequency of the test items compared to their variants and alternative expressions.

**Interpretation of the results.** Adopting a usage-based approach to borrowing (Zenner, Speelman & Geeraerts 2012), the studies permit us to investigate the existence, and if applicable, the strength of additional pragmatic effects conveyed by the loanwords, depending on 1) the degree of orthographic adaptation in spelling variants, 2) the catachrestic vs. non-catachrestic distinction, and 3) dimensions of lectal variation. In this sense, the talk aims at bringing together methods and issues of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, and at studying the interplay between semantic and formal variation, which is a key issue in Cognitive Sociolinguistics (Kristiansen & Dirven 2008; Geeraerts & Kristiansen 2012). As a general result of the questionnaire studies, we can observe that the various kinds of variation arising from the introduction of a loanword into the language are interpreted as meaningful by the speakers.

### Keywords

Loanword adaptation, onomasiological variation, lectal variation, pragmatic markedness, Cognitive Sociolinguistics

### References

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