
Socially-mediated linguistic convergence can drive perception of social proximity

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Abstract

Structural priming—the tendency to re-use syntactic forms after exposure to those forms—fits into a broader pattern of convergence between interlocutors at various linguistic levels. While sentence-level convergence is often explained in terms of cognitive mechanisms like implicit learning, recent work suggests that it can function to manage social distance with an interlocutor, as has been demonstrated for phonetic accommodation. Two experiments are presented that show that structural convergence is mediated by a speaker’s perception of their social proximity to their interlocutor, and that these perceptions can be shifted by convergence that occurs over the course of a conversation.

Keywords: dialogue, sociopragmatics, convergence

*Speaker