Towards a Holistic Measure of Linguistic Diversity: Exploring Individual and Contextual Linguistic Features in South African and United Kingdom Speakers

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Across the linguistics discipline, copious studies using various measures have sought to categorize individuals' self-reported 'lingualism' status (e.g., monolingualism, bilingualism, multilingualism). While most of these measures provide valuable information, one's 'lingualism' status is not limited to individual diversity but is also partly determined by the linguistic context, that is, the contextual milieu to which the individual is exposed over a substantive period. Accordingly, a crucial factor to consider is whether an individual is exposed to a multi-linguistic or (predominantly) mono-linguistic context. For example, a self-described monolingual English speaker from South Africa may differ in linguistic exposure to that of a self-described monolingual English speaker from England. In both countries, English is an official language, the lingua franca, the medium of instruction for formal education, and the prevalent language used in business and the media, yet since South Africa is host to 11 official languages, the country's English-speakers are ubiquitously exposed to linguistic diversity (Khokhlova, 2015). Despite such cases, there is little to no research investigating whether contextual linguistic diversity is an additional contributor to 'lingualism' status above and beyond isolated individual linguistic features and socioeconomic factors. Gaining insight in both individual and contextual linguistic descriptors can illuminate a fundamental feature of linguistic diversity and provide a holistic depiction of linguistic self-identification.

In this paper I explore this overlooked contextual linguistic feature through the Contextual Linguistic Profile Questionnaire (CLiP-Q) – a holistic online questionnaire that has recently been developed in our lab. The CLiP-Q is comprised of four sections: a) basic demographic information, b) contextual linguistic diversity (a novel measure), c) language background and proficiency (adapted from the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire, LEAP-Q and the Language History Questionnaire, LHQ 3.0; Marian, Blumenfeld, & Kaushanskaya, 2007; Li, Zhang, Yu, & Zhao, in press), and d) socioeconomic status.

Using the CLiP-Q I aim to investigate individual and contextual linguistic diversity in the English-speaking contexts of South Africa and the United Kingdom. This study is guided by the following questions: Is there a difference in contextual linguistic diversity between individuals with multi-linguistic exposure (South Africa) in comparison to (predominantly) mono-linguistic exposure (United Kingdom)? Furthermore, should contextual linguistic diversity be considered when assessing 'lingualism' status?

I will present the rationale behind the development of the CLiP-Q as well as provide an overview of its four sections, with a particular focus on the development of contextual linguistic diversity. Following completion of data collection[1], I will present the findings that address the research questions. I aim to illustrate that the CLiP-Q should be used as a primary indicator of holistic linguistic diversity across various contexts.

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[1] still in progress and should be completed by April 2019

References

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