TWO FIELDWORKERS' EFFECTS ON A RESPONDENT'S LANGUAGE USE IN SZEGED, HUNGARY[1]

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Abstract

Interviewing techniques in variationist sociolinguistics may work in one location but fail in another. In this paper we test the effect of a dialect (ö-speaking) fieldworker and a Standard Hungarian (e-speaking) fieldworker on the speech of the same respondent who uses ö *[Ø] in place of Standard* e *[e]. Quantitative analyses showed no effect of any of the traditional explanations such as Labov's audiomonitoring, Bell's audience design, progress of time in the interview, topic or emotional loading. However, Watzlawick's interactional view of communication provides an adequate means to interpret the data. What did have an effect on the speech behavior of the respondent was how he placed himself vis-à-vis the two interviewers on a social hierarchy axis. The importance of constructing profiles of the persona of the respondent and that of the interviewer is emphasised.*

Keywords: fieldworkers' effects in a sociolinguistic interview, bidialectals in hiding, Labov's audiomonitoring, Bell's audience design, trust between interlocutors, Watzlawick's interactional view of communication, the respondent's and the interviewer's profiles, the respondent's position in the interview, indirect effect of the fieldworker's persona

1. The Variation and Change in Szeged Speech project

The dialect traditionally used in and around the city of Szeged (population c. 160,000) in South Eastern Hungary is a nationally conspicuous one, using the front mid round *ö* [Ø] in place of Standard Hungarian *e* [e] in certain syllables as in *köröszt* [kØrØst] vs. Standard *kereszt* [kerest] 'cross'.

when we began our project to study variation and change in the dialect of Szeged[2] in 2012, we assumed that

- the dialect was probably disappearing fast,
- most of its users are bidialectal in Standard and local speech,
- they are very skillful code-switchers ("bidialectals in hiding").

One more consideration we had to take seriously is that about one-third of the city's population are in-migrants, many of them from non-*ö* dialect regions.

Our major methodological tool is a modification of the interview designed by Labov (1984) and adapted to Hungarian in the Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview project (see Kontra–Váradi 1997, Kontra–Borbély 2010). we have a fair number of conversational modules, subjective reaction tests, reading passages, modules on local speech, questions designed to gauge respondents' attachment to/solidarity with Szeged, forced-choice tests such as "which of these two words do YOU use?" and "which of these two is correct?" Also included are two map-drawing tasks (see Preston 1999) and some other components typical of sociolinguistic interviews.

Our basic linguistic hypotheses state that the use of *ö* (vs. *e*) is (1) influenced by the position of the *ö*-able syllable in the word: initial, medial or suffixal, and (2) the position of a preverb like *fel-/föl-* 'up', which may be either preposed (e.g. *fölad* 'it gives up') or postposed (e.g. *nem ad föl* 'it does not give up'). we also hypothesise that some additional linguistic variables may covary with our *major* variable (*ö*).

As regards social variables, it is hypothesised that

- the young use the dialect less than the old,
- the less educated use it more than the more educated,
- it will be used more in interviews than in reading passages or tests,
- people more attached to Szeged use it more than those less attached.

We have no hypothesis regarding the sex of speakers.

We also hypothesised six types of respondents on the basis of in-migration status and linguistic behavior (see Berente–Kontra–Sinkovics, forthcoming). Some people born and raised in Szeged may be able to use the local dialect, in which case they may be either speakers of it (*ö*-ing people) or they may avoid using it (using *e* almost always). Others born and raised in Szeged may never have learned the dialect and use *e* categorically. In-migrants are defined as speakers who were born and raised outside the *ö* dialect region and who moved to Szeged after age 14. Some in-migrants cannot use the *ö* dialect and use *e* categorically. Other in-migrants may be able to speak the dialect and they speak it (*ö*-ing people), yet others may be able to speak it but avoid doing so (using *e* almost always). The avoiders (those who can use *ö* speech but avoid using it almost always) will be identified as using *ö* in less than 20% of the *ö*-able syllables, which is the researchers' admittedly subjective threshold. Thus the avoiders can use the local dialect (a qualitative decision), but avoid doing so (a quantitative decision).

All members of our random representative sample of 160 respondents will be categorised as belonging to one of these six types ex post facto, on the basis of their in-migration status and use of *ö* in the guided conversations. One of our aims is to find out whether these six posited categories of speakers will actually show important sociolinguistic differences.

2. On bidialectals in hiding

Based on our everyday experience of language use or speech behavior in Szeged, we are aware that almost all speakers of the local dialect are extremely good at code-switching between *ö*-ing speech and near-Standard (*e*-ing) speech. They also seem to be very good at choosing the right code or variety with practically all their interlocutors: they use *ö* with people they know are good speakers of the dialect, and *e* with everybody else. They are bidialectals in hiding, which makes it very hard to observe their use of *ö*. They are a nightmare

for the fieldworker if s/he is not a native speaker of local Szeged speech. Here is what a 22-year-old male respondent told our fieldworker in an interview:

> Respondent: De énbennem valahogy mindig az van, hogyha jön szembe egy ismeret-len, akiről nem tudom biztosan, hogy ő ö-ző tájszólást beszél, akkor én nem fogok vele úgy beszélni. Még itt Szegeden sem. És hogyha most én itt vagyok az egyetemi épületben, akkor itt is bennem van egy ilyen, hogy nagyon nehezen kezdek el úgy beszélni.

> Fieldworker: Aha.

> Respondent: És az iskolában is így volt. Hogy főleg inkább, ha elmöntünk ëgymáshoz, akkor ott jobban előjött ez,[köszörüli a torkát]de egyébként szóval a többiekkel, akik nem szögediesen beszéltek, azokkal tehát mi mindig tudtunk ezen így változtatni, hogy ha akartuk így, ha akartuk úgy. És nekem ez gyerekkorom óta így van. Én nem emlékszem olyan időre, amikor nem tudtam volna eldönteni, hogy most kivel beszé-lek hogy.

> (K01, 00:12:50 – 00:13:34)[3]

The above is a simplified transcript of about 45 seconds of the interview. An English translation follows:

> Respondent: when I see a stranger coming towards me, someone who I don't know for sure that they speak the local *ö*-ing dialect, I won't use it to them. Not even here in Szeged. And when I am in this university building, I would start *ö*-ing only with great difficulty.

> Fieldworker: Right.

> Respondent: And it was like that at school too. when we visited each other, *ö*-ing speech would more likely be used, but when we spoke to the others, those who did not use the Szeged dialect, we didn't use it either. So we could always easily switch between speaking this way and that way. And I have been like that, since I was a child. I don't remember a single situation when I couldn't decide which kind of speech I should use to someone.

In order to hopefully minimise the respondents' use of Standard (*e*-ing) speech, which they would likely use to strangers like our fieldworkers, we instructed the fieldworkers, native speakers of the dialect, to consistently use *ö*-ing from the first minute of the interview to the last. However, as will be shown below, the respondent in this case study used his *ö*-ing speech over 75% of the time, regardless of the different (local vs. Standard) dialects of the two field-workers. This lack of accommodation in the speech of the respondent and the interviewers

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[3] The extract is from the interview with Respondent K01, between 12 minutes and 50 seconds and 13 minutes and 34 seconds in our project archive.

prompted us to look for an explanation which is different from such traditional views as Labov's audiomonitoring, Bell's audience design, the progress of time in the interview, the trust between the interlocutors, topics, and emotional loading.

3. Research Questions

As a methodological exercise outside the main thrust of our project, in order to test the fieldworkers' effects on respondents' speech, we set up two interviews with the same respondent: one conducted by a native speaker of the local *ö* dialect, and the other conducted by a standard *e*-speaking fieldworker. Apart from the dialect differences, the two fieldworkers were very similar: female university students of humanities in their twenties. The setting was the same (the porch of the respondent's house) and the topics (conversational modules) were also as similar as possible. A few months elapsed between the two interviews, and their real purpose was disguised as "research on the life of people in Szeged".

Our respondent is a retired male who had earlier worked as a printer. He was born and raised in Szeged and is a skillful bidialectal speaker of Szeged (*ö*-ing) speech and near-Standard (*e*-ing) speech.

The following research questions were addressed:

1) Is there any intra-speaker variability in the frequency of use of [ö] in the respondent's speech with the two different fieldworkers? Our working hypothesis: the respondent will use different frequencies of [ö].
2) If the answer to (1) is "yes", is the use of [ö] by a fieldworker correlated to its use by the respondent? Our working hypothesis: the respondent will use [ö] more frequently with the *ö*-ing fieldworker than with the *e*-ing one.
3) Is the frequency of use of [ö] by the respondent correlated to
    (a) the progress of time in the interview (cf. Shepard–Giles–Le Poire 2001),
    (b) the amount of attention paid to his own speech, and
    (c) the building up of trust between him and his interlocutor? Our working hypotheses:
    (i) with the progress of time, the respondent's use of [ö] will increase in both interviews as his audiomonitoring decreases, (ii) in the interview with the *ö*-ing fieldworker, the respondent's use of [ö] will increase as a result of the trust building up between them.

4. Findings

The two interviews have been transcribed and coded with ELAN (https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/).[4] Table 1 shows the essential properties of the two interviews.

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[4] we are indebted to Naomi Nagy for coming to Szeged in June 2014 to teach us how to use ELAN and for discussing with us the linguistic minutiae of the *ö* dialect.

Fieldwork-er's dialect	Setting	Time	Purpose of interview	Fieldworker	Conversation-al modules
e (standard)	respondent's porch	approxi-mately 2 hours	research on local lore	female human-ities student in her 20s	same
ö (local)	respondent's porch	approxi-mately 8 hours	research on life in Szeged	female human-ities student in her 20s	same

Table 1: The two interviews analyzed

Table 2 demonstrates the frequency of use of [ö] vs. [e] in the two interviews. The data demonstrate a 5.1% difference between the interview conducted by the *e*-speaking fieldwork-er and the *ö*-speaking one.

Fieldwork-er's dialect	Number of all *ö*-able syllables	Realised with [ö]	Realised with [e]	Realised with [ö] %	Realised with [e] %
e (standard)	954	778	176	**81.6**	**18.4**
ö (local)	2707	2070	637	**76.5**	**23.5**

Table 2: The frequency of use of [ö] vs. [e] in the interviews with two different-speaking fieldworkers

As can be seen, our hypothesis (1) is corroborated: the respondent used the [ö] variant in 81.6% of all the *ö*-able syllables with the standard speaking fieldworker and used it 76.5% of the time with the local dialect speaking fieldworker, a highly significant difference (chi-square [df=1] = 10.550, p < 0.001). However, we must reject our hypothesis (2) because the respondent's use of [ö] is **not more but less frequent** with the *ö*-speaking fieldworker than with the *e*-speaking one. Thus these two interviews provide evidence against our expectation that the fieldworkers' dialect differences influence the respondent's speech in harmony with accommodation theory.

Let us review why the data in Table 2 are perplexing. First, our respondent is not a bidi-alectal speaker in hiding: in the interview with the Standard-speaking fieldworker he uses his vernacular style realising over 80% of the tokens with [ö]. Second, these data go against the view, widely held by both linguists and non-linguists, that the use of a dialect (feature) presupposes a good amount of trust between the interlocutors. (Such views have also been voiced by several respondents in our Szeged project.) Third, the results of our case study cannot be explained by Bell's (1984) audience design theory either. Fourth, the frequency of use of [ö] by the respondent does not vary between different topics discussed, nor between modules characterised by different degrees of his emotional involvement.

In order to answer our research question (3a) on the role of the progress of time, we looked at the interview with the *ö*-speaking fieldworker in some detail. This interview lasts for 8 hours and was recorded in two sessions. we divided each session into two parts and com-pared the respondent's percent of *ö*-ing vs. *e*-ing session by session and part by part. Table 3 shows the results.

	Syllables realised with [ö]	Syllables realised with [e]	Percent of syllables realised with [ö]	Percent of syllables realised with [e]
Part 1	904	260	77.7	22.3
Part 2	496	109	82	18
Part 3	435	170	71.9	28.1
Part 4	235	98	70.6	29.4
Total	**2070**	**637**	**76.5**	**23.5**

Table 3: Frequency of use of [ö] vs. [e] in four equal parts (and two sessions) of an 8-hour-long interview with an *ö*-speaking fieldworker

The data shows very little difference in *ö*-ing between the first two hours and the second two hours of a session: *ö*-ing increased by 4.3% in the later part of the first session, and decreased by 1.3% in the later part of the second session.

In summary, the linguistic behavior of our respondent cannot be explained by the principles of audiomonitoring, or trust between interlocutors, or Bell's audience design.

5. A possible explanation

We believe that the unexpected lack of the effects of our fieldworkers' language use on the respondent's linguistic behavior can be explained by an interactional framework, in which the key factor is the relationship between the fieldworker and the respondent in the interchange. More specifically, we think the most important factor is how the respondent strives to strengthen his own position – at the expense of the fieldworkers' position. In this attempt to explain the dynamics of language use by the respondent and his interlocutors, we draw on Watzlawick's interactional view of communication. In this view, "[a]ll communicational interchanges are either symmetrical or complementary, depending on whether they are based on equality or difference" (Watzlawick–Beavin–Jackson 1967: 70). Symmetrical interaction is characterised by the minimisation of difference, "while complementary interaction is based on the maximization of difference" (ibid. 69). The crucial issue is who controls the interchange. "*One-up communication* is movement to *gain* control of the exchange. A bid for dominance includes messages that instruct, order, interrupt, contradict, change topics, or fail to support what the other person said. *One-down communication* is movement to *yield* control of the exchange" (Griffin 2012: 186). we also draw on the role of sex difference and power asymmetry in the interview discussed illuminatingly by Schilling (2013). In the Hungarian literature Bartha–Hámori's (2010) analyses of speakers' discursive-interactional strategies are precursors of the explanation we are about to present.

However, one should not run away with the idea that a fieldworker will necessarily end up in a hierarchy where s/he is dominated by the respondent. For instance, Szabó (2013) demonstrates that a young Hungarian schoolboy radically changes his opinion on a language issue during an interview as a result of recognising the authority of his adult fieldworker, a teacher. Referring to Eckert's and her own work, Schilling (2013: 205) also notes that "even teenagers and children can take over [control of the interview] when talking with adult interviewers."

In what follows, we will show the linguistic means the respondent uses in order to gain the dominant position in the interactions, to weaken the fieldworkers' positions, and to control the overall communication. First, we need to sketch a profile of the respondent on the basis of his statements during the interviews.

6. The respondent's profile

- Our respondent has a negative attitude to all foreign languages, which is demonstrated by statements like *büdös angol, tanuljon meg magyarul* 'Damned English people, they should learn Hungarian!'
- He is also negative about any Hungarian dialects different from the Szeged *ö*-ing dialect, including the *mekögő* dialect '*e* dialect spoken by people who can but will not speak *ö*'. This is shown by how he always cites a person he dislikes: *mekögő* people are always cited as speaking Standard Hungarian *e*-ing speech.
- His statements are unmistakably anti-intellectual and anti-humanities. His views of young female university students of the humanities are extremely negative. (Once we consider the social hierarchies in the two interviews analyzed, it is clear that both of our fieldworkers were in an extremely difficult situation, quite different from "the power asymmetry that inheres in the relationship between the researcher, usually someone with an advanced education who is affiliated with an authoritative research institution, and the community, whose members are often far removed from mainstream power structures" [Schilling 2013: 197].)
- On the other hand, our respondent holds positive attitudes to
  1. his Hungarian mother tongue,
  2. his own dialect,
  3. people in Szeged,
  4. peasants in general,
  5. all kinds of manual labor,
  6. the Kádár regime (Hungarian socialist regime, 1957–1990), and
  7. the past in general.

7. The respondent's position in the interviews

Here we will show how our respondent uses, consciously or unconsciously, verbal strategies to gain superiority in the interviews. Some of the elements in the respondent's profile make it inevitable that the two young female fieldworkers start out with a great disadvantage in the discourse if they mean to gain recognition for their chosen profession. The quotations below offer ample evidence that the respondent wants to gain superiority and he does not recognise his interlocutors as equals. He is projecting his own view of his own position in society, and tries to make sure that these views also dominate the entire discourse. He uses several linguistic means to achieve this goal, and the common denominator of all of them is his attack on the fieldworkers. Examples follow:

1. T/V form of address

   Violating the rules of Hungarian politeness, the respondent has sometimes used T forms of address to the fieldworkers who categorically used V forms to him, e.g. *De tudod?* 'But do you [T form] know?' (A163e 405)[5]

2. He used dozens of face-threatening moves to the fieldworkers, for instance

   a) *Mikó<r> látott tyúkot, igazi tyúkot életibe<n>?* 'when did you ever in your life see a real hen?' (A163e 320)

   b) *Kuncsaft szót ismeri?* 'Do you know the word *kuncsaft* »customer«?' (163e 639)

   c) *Tudja mi a cserje?* 'Do you know what a shrub is?' (A163e 768)

3. There are countless examples of the respondent interrupting the fieldworker, examples will not be cited.

4. He uses pejorative language regarding the fieldworkers' chosen profession, for instance *Hát bö- böl- hát két diplomája van. Bölcs is, meg ész is.* 'Untranslatable linguistic mocking of the Hungarian expression *bölcsész diploma* 'degree in the humanities', as if such a degree were two degrees, one in *wisdom* and the other in *mind*'. (A163.2. 197)

5. Attacks on women, for instance

   (a) … *és ez a maga korosztálya a legundorítóbb.* '… and your [V form] age cohort is the most despicable.' (A163e 489)

   (b) *nem pici lány, mán tudja, hogy milyenek a nők.* 'You're not a little girl, you know what women are like.' (A163.1. 91)

   (c) *Hány gyerököt vitt má<r> a bölcsödébe?* 'How many children have you ever taken to the kindergarten?'(A163e 227)

6. Teaching a lesson

   Úgyhogy nagyon szépen megkéröm, hogy le- legyen szíves bemutatni majd a diplomá-ját. 'So I ask you to please show me your university degree.' (A163e 1005)

7. Patronising vocatives

   Tündérkém 'sweety' (A 163.1. 919, A163.2. 405), *pici baba* 'little babe' (A163.3. 420), *édös lelköm* 'my li'l sweetheart' (A163.2. 417)

8. Role-shift: respondent takes upon himself the role of interviewer

   De én a gyerökkorát, most én is visszakérdözök a gyerökkorára, hogy ... ' But your childhood, now I'm gonna ask *you* back about *your* childhood…' (A163e 324)

8. Speaking time

The hierarchical relationship between the respondent and his two interlocutors is also shown by their speaking times in Table 4. This table also demonstrates that the respondent used more time vis-à-vis his standard (*e*-speaking) interviewer than with his local (*ö*-speaking) one.

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[5] *A163* is the code for the respondent. when this is followed by an *e*, this shows that the fieldworker is an *e*-speaker. *A163* without an *e* indicates an *ö*-speaking fieldworker in the interview. The final digits in parentheses indicate the location of the segment in the ELAN transcript.

Fieldworker's dialect	Minutes		Percent	
	Fieldworker	Respondent	Fieldworker	Respondent
e (standard)	16.3	90.3	15.3	84.7
ö (local)	109.6	252.5	30.27	69.73

Table 4: Speaking times in the two interviews

9. What has and what has not had an effect on the respondent's use of [ö]?

Now that we've seen the quantitative data on the use of [ö], the profile of our respondent, and the hierarchical relationship between the respondent vis-à-vis the fieldworkers, we will look at which factors did, and which did not, have an effect on the use of [ö] in the two interviews. Table 5 demonstrates the factors which did or did not have an effect on the use of [ö].

Factors	Their effect on the use of [ö]
Fieldworker's use of [ö]	+ (negative effect)
Length of the interview	−
Progress of time in the interview	−
Topics	−
Emotional loading	−
Respondent's identity	+
Respondent's linguistic identity	+
Respondent's view of his own social position	++
Respondent's self-assigned social position vis-à-vis his interlocutor	+++
Male vs. female hierarchy as seen by the respondent	++

Table 5: which factors have an effect on the use of [ö] in the two interviews?

This case study has thus demonstrated that the use of the salient dialect feature [ö] by our respondent was not influenced by the fact that the two fieldworkers spoke different varieties, nor was it influenced by his audiomonitoring, the topics in the interviews or the variation in emotional loading. On the other hand, the respondent's local peasant identity and his extremely positive attitudes to the local speechways have been shown to be important influences. Most important of all the factors, however, is the social hierarchical relationship assigned by him to himself vis-à-vis the two fieldworkers. This effect is enhanced by his self-assigned male vs. female hierarchy. In the interviews the respondent does his best to take the position he believes he deserves: he positions himself so much higher than the fieldworkers that he shows no sign of behaving according to the fieldworkers' implicit or explicit expectations. There is no trace of linguistic accommodation in his speech.

10. Conclusion

As Tagliamonte (2016: 93–99) states in a recent review of fifty years of variationist sociolinguistics, interviewing techniques which had been successful in one location did not work well in other places. "Even though Peter Trudgill interviewed a broad range of people in Norwich, the Danger of Death question got him nowhere" (p. 96). She notes that "The interviewer him or herself can have a major impact on the nature of the data in any interview situation" (p. 97) and goes as far as saying that the fieldworker is the prime variable. In this paper we hope to have contributed to this discussion.

Our case study has demonstrated that there exists a kind of sociolinguistic interview in which the respondent's linguistic behavior cannot be explained by a number of traditional explanations: Labov's audiomonitoring, Bell's audience design, the progress of time in the interview or the building up of trust between the interlocutors. However, an interactional view of communication provides adequate means to interpret the data. Our two interviews show that the fieldworkers' language use has no direct effect on that of the respondent. The fieldworkers' personae, however, do have indirect effects in as much as the respondent places himself vis-à-vis the fieldworkers on a social hierarchy axis in the interview and in society in general. Thus the fieldworker's effect is not triggered by their speech behavior/style, but by the respondent's positioning himself vis-à-vis the fieldworker on a social hierarchy axis. This same explanation can also hold for a mirror image of the social hierarchy: a Hungarian schoolboy positioned himself below the fieldworker (a teacher), and radically changed his opinion on a linguistic issue, adopting the views of the fieldworker in the second half of the interview (Szabó 2013).

Our general conclusion is that some sociolinguistic interviews may yield data which can only be meaningfully interpreted by (1) constructing a profile of the persona of the respondent, (2) of the persona of the fieldworker, and (3) by defining their position vis-à-vis each other on a social hierarchy axis by means of analyzing explicit linguistic features. This case study poses the perplexing question: what kind of linguistic data would be provided by the same respondent if he were interviewed by a fieldworker he places above himself, or by one he regards as an equal?

As regards our Szeged project, we have learned that the indirect effect of our fieldworker's persona (who uses *ö* speech categorically with all respondents) on the speech behavior of a respondent can neither be predicted, nor excluded. The methodological lesson we have learned is that we must attach interlocutor profiles to each of our interviews.

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