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Style-shifting as a function of multiple factors: A corpus based study

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ABSTRACT

According to Labov (1966, 1972), the selection of a given style is primarily dependent on the amount of attention the speaker pays to what he is saying. In more formal styles he tends to be more aware of the way he speaks, and in less formal styles he does not concentrate on his linguistic performance. An alternative explanation of style-shifting was proposed by Giles (1973), who suggests that the speaker attunes his speech toward his addressee. The major aim of the present paper is to evaluate these two approaches in a single experiment. In order to fulfil this task the distribution of formal and informal variants of three selected variables have been investigated in the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE)*. This corpus allows the testing of the variants according to specific transcript attributes, making it particularly suitable for the task. The results of the experiment indicate that the choice of a speaker's style depends on both of the factors suggested in the two theories and, as proposed in some recent publications, the process may be affected simultaneously by many other aspects of the speech event.

1. Introduction

Mayerhoff states that style-shifting is "variation in an individual's speech correlating with differences in addressee, social context, personal goals or externally imposed tasks" (2006: 28). Such a definition explicitly points out the fact that style-shifts involve intra-speaker variation rather than inter-speaker variation. This feature is also clearly indicated by Schilling-Estes, who, quoting Crystal (1991: 295) and Halliday (1978), additionally specifies that intra-speaker variation encompasses either "shifts in usage levels for features associated with particular groups of speakers- i.e. dialects- or

with particular situations of use- i.e. registers" (2003: 375). As an example of register-based variation she suggests that the speaker may make use of pronunciation features which are considered to be "formal" to a greater extent in a conversation about work-related matters than when talking in an informal environment about family. Recently, the investigation of the possible reasons for intra-speaker variation has moved the focus from analysing just one or a few social factors to examining a full range of possible aspects (e.g. Kiesling 1996; Mendoza-Denton 1977; Eckert 2000). In addition, more and more variationists discuss the influence of intra-speaker variation on diverse linguistic features (e.g. Schilling-Estes 1999; Coupland 2001) and not just on chosen phonetic or lexical variables.

The major focus of this article is, however, on the individual factors proposed in initial studies on style-shifting. The first of these is the suggestion that the level of formality of style is "a function of speakers' attention to their own speech: in more formal styles they pay more attention; in more casual styles they pay less attention" (Mayerhoff 2006: 30). The idea was originally proposed by Labov (1966, 1972), who investigated several sociolinguistic variables in New York City English. His research method included "sociolinguistic interviews" which consisted of four structured parts. The first of these was reading a list of minimal pairs; the second, reading a list of words in isolation; the third, reading aloud a short narrative; and the fourth involved talking with the interviewer about various subjects, such as the interviewee's life, beliefs, etc. The four contexts were believed to draw the participants' attention to their own speech to different degrees. The tasks were arranged from the most "formal" to the "most informal". Therefore, reading minimal pairs should involve relatively more "formal" variants than reading list of words, which in turn should involve more "formal" variants than reading aloud a short narrative, and so on. Labov's studies confirmed the association between the four interview contexts and the percentage of formal and informal variants appearing in his experiments and the view that styles are dependent on the amount of attention paid to speech was later accepted by other variation researchers (cf. Ervin-Tripp 1973; Tarone 1982; Lavandera 1988). An empirical study which substantiated Labov's suggestion was conducted by Mahl (1972), who tried to examine the influence of aural monitoring on style-shifting among the participants of his test. He established that, indeed, when the informants were exposed to white noise and they could not hear themselves speak, their speech became markedly less formal than in the case where aural monitoring was possible. Some other researches also confirmed a correlation between attention and formality of

speech (cf. Dressler 1974; Vaneček – Dressler 1975). Nevertheless, the theory also came under criticism. For example, Wolfram (1969: 58-59) argued that the paralinguistic channel cues used in Labov's experiments, such as pitch, volume, changes of tempo, breathing rate and the use of laughter, are not necessarily reliable indicators of casual speech. For instance, laughter may also be associated with increased nervousness and self-consciousness. Moreover, some authors observed that shifting into less formal styles may also be conscious and speakers may also pay close attention to the way they speak in such cases (cf. Rickford 1979; Coupland 1980, 1985, 2001; Schilling-Estes 1998; Eckert 2000).

An alternative explanation of style-shifting may be found in the so-called "speech accommodation theory", which was initially proposed in Giles (1973) and Giles – Powesland (1975). One of the major ideas it contributes is that speakers adjust their speech to their addressees and shifts in style are primarily due to this factor rather than the amount of attention paid to speaking. This proposal was adopted in the theory of "audience design" put forward in Bell (1984). This approach, among other things, elaborated on different audience types. Bell distinguished between addressees, who are the people spoken to directly; auditors, who are ratified participants of the conversation but are not directly addressed; overhearers, who are not treated as participants of the conversation, but whose presence is known to the speaker; and also eavesdroppers, who are unrated participants of the speech event and the speaker is unaware of their presence. Bell claimed that these kinds of listeners have progressively less and less influence on the linguistic behaviour of the speaker; thus addressees have the greatest impact on a speaker's style, auditors influence the speech event to a lesser degree than addressees but to a greater degree than overhearers, and so on.

It is important to add that Bell did not deny the fact that attention to speech may play a role in the process of style-shifting, but he assumes that it is "a mechanism, through which other factors can affect style. Certain topics or addressees or settings tend to evoke graded degrees of attention which may result in parallel graded styles. But the behavioural results of a given level of attention can also be quite diverse. [...] Attention is at most a mechanism of response intervening between a situation and a style" (Bell 1984: 150).

Bell substantiates his claims by referring to various studies on the subject, for instance Trudgill (1974); Douglas-Cowie (1978); Bickerton (1980); Coupland (1980, 1981, 1984); Russell (1982); and Thelander (1982). All of them show that, indeed, speakers attune their speech to the norms associated with different addressees.

2. Aim of the current project

The major aim of the current project is to examine the two basic theories on style-shifting discussed in the introduction. In particular, the two approaches are to be tested on the basis of one and the same language sample using one and the same procedure. Even though both of the theories have been tested in independent sociolinguistic experiments, diverse methodological procedures were applied and, consequently, it is difficult to objectively assess the relative validity of these results. So far no attempt has been made to evaluate the two proposals in a single experiment. What is more, the current study aims at using a large, unbiased sample which allows statistically relevant conclusions to be drawn. Unfortunately, such an approach was not used in all previous experiments on style-shifting.

3. Data and methods

One of the possible solutions for fulfilling the requirements outlined above is to use a large on-line corpus. The advantage of choosing such an option is the greater sample size and the increased likelihood that the results obtained would be statistically significant. Obviously, it is virtually impossible to design any sociolinguistic interview which would be comparable with a proper corpus in terms of the amount of analysed data. Additionally, corpora are not prepared with any particular linguistic analysis in mind. They include an enormous amount of data, which is balanced and can serve various research purposes. Consequently, using a corpus automatically makes the experiment "blind". The speakers "do not know" what is being investigated.

At present, various corpora based on spoken English are available on the Internet. For instance, the *Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE)* is a structured collection of English as means of communication between speakers from different first-language backgrounds. A similar project has been completed at the University of Helsinki under the name *English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings (ELFA)*. One should also mention the *Corpus of Spoken Professional American English (CPSAE)*, the *Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE)*, the *Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE)*, the *British Academic Spoken English Corpus (BASE)*, the *London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC)*, the *Spoken English Corpus (SEC)*, the *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English (DCPSE)*, the *Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English (SCoSE)*, the *Corpus of Spoken Professional American-English (CSPA)*, the *Old Bailey Corpus (OBC)*, the *Louvain International*

Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI), the *Monash Corpus of Australian English (MCE)*, the *The Griffith Corpus of Spoken Australian English (GCSAusE)*, and the *Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (WSC)*. For the current purposes, however, the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE)* has been chosen. The corpus is based on 152 transcripts of academic speech events recorded at the University of Michigan and includes over 1.8 million words. It is probably the largest corpus based on spoken English. Another significant advantage is that it offers the possibility of searching according to several speaker and transcript attributes. Speaker attributes include gender, age, academic position, native speaker status, and the first language of the speaker. Transcript attributes are speech event type, academic division, academic discipline, participant level, and interactivity rating. This particular feature makes the corpus a particularly suitable tool for meeting the primary objectives of the current project.

In the remaining part of this paper the two basic approaches outlined in the introduction will be referred to in the following way: the proposal initially put forward by Labov (1966, 1972) that formality or informality of styles is a function of speakers' attention to their own speech will be called Hypothesis 1 and the idea suggested by Bell (1984) that the difference between informal and casual speech can be seen as a function dependent on the addressee will be called Hypothesis 2.

In order to test the two hypothesis, specific variables need to be selected which would alter whenever the speaker changes her style from (more) formal to (more) informal and vice versa. Petrusiak Engkent (1986) discusses many such variables. She mentions that spoken English is characterized by reductions of sounds and ellipsis, the use of "you" as a general pronoun, hesitation markers, "errors" in subject-verb agreement and pronoun agreement, the overuse of the verb "to get", the frequent modification of verbs with the addition of "up" and the use of specific modifiers such as "a lot" and "a bit". Additionally, Petrusiak Engkent suggests that a common feature of "conversational" English is the use of euphemisms, idioms, numerous slang words and "ritualistic" expressions for greetings and partings. The variables chosen for the current project are the examples she discusses among "reductions of sounds". She proposes that in informal spoken English the forms "gonna", "wanna" and "gotta" are more popular than in more formal contexts. The three examples are ideal for testing the theories under discussion. Firstly, the variants marking formal and informal styles most likely do not differ functionally. The forms "gonna", "wanna" and "gotta" are exact equivalents of more formal "going to", "want to" and "got to" (although the variants "going to" and "got to" could themselves

be regarded as less formal). Secondly, the variants are spelled differently, which is advantageous in using a corpus. Although *MICASE* is based on voice recordings and any variation in pronunciation could be measured acoustically, the fact that the variants chosen in the present study differ in terms of spelling make the task infinitely more reliable, as it is enough just to search for the variants in the search box. Tab. 1 summarises the variables and their variants used in the experiment.

Table 1. Variables and their variants used in the experiment

Variable	More Formal Variant	More Informal Variant
(going to)	"going to"	"gonna"
(want to)	"want to"	"wanna"
(got to)	"got to"	"gotta"

The current experiment also requires establishing which speaker and/or transcript attributes should be taken into consideration. Since all the three hypotheses focus on the characteristics which are related to the transcript attributes in *MICASE* Corpus, speaker attributes will not be analysed. It is, however, crucial to specify which transcript attributes will be used in testing which hypothesis. To begin with, the most appropriate criterion for examining Hypothesis 1 is "speech event type". In more formal contexts the speaker will direct more attention to her speech and in less formal contexts her speech will be less controlled. From among fifteen available attributes seven have been selected and classified in the following way:

- the most formal: dissertation defence, colloquia
- the most informal: tour, meeting, advising, office hours, service encounters.

It must be stressed that the level of formality of these speech event types is relative. "Tour", "meeting", "advising", "office hours" and "service encounters" are obviously less formal contexts than "dissertation defence" and "colloquia", but they could be more formal than many other situations outside of the academic environment the corpus deals with.

It should also be noted that the results concerning the distribution of the variants of (going to), (want to) and (got to) on the basis of the selected transcript attributes do not necessarily refer exclusively to the amount of

attention the speaker pays to his speech. Other influences may play a crucial role (cf. the discussion in the introduction), but surely attention to speech is significant. Indeed, in his experiments Labov (1966, 1972) assumed that the amount of attention to speech is directly dependant on the level of formality of the speech event.

The attributes chosen for testing Hypothesis 2 concern “interactivity rating”. The *MICASE* corpus allows searching according to the following four levels of this criterion: highly interactive, mostly interactive, mostly monologic and highly monologic. These transcript attributes are highly suitable for examining whether style-shifting is dependent on the speaker’s attention to their interlocutor(s). In “highly interactive” linguistic behaviours the speaker tends to be more aware of the addressee(s) than in “mostly interactive” situations, which are, in turn, more hearer-oriented than “mostly monologic” utterances and, even more so, “highly monologic” ones.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that in all the calculations performed in this study the samples taken into consideration are always half of what the corpus data encompasses. For instance, the entire corpus involves 1848364 words and the sample size in Tab. 2, which concerns the general distribution of the variants, is 924182. The reason for such a change is the fact that all the variants chosen for the analysis consist of two lexical items, even though “gonna”, “wanna” and “gotta” are spelled as single words. Consequently, their distribution is calculated on the basis of all the possible pairs of words in the corpus, so the samples are always reduced to half of all the words in a given group.

4. Results

4.1 General distribution of the variants in the *MICASE* corpus

Tab. 2 presents the overall distribution of the variants examined in the current project. It is plainly visible that in all three cases the informal forms are clearly more popular than the formal ones and the differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$). Indeed, the ratio between “gotta” and “got to” is 3.8 to 1, between “wanna” and “want to” 2.1 to 1, and between “gonna” and “going to” 3.9 to 1. These results should be kept in mind in the further analysis, because the influence of the two different factors (Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2) on the speaker’s style should be considered in relation to the general distribution of the variants in the corpus.

Table 2. General distribution of the variants in the MICASE Corpus (n=924182)

Variants	Tokens	Percentage
got to	84	0.0090891%
gotta	318	0.0344088%
want to	933	0.1009541%
wanna	1983	0.2145681%
going to	1071	0.1158863%
gonna	4192	0.4535903%

4.2 Testing Hypothesis 1

Tab. 3 presents the distribution of all the examined variants in the selected formal and informal contexts. To begin with, the results indicate that in formal situations “got to” is more popular than “gotta”, even though, in general, the former is used less frequently in the corpus than the latter (cf. Section 4.1). It must be admitted, however, that the observed difference is statistically not significant ($p=0.2228$), which may be the result of a relatively small sample (the two formal contexts include 214170 words, so the calculations were made on the basis of a sample consisting of 107085 elements). A reverse in the distribution of the variants may be observed in informal contexts. This time “gotta” is much more frequent than “got to” and this general observation should be regarded as highly statistically relevant ($p<0.0001$). We could also analyse the distribution of the two variants within the individual situational contexts (cf. Figures 1 and 2), but the differences are statistically significant only in some of these instances. While the p-values are below 0.05 in the case of the differences between the distribution of “gotta” and “got to” in tours, advising sessions and office hours, they are higher in other instances.

Table 3. Distribution of the variants in formal and informal contexts

Variants	Tokens	Percentage	Tokens	Percentage
got to	20	0.0186768%	13	0.0080505%
gotta	13	0.0121399%	80	0.0495417%
want to	142	0.1326049%	268	0.1659648%
wanna	122	0.1139282%	603	0.3734209%
going to	180	0.1614410%	176	0.1089918%
gonna	278	0.2596069%	903	0.5592024%

Although the above observations are interesting and, in fact, support Hypothesis 1, comparing the two variants is probably less informative than analysing their distributions separately. As discussed in Section 4.1, the occurrence of the variants in the whole corpus is not uniform and less formal variants are, in general, more frequent than the more formal ones, which has an obvious influence on the above results. Let us, therefore, analyse the distribution of the variants separately. Tab. 3 reveals that “got to” is more frequent in formal situations (0.01867675%) than in informal ones (0.00805053%), and the p-value for this difference is 0.015. Conversely, “gotta” is considerably more popular in informal contexts (0.04954174%) than in formal ones (0.01213989%), and this difference must also be considered statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$). These results clearly confirm Hypothesis 1.

It is also useful to compare the distribution of “got to” and “gotta” with the general distribution of the variants in the MICASE Corpus presented in Tab. 2. Theoretically, the frequency of “got to” in the overall distribution should be lower than in formal contexts and higher than in informal ones. Again, the size of the samples representing individual

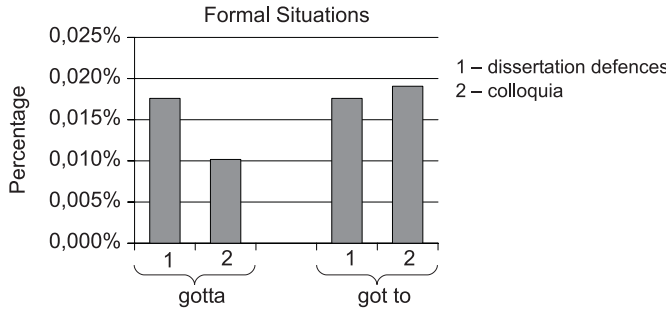


Figure 1. “Gotta” and “got to” in individual formal contexts

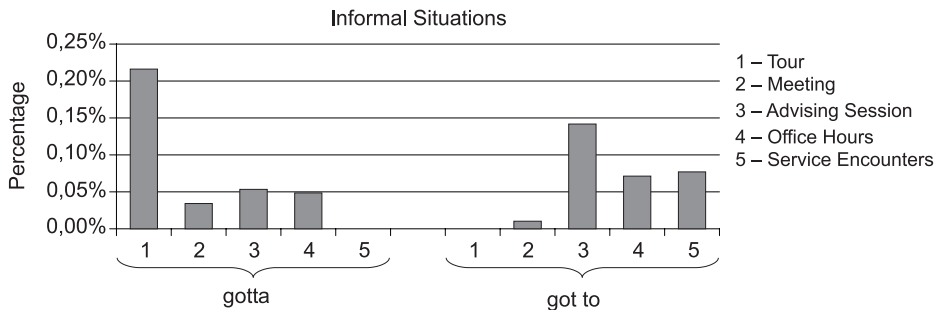


Figure 2. “Gotta” and “got to” in individual informal contexts

contexts is in most cases not large enough for the observed differences to be statistically significant. In fact, the results are statistically meaningful only in “colloquia”, where “got to” was used in 0.0190678% of the cases, which is more frequently than in general in the corpus (0.0090891%), and the p-value for this difference amounts to 0.0069. “Gonna”, on the other hand, was encountered in 0.0101695% of the cases, which is clearly less frequently than in the entire corpus (0.0344088%), and the p-value for this difference is also satisfactorily small (0.0003). In all other individual situational contexts no statistically relevant associations could be found. Nevertheless, when we compare the general distribution of the variants (cf. Tab. 2) to the way they are used in all formal or informal contexts (cf. Tab. 3), then in most cases the conclusions are statistically relevant. For example, the p-value for the difference between “got to” used in all the formal contexts (0.01867675%) and its frequency in the entire corpus (0.0090891%) is 0.0031. Therefore, it can be stated with certainty that the expression tends to appear more frequently in formal situations. An opposite result may be observed in the case of “gotta”, which is used less frequently in formal contexts (0.01213989%) than in general (0.0344088%), and again, the difference must be regarded as statistically relevant ($p < 0.0001$). Additionally, the use of “gotta” in informal contexts versus the overall frequency in the corpus also reveals the expected tendency. The expression is more frequent in the former case (0.04954174%) than in the latter (0.0344088%), and this observation is statistically meaningful ($p = 0.0034$). Only the difference between the use of “got to” in informal contexts (0.00805053%) versus the general frequency of this variant in the entire corpus (0.0090891%) is statistically not relevant ($p = 0.6840$), although even in this case the distribution of the expression coincides with the prediction that it should be less frequent in informal situations.

The distribution of “want to” and “wanna” shows tendencies similar to “got to” and “gotta”. The results summarised in Tab. 2 indicate that in formal contexts “want to” is more frequent than “wanna”, but again, this difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.2179$). Still, the opposite situation in informal context should be regarded as highly statistically meaningful ($p < 0.0001$). It is interesting to add that the tendency of the more formal variant to appear more frequently in formal contexts than the informal one, and the more informal variant to be used more frequently in informal situations than formal ones, is also substantiated by the results summarised in Figures 3 and 4, which summarise the distribution of “wanna” and “want to” in individual contexts. In fact, in most of the cases the differences are statistically relevant and the p-values are only clearly above 0.05 in “colloquia”, and “service

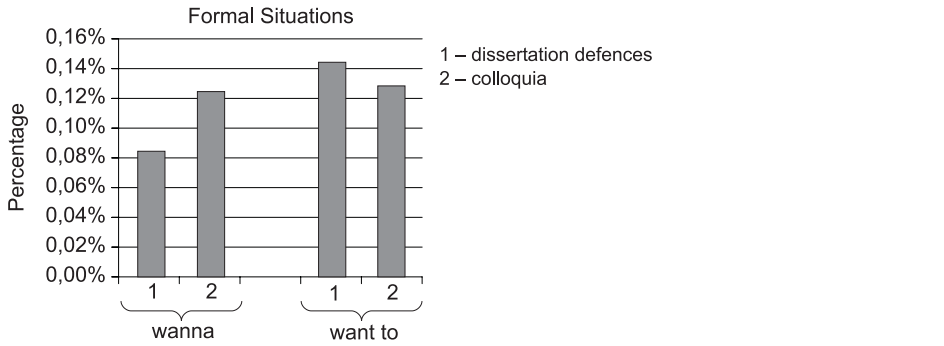


Figure 3. “Wanna” and “want to” in formal situations

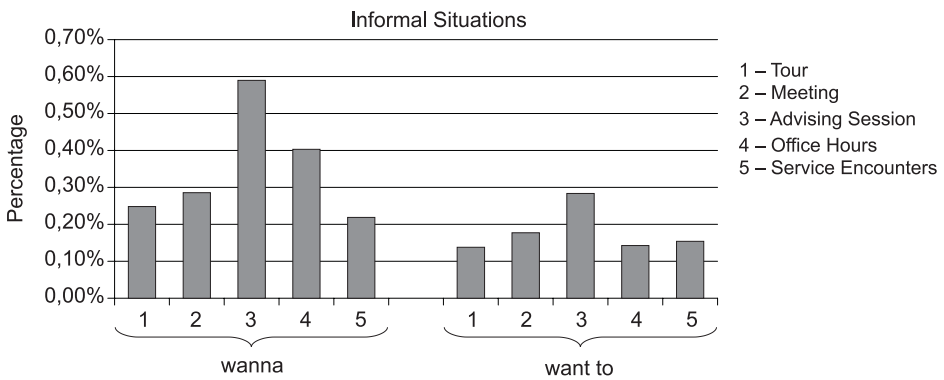


Figure 4. “Wanna” and “want to” in informal situations

encounters” (in “tours” the difference should be treated as marginally statistically significant, because $p=0.0639$). All this shows that the discussed tendency is fairly strong.

The distribution of “wanna” in all formal contexts versus all informal contexts also confirms the predictions of Hypothesis 1 (cf. Tab. 3). The variant is less frequent in the former case (0.1139282%) than in the latter (0.3734209%), and this difference must be interpreted as highly statistically relevant ($p<0.0001$). The distribution of “want to” in formal versus informal context is, however, problematic. The variant is actually used less frequently in the former than in the latter, which runs counter to the assumptions of Hypothesis 1. The p-value for this difference is 0.0302, so the results must be treated as statistically meaningful. This particular case should be kept in mind in the subsequent analysis. Although Hypothesis 1 has been confirmed by most of the results discussed thus far, there are exceptions.

As predicted, the frequency of “wanna” in the whole corpus (0.2145681%) is higher than in formal contexts (0.1139282%) and lower than in informal contexts (0.3734209%). The p-values for these differences are below 0.0001 and such results strongly support Hypothesis 1. Also, the distribution of “want to” in formal contexts (0.1326049%) is higher than in the entire corpus (0.1009541%) ($p=0.0024$), which is in accordance with the expected results. Nevertheless, a comparison between the frequency of “want to” in the selected informal contexts and in the whole corpus is another problematic case, because the variant is, in fact, more frequent in the former instance (0.1659648%) than in the latter (0.1009541%), and this difference is statistically meaningful ($p<0.0001$). Consequently, it must be stressed that although Hypothesis 1 has been confirmed so far, some of the results do not support it.

Figures 3 and 4 show the distribution of “want to” and “wanna” in individual contexts. The results depicted there clearly indicate the discussed tendencies. In all formal contexts the formal variant “want to” is more frequent than the informal “wanna”, and in informal situations the distribution is reversed. What is more, almost all these differences are statistically significant. The corresponding p-values are above 0.05 only in the case of “service encounters”.

The variants of the variable (going to) also behave in the way which, in general, corresponds with the assumptions of Hypothesis 1. The results summarised in Tab. 3 demonstrate that in informal contexts “gonna” is more common than “going to” ($p<0.0001$). The summary of the distribution of the variants in individual contexts provided in Figure 6 also indicates this tendency, and the p-values for the differences observable there are below 0.0001 in all cases. On the other hand, a similar comparison in formal contexts (cf. Tab. 3 and Figure 5) yields results which are not as consistent with the predictions. In these cases, “gonna” is actually more frequent than “going to”. This inconsistency, however, does not really undermine Hypothesis 1, because the results are strongly influenced by the general bias in the distribution of the variable “going to” in the entire corpus. As summarised in Tab. 2, “going to” is significantly more frequent than “gonna”. A much more reliable analysis, in which the two variants under discussion are examined separately, fully supports Hypothesis 1. “Going to” is more frequent in formal contexts (0.1614410%) than in informal ones (0.1089918%) ($p<0.0001$) and “gonna” is more frequent in informal situations (0.5592024%) than in formal ones (0.2596069%) ($p<0.0001$).

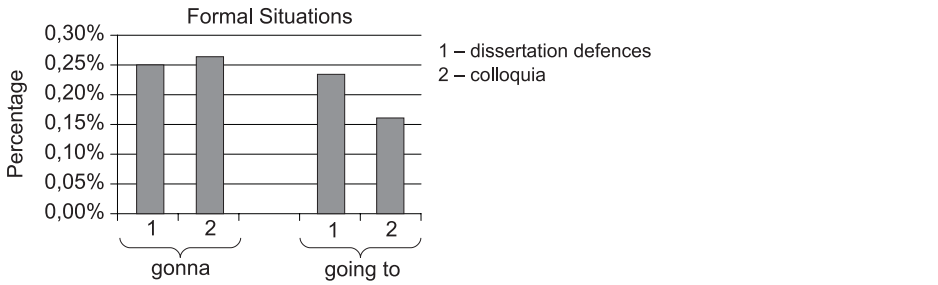


Figure 5. “Gonna” and “going to” in formal situations

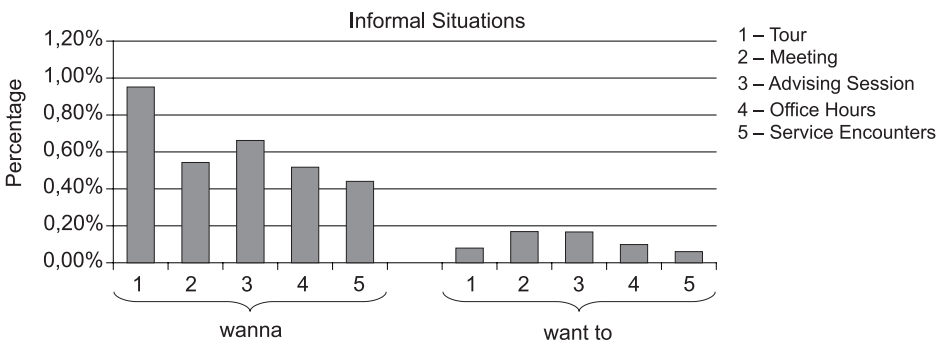


Figure 6. “Gonna” and “going to” in informal situations

A comparison between the distribution of the variants in the examined contexts and the general distribution of the variants in the corpus also supports Hypothesis 1. “Gonna” in general (0.4535903%) is more frequent than in the formal contexts (0.2596069%) and less frequent than in the informal contexts (0.5592024%) (in both cases p-values are below 0.0001). Conversely, “going to” in the entire corpus (0.1158863%) is less frequent than in formal situations (0.1614410%) and more frequent than in the informal ones (0.1089918%) (in the former case $p < 0.0001$, and only in the latter can the difference not be statistically proven because $p = 0.4502$). What is more, the tendencies under discussion are also observable when the general distribution of the two variants in the corpus is compared with the way in which the variants are used in individual contexts, and the differences in such comparisons are also in most cases statistically significant.

All in all, the results discussed in this section indicate that speaker’s choice of style is dependent on the level of formality of the situation they are in. This supports Hypothesis 1, according to which the speaker tends to pay more attention to the way he speaks in formal situations than in informal ones.

4.3 Testing Hypothesis 2

Figure 7 depicts the distribution of the two variants of the variable (got to). It is instantly visible that the frequency of the less formal variant “gotta” gradually decreases when the conversational interaction between interlocutors decreases. Conversely, the formal variant “got to” becomes gradually more frequent. This accords with the assumptions that style-shifting depends on the amount of attention the speaker gives to the addressee. In the case under discussion speakers recorded in the corpus tend to shift from more formal to less formal style when their interaction with hearers becomes closer. A similar tendency may be observed in the case of the two variants of the variable (going to) (cf. Figure 9). The informal “gonna” becomes gradually less frequent when the interaction between interlocutors decreases. The only exception is a slight rise in frequency in the case of highly monologic contexts in comparison to mostly monologic contexts. The distribution of the informal variant here is the opposite of what one would expect, but the observed difference is statistically insignificant ($p=0.125$). What is more, the frequency of occurrence of the formal variant “going to” also aligns with the predicted tendency and the expression is used less frequently in interactive contexts than in monologic contexts.

The analysis of the distribution of the two variants of (want to) yields mixed results (cf. Figure 8). On the one hand, the informal “wanna” is distributed in the expected way: the weaker the interaction between the interlocutors, the less frequently it is used. On the other hand, the frequency of occurrence of “want to” does not seem to be correlated with the change in interactivity. The differences between the results for each of the analysed contexts are minute and statistically irrelevant. Additionally, they do not exactly conform with the expected tendency. The frequency of use of “want to” does not increase with the decrease in interactivity rating.

Figure 10 presents the average distribution of all the informal and formal variants of the three variables tested in the present study. It is easily visible that there is a strong association between the interactivity rating and the frequency of occurrence of “gotta”, “wanna” and “gonna”. The informal variants become gradually less frequent as the interactivity between interlocutors decreases. It is necessary to underline that the differences between the results obtained in the four contexts are statistically significant. The only case in which the p -value is above 0.05 is the difference between the frequency of occurrence of the informal variants in mostly monologic situations and highly monologic situations ($p=0.7384$). The mean results depicted in Figure 10 also confirm the prediction that the formal variants

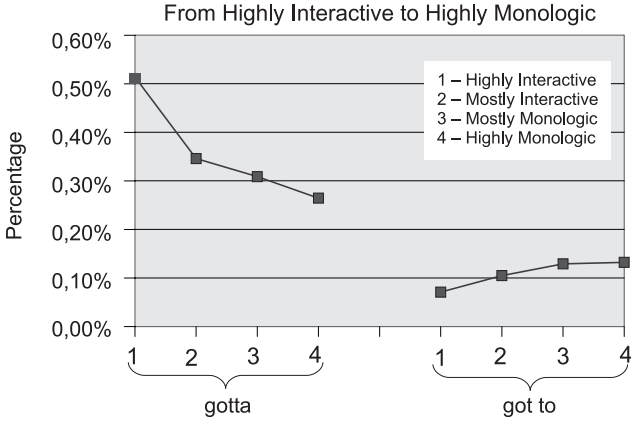


Figure 7. Distribution of "gotta" and "got to" according to interactivity rating

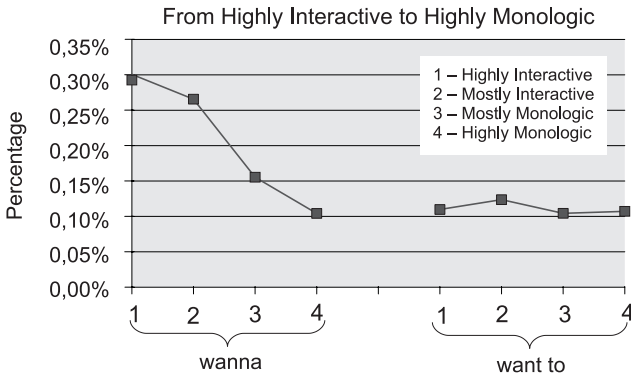


Figure 8. Distribution of "wanna" and "want to" according to interactivity rating

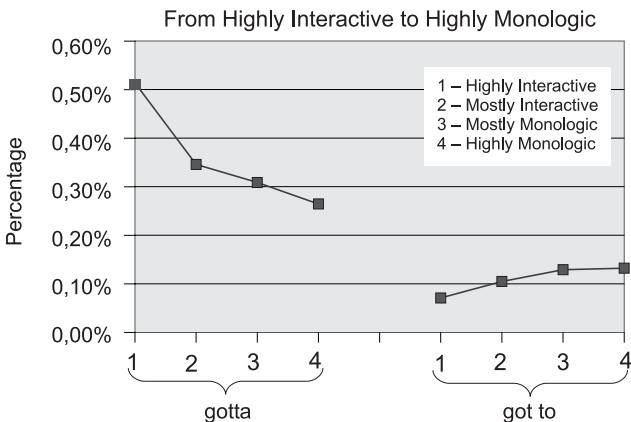


Figure 9. Distribution of "gonna" and "going to" according to interactivity rating

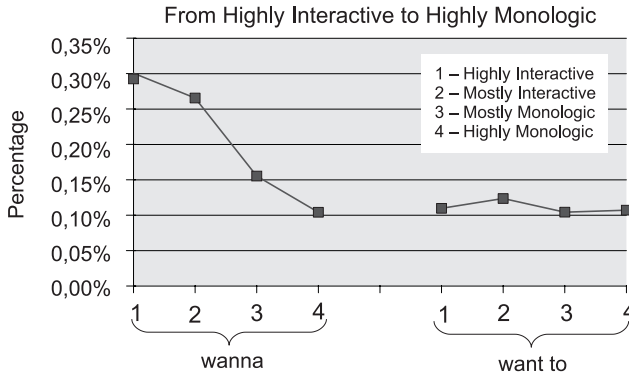


Figure 10. Distribution of informal and formal variants according to interactivity rating

would tend to become more frequent with the decrease in interactivity between the speakers. Again, the differences between the data obtained in each of the four interactional contexts are statistically significant (with the exception of “mostly monologic” versus “highly monologic”, in which case $p=0.3207$).

It is interesting to note that, in general, style-shifting is marked more by the distribution of informal variants than formal ones. As observed above, “got to”, “want to” and “going to” are used in a way which supports Hypothesis 2, but in this case the differences are smaller than the differences in the distribution of their informal counterparts. Consequently, it becomes apparent that the speaker marks his style primarily by they use of the informal forms. The more formal counterparts are less active in the process of style-shifting.

5. Conclusion

The present paper examined two basic theories of style-shifting. (The experiment was designed in such a way as to test the theories in a single experiment, using a large, unbiased sample.) The obtained results strongly support both of the proposals in question. Firstly, the attributes used in Labov’s experiments have a significant effect on the choice of the variants used in the analysis. The less formal “gotta”, “wanna” and “gonna” were relatively more frequent in informal contexts and less frequent in formal contexts. Conversely, the more formal “got to” and “going to” were used less frequently in formal situations and more frequently in formal ones. The only significant exception to this general pattern was the distribution of “want to”.

This variant was actually more common in informal contexts than formal ones. This exception shows that we are dealing here only with a tendency rather than an absolute rule. Secondly, the results of the experiment also support the theory of “audience design” (Bell 1984). It is clear that the level of interactivity rating has a direct effect on the distribution of the variants used in the analysis. As the interactivity increases, the more informal variants become more frequent and the formal variants less frequent. There is also an opposite trend when the interactivity between the interlocutors decreases.

All in all, the current findings demonstrate that style-shifting is a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon depending on more than one factor. Indeed, the two aspects investigated in this paper are probably only a small part of the complex system effecting the variation in an individual’s speech.

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