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Koineization

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koineization

The term koineization refers to a process of mixing of dialects (or mutually intelligible varieties of language) which leads to the rapid formation of a new dialect or koine, characterized by mixing, levelling and simplification of features found in the dialects which formed part of the original mix. Koineization generally occurs over the course of three generations (including first-generation adults dur ing the 'pre-koine') and is often found in new towns, frontier regions and colonies which have seen sudden in-migration followed by the establishment of a permanent community.

From Koine to Koines and Koinezation

Koine (which means 'common' or 'shared') was a type of ancient Greek that began during the Athenian empire in the 5th century BCE. It later became the main form of Greek used across the eastern Mediterranean after Alexander the Great's conquests in the 4th century BCE. This language came from older Greek dialects, especially the Attic dialect from Athens and the Ionic dialects from Asia Minor. It mixed features from these dialects and made them simpler.

In the 20th century, the word "koine" was used to describe any language variety that many people shared. Today, sociolinguists use the term more carefully. They define a koine as

a language variety that forms when many people from different dialect backgrounds move and mix in a new place. This process is called koineization, and it explains how koines are formed.

Koineization has happened in many languages over time, especially due to immigration and the mixing of dialects. Researchers have studied these cases to understand how koines develop. The common changes that happen during koineization include:

Mixing (combining features from different dialects),

Levelling (removing unusual or rare features),

Reallocation (assigning old features new meanings),

Simplification, and Interdialect changes (influences from many dialects together).

Mixing, levelling, reallocation

Mixing, levelling, and reallocation are all part of how a new, shared language variety (a koine) develops. They involve choosing certain language forms over others.Mixing means taking words or grammar from different original dialects and combining them. This happens when people from different places come together and bring their ways of speaking.Levelling is about removing unusual or less common forms and keeping the ones most people use more often. For example, in early Fiji Hindi, there were

different ways of saying "what" (/kja:/ and /ka:/) and "who" (/ke/ and /kaun/) from different dialects. Over time, only the most frequently used forms stayed: /ka:/ for "what" and /kaun/ for "who."Sometimes, levelling doesn't remove all the forms. Instead, more than one form survives, but they are used differently. For example, in Fiji Hindi, there are two ways to say "his" or "her": /okar/ from Bhojpuri and /uske/ from Hindi. /uske/ became the normal, more polite way, while /okar/ is now seen as more rural or informal.

Simplification and interdialect features

Simplification and interdialect features are also important in the development of a koine, and not all of them come directly from existing dialects.

Simplification happens when people learning a new dialect make it easier by changing or removing complicated forms. Often, they replace irregular or hard-to-remember forms with simpler, more regular ones. This makes the language easier to use and learn. For example, in medieval Spanish, irregular verbs like escrise ('I wrote') were changed to escribí, which is more regular and clearly linked to the base form escribir ('to write'). Simplification like this is common when speakers from different dialects are learning and using the language together.

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Interdialectalisms are new forms that arise when speakers mix features from different dialects in creative or accidental ways. These forms are not copied exactly from any single dialect. For example, learners might blend different versions of a word, like in Høyanger, where different words for 'songs' were combined into one new word myre. They might also use a certain form more often than in any of the original dialects – a habit called statistical hypercorrection. This can lead to majority forms becoming even more common and preferred in the new koine.

Conditions of Speaker Activity: Social Networks, Accommodation and Acquisition

The formation of a new koine language variety happens when people from different dialect backgrounds move to a new place with few or no original residents. In this new community, people lose the strong social networks of their old homes and form weak, loose social ties. These loose networks encourage language change and make it easier for new features to appear.

Adult speakers often adjust their speech (a process called accommodation) to fit in with others by dropping unusual or marked features and sometimes adopting features they see as common or socially useful. This process leads to mixing, levelling, and simplification. But the most important changes come from

older children and adolescents, not very young children or adults.

These older children adapt to their peers' speech, creating new

norms in the community.

Usually, children adopt frequent and regular forms, which leads to

levelling (keeping majority forms) and simplification (making

language more regular). When adults and children are

inconsistent in their speech, learners tend to overgeneralize the

most regular and frequent patterns.

However, two exceptions exist:

1. Some features may be adopted even if they are not the most

frequent, simply because they are salient (noticed more easily).

2. Sometimes, children misunderstand what they hear and create

completely new forms. These usually don't last and are removed

during levelling.

The Timescale of Koineization

Koineization usually happens over three generations:

1. First generation: Adults who move to a new place; they may

adjust their speech but don't need to.

2. Second generation: Their children, especially older children and teenagers, begin to mix and simplify dialects.

3. Third generation: Their children further develop and stabilize the new language variety.

However, this three-generation model is just a general pattern. Sometimes a koine can stabilize faster (by the second generation) or take longer, depending on certain conditions. For focusing (the process of forming clear language norms) to happen, key conditions must be met:

People must interact freely.

New social networks must form.

A shared group identity should develop and be reflected in language.

While some researchers think that similarities between original dialects help speed things up, the social connection and shared identity are more important.

Conclusion

Ultimately, any study of koineization will aim to study not just linguistic outcomes or the conditions of speaker activity, but rather the links between the two. Indeed, it is the study of these

links that makes the study of koineization so valuable, for it has become a means by which scholars can respond to the actuation problem, or the fundamental question of how and why linguistic changes occur when and where they.

References :

Llamas, Carmen, et al., editors. The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics. Routledge, 2020