

The graphic realization of /l/-vocalization in Swiss German WhatsApp messages

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Abstract

This Poster represents a corpus based study into /l/-vocalization in the German speaking part of Switzerland. Its main scientific objective is to show that isolated occurrences of /l/-vocalization can be found in speakers who do not originate in the geographical area for which this phenomena has traditionally been described. This result is relevant for the discussion of /l/-vocalization because the study does not look at the realization of the sound in specific words as they are produced in an artificial setting but rather at real data as it is written by informants in everyday WhatsApp communications and as such shows an extended use of the phenomena by a group of speakers hitherto ignored.

/l/-vocalization, i.e. the replacement of a lateral approximant [l] by the vowel [u] is a well described feature of some Swiss German dialects (GSW). Phonological (e.g. Haas (1983), who mentions a implicational scale of phonological factors that favor /l/-vocalization) and sociolinguistic (e.g. Christen (2001)) restrictions and promoters are well described. The *Linguistic Atlas of German-Speaking Switzerland* (Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz, 1962 to 2003), is the most renowned documentation of the GSW dialects representing regional variation in linguistic features. It describes /l/-vocalization as a feature roughly to be found between Berne and Lucerne. A more recent study (Leemann et al., 2014) found /l/-vocalization to progress to "... southeasterly, southerly, and westerly directions, but with much less success to the north and northwest, where the equally influential dialectal areas of Basel and Zürich seem to exert opposing influences" (Leemann et al., 2014, 191).

A large scale multilingual corpus (617 chats, 5,5 Mio tokens) of authentic WhatsApp messages was compiled in 2014 at the University of Zurich (cf. Ueberwasser and Stark (in print) and www.whatsup-switzerland.ch). The 45 chats from this corpus that are in GSW and for which informants provided information about their home town today and when they were in 5th grade (± 12 years old) were used for the study.

Focusing on the places where informants lived when in 5th grade, /l/-vocalization can, of course, be found in the expected area but also around Zurich and Basel in suburban places. However, in these areas, /l/-vocalization is not applied as consequently as in the core area but very sporadically. The tokens that are realized with /l/-vocalization follow different phonological patterns. Even though many of them come from the highest class in Haas' implicational scale, not all of them do. On the other hand, the lexemes to which /l/-vocalization is applied outside the expected area are mostly very frequent and thus salient in the GSW subcorpus and often interjections. These and more results will be presented in the poster.

Keywords: Swiss German dialects, /l/-vocalization, dialect use in WhatsApp messages

References

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