CALL FOR PAPERS

WORKSHOP: Democratization in English(es): Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives

Workshop convenors

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Workshop summary

Social changes are usually reflected through language, and a recent example of it is democratization, the linguistic result of "changing norms in cultural relations" (Leech et al. 2009: 259). More specifically, it is said to imply "the removal of inequalities and asymmetries in the discursive and linguistic rights, obligations and prestige of groups of people" (Fairclough 1992: 201), and to reflect the "speakers' tendency to avoid unequal and face-threatening modes of interaction" (Farrelly and Seoane 2012: 393). Thus democratization refers to a tendency to reduce markers of social distance and a wish for increasing social equality through language. As such, it has been at work in English from the 19th century onwards, and it is particularly common in the 20th c. Democratization has been the focus of many corpus-based studies, where it has been held partially responsible, for example, for changes in the use of specific modals and semi-modals in British and American English (e.g. Myhill 1995, Leech 2003, Smith 2003). Other suggested effects include the decrease of titular nouns (*Mr, Ms., Mrs.*) and masculine pronouns (Baker 2010a), and the use of generic *they* instead of *he* to refer to an epicene antecedent (Farrelly & Seoane 2012).

Nevertheless, the term 'democratization' is not universally used and may not occur in studies dealing with the same phenomenon. For example, while Baker (2010b) suggests that the reduction of male bias in language use is attributable to societal democratization, the term is not used in Paterson (2014), who simply talks about 'gender equality' and

'non-sexist language'. Another issue is that in corpus studies democratization is often considered to overlap with related processes, particularly colloquialization and informalization (Mair 1997, 2006, Farrelly & Seoane 2012). This is probably due to the fact that democratization is not fully characterized with respect to factors such as register (Biber 2012), origin (Paterson 2014), and consciousness of speakers (Labov 2007). Detailed corpus-based analyses along these dimensions would contribute to disentangle democratization from other processes. We invite papers addressing linguistic democratization from different perspectives: diachronic and synchronic, in inner and outer-circle varieties, and using both large and small, carefully curated corpora. Possible research questions include:

· How do democratization patterns differ in inner and outer-circle varieties?
· Do democratizing features exhibit similar historical developments?
· What role do registers play in the emergence and diffusion of the linguistic features involved?
· What can be gained from an analysis of mega-corpora of global Englishes like GloWbE (Davies 2013a) or the NOW corpus (Davies 2013b)?
· What evidence can social media corpora provide about democratization of discourse (cf. Baker and McEnery 2015)?

Call for papers

Abstracts should be between 400 and 500 words in length (excluding references) and both full papers and work-in-progress reports are welcome. They should be sent to both lucia.loureiro@uib.es and turo.hiltunen@helsinki.fi and the deadline for abstract submission is 15th December 2017. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by 1st January 2018.

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