

HYPERCORRECTION AS A MEASURING-INSTRUMENT FOR INTERVARIANTS :  
DIALECT-INTERFERENCE IN FLEMISH DUTCH

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Hypercorrection is usually considered a sociolinguistic and not a purely linguistic term. It is "an incorrect analogy with a form in a prestige dialect, which the speaker has imperfectly mastered" (DeCamp 1972). Whether a form will be characterized as hypercorrect will depend on the social status of the speaker's "own" dialect relative to the standard of the community.

Linguistically speaking there is no difference between the process involved in hypercorrection and two of the processes involved in language change in general, namely rule addition and rule generalization. Whether the results of these processes will be considered hypercorrections will depend on where they originate. For instance, if rule (over)generalization originates from the standard language, nobody will call it hypercorrection. It is clear that hypercorrection is a consequence of the tension that is activated when a prestige code and a stigmatized code are competing.

On the other hand, hypercorrection is often a symptom of linguistic insecurity ; as such, and also because it is in part the result of a psychological process, it is connected closely with the linguistic competence of every speaker who is subject to it and goes beyond the relation between prestige code and stigmatized code in which it originates.

From this it should be clear that hypercorrection is a phenomenon that has to be studied from two angles, since it relates to two different spheres of human behavior.

The aspects of hypercorrection that are linked with linguistic insecurity and other "mental" phenomena, can be called personal ; they might be studied in a psychologically inspired, theoretical frame, such as the psychology of the second language learner and language attitude theory.

The aspects of hypercorrection that relate to the existence of prestige codes and stigmatized codes is more sociolinguistic and is best studied in the frame of this discipline. I will try to elaborate these aspects in the following paragraphs.

### 1. The connection between hypercorrection and sociolinguistics.

It has not been the major trend in sociolinguistics up to now, to study the co-occurrence of linguistic variables in language varieties. Labov, for instance, often limits himself to the study of a few linguistic variables. Studies of this kind, such as his "Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores" are important to gain socially relevant insight into linguistic variation.

On the other hand the study of variables in interrelation, of which Wolfram and Fasold's "The Study of Social Dialects in American English" is an example, stresses the linguistic aspects of socially determined variation in language. This latter kind of study lends itself more to the systematic examination of phenomena such as hypercorrection, precisely because of the focus on the linguistic aspects.

An interesting territory for a more or less elaborated investigation of hypercorrection in this respect, and in others as well, is the linguistic situation in Flanders, the northern region of Belgium. This situation can be characterized as an unstable form of diglossia, with as contributors the Flemish dialects on the one hand and a Belgianized form of standard Dutch on the other hand. It is a situation not unlike that in many highly industrialized regions in Western Europe. Due to historical circumstances however, among which a centuries long domination by a French speaking elite and bureaucracy is a major element, there is a very high dialect resistency in Flanders.

For about half a century now, standard Dutch has been taking over the role that French used to play. The Flemish dialects are closely related to the Dutch standard - in fact they contributed heavily to it from the 14th till the 16th century - and they are now slowly merging towards a Dutch standard with typical Flemish traits.

The linguistic variants used by the Flemish can be situated

on a continuum ranging from pure dialect to pure standard, with many intermediate stages in between. The variants on the dialect-end of the continuum are typically used in informal situations only.

From now on I will call the variants associated with informal situations endogenous variants. This term implies perfect familiarity with the variant from the part of the user. In contrast to this, I will call variants associated with formal situations, exogenous variants; the familiarity of the speaker with these variants is usually limited. As standardization is spreading throughout the speech community, the endogenous variant moves along the continuum in the direction of the standard.

Figure 1. The Flemish linguistic situation anno 1980 on a continuous scale.

	dialect	standard
	■—————■	
formality	-	+
endogenous	+	-
exogenous	-	+

The Flemish are coping with characteristic difficulties in making the Dutch standard their own. For one thing, the centuries-long absence of a related standard language has produced an obstacle for standardization in the form of the numerous dialects which are still the preferred variant of most of the people, even in the cities. This has widened the gap between the endogenous and the exogenous variants for many members of the speech community. Consequently there is a big amount of interference from the endogenous in the exogenous variant.

Turning back to our starting-point, the need for the study of variables in a systematic way, it seems worthwhile to systematize dialect-interference, e.g. by categorizing it. One categorization is the division into straight and reverse interference. Straight interference is the process by which elements from the endogenous variant persist effectively in the exogenous variant. The front vowels in the western dialects, for example, are pronounced much more open than those of the standard. Straight interference from the endogenous variant (the dialect) means that the western speaker for whom the standard is a rarely used variant, will pronounce the standard front vowels at least slightly more open than is the norm (see example (1) in Table 1.). Reverse

interference in this case would entail that the speaker pronounces these vowels more closed than is the norm under the influence of, for instance, school instruction, which has made him/her aware of his/her "too open vowels".

In other words, the interference here is only indirect ; it is the result of an evasion-strategy and moreover it is reverse because the result is the opposite of the element that caused it. These examples are from the phonetic level, examples from other levels can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Dialect-interference :

- phonetic level : straight : too open front vowels (1)  
 reverse : overdiphthongization (2)  
 morphophonological level : straight : dropping of infinitive -/ə/ (3)  
 reverse : overstressing of final infinitive -/n/ (4)  
 syntactic level : straight : word order in and around verbal group (5)  
 reverse : word order in subordinate sentence (6)

	English	a Flemish dialect	Standard Dutch	Interference in standard
(1)	to work	/wærkn/	/wɛrkə/	/wɛ <sub>ɾ</sub> rkən/
(2)	to remain	/blɛ.vn/	/blɛ. <sup>i</sup> və/	/bleivən/
(3)	to milk	/mɛ,ɪkn/	/mɛɪkə/	/mɛɪkn/
(4)	to sit	/zɪ.tə#/ but :	/zɪtə#/ but :	/zɪtən#/
	to sit on s. th.	/zɪ.tənpits/	/zɪtənpits/	
(5)	I would like to go home	Ik zou willen naar huis gaan	Ik zou naar huis willen gaan	Ik zou willen naar huis gaan
(6)	I know that I haven't been (verb) here	Ik weet dat ik niet geweest ben	Ik weet dat ik hier niet geweest ben	Ik weet dat ik hier niet ben geweest
	I know that I'm not wanted (adj) here	Ik weet dat ik hier niet gewenst ben	Ik weet dat ik hier niet gewenst ben	Ik weet dat ik hier niet ben gewenst

A typical example of reverse interference is hypercorrection. As has been mentioned, DeCamp (1972) says that hypercorrection is an incorrect analogy with a form in a prestige dialect which the speaker has imperfectly mastered. This does not connect hypercorrection explicitly with interference ; however there is often a link between the two : hypercorrection can be a result of knowledge, from the part of the speaker, of interference in a particular part of the language, and a systematic elusion of this interference.

I would like to define hypercorrection in the Flemish situation as the overgeneralization of a linguistic rule, which is triggered by the awareness, from the part of the speaker, of endogenous interference in his/her exogenous variant. Since there is always reflection present in this process, which makes the interference indirect, and since the result is usually the opposite of what caused it, hypercorrection can be characterized as reverse interference. This among other things makes it worthwhile to study the co-occurrence of hypercorrections.

Another motive for this kind of study could be, that by trying to find the linguistic rules that govern hypercorrection, we may add a linguistic dimension to the social-psychological frame in which this phenomenon has found a well deserved place.

In all kinds of Flemish hypercorrections, moving away from the endogenous system is very important. As I have already mentioned, it is usually the awareness of a particular "deviation" in the endogenous system, which triggers reverse interference and thus hypercorrection. In Flanders, however, this phenomenon receives a special dimension through the low status that the Flemish have been taught to bestow on their dialects. In the overgeneralization of rules, avoiding the endogenous variant is the main motive.

Within the sociolinguistic framework, hypercorrection can again be studied from two angles, according to the two main components of this discipline.

#### 1.a. The social aspect.

It is important to understand the social stratification of hypercorrection. Labov (1972) has drawn attention to the special role that American Lower Middle Class speakers play here.

In Flanders this social dimension is not so obvious : since standardization has begun relatively late there (around the second war, whereas in most surrounding European countries it started around the seventeenth century), the school and the media are important democratizing elements which "crisscross" the "normal" linguistic constellation of the social classes.

At first glance, all of Flanders seems to be "lower middle class" in this respect. Hypercorrection is found in all social classes ; this may be due to the fact that in Flanders it is connected primarily with the firmly rooted linguistic insecurity (see later) which is spread out over all the social classes in the Flemish situation ; hypercorrection has an important linguistic-personal dimension, which is determined primarily by language attitudes, and much less by sociological influences.

However, little or no empirical or experimental research has been carried out in this respect, although it is the only answer to the question whether a social stratification can be found in Flemish hypercorrections.

Empirical research has been carried out by myself and others, about linguistic insecurity. In a research project on lexical insecurity in Freshmen/women students that I carried out in the fall of 1979, I found that women were less insecure than men. Labov (1972) on the other hand found that LMC women were more liable to speak hypercorrectly than men. This among other things suggests that hypercorrection is not connected with linguistic insecurity alone. I will come back to this topic in Section 2.

#### 1.b. The linguistic aspect.

An interesting starting-point for the study of hypercorrections here, is a typology of hypercorrections, which should, in my view, contain at least the following three categories.

##### 1.b.1. Structural-statistical.

Wolfram and Fasold have made a distinction between statistical and structural hypercorrection. Statistical hypercorrection occurs when the relative frequency of a certain form exceeds the norm of the group that is imitated. It is this kind of hypercorrection that

Labov found in the pronunciation of (r), (th) and (eh) in Lower Middle Class speakers in New York City. Structural hypercorrection occurs when a certain linguistic feature is not under total control of the speaker, as in for instance : "whom do you say is calling ?".

Statistical hypercorrection is sometimes found at the pragmatic level in Flemish speech, in other words : pragmatic rules are overgeneralized here. An example is the use of the second person. Standard Dutch and Flemish differ fundamentally here, in that the standard has a confidential and a complimentary form, namely (jij/jullie) on the one hand and (u) on the other, whereas the Flemish dialects have only one form, namely some realization of (gij), which is used in all situations, formal and informal (see Table 2.). Many Flemish, especially when confronted with Dutchmen, use (jij) too often, and in a lot of situations in which it is inappropriate.

An example of structural hypercorrection, in which the frequency of the form plays no role, and where the structure of the standard is being violated in one way or another, is to be found in Table 2. Structural hypercorrections will emerge further on, however, they seem to be more frequent than statistical ones, and they will be mentioned in the frame of other subdivisions.

Table 2. Statistical versus structural hypercorrection.

a. Statistical : more frequent use of the confidential form "jij" than is the norm				
	English	a Flemish dialect	standard Dutch	hypercorrection
confidential	you	gij	jij/jullie	jij/jullie
complimentary	you	gij	u	jij/jullie
b. Structural : overgeneralization of the rule $w \rightarrow d / V - V$				
English	a Flemish dialect	standard Dutch	hypercorrection	
to keep	/æ:wən/	/hɔ.ʷ də/		
butcher	/bi:nə:wər/	/be.nɔ.ʷ wər/	/be.nɔ.ʷ dər/	

## 1.b.2. Primary-secondary.

A second division that can be made is that between primary and secondary hypercorrections, which are illustrated in Table 3. Whereas primary hypercorrections always affect a linguistic rule in the broadest possible sense, secondary hypercorrections are the result of a hypercorrect attitude but do not affect a grammatical rule themselves. I will give an example of a secondary hypercorrection from the lexicon.

Table 3. Primary (1) versus secondary (2) hypercorrections.

	English	a Flemish dialect	standard Dutch	hypercorrection
(1)	to give a name	heten (transitive)	heten noemen (transitive)	noemen
(1)	to have a name	heten (copula)	heten (copula)	noemen
(2)	sidewalk	trottoir	trottoir	voetpad

Out of the conviction that every French and every dialect element - and certainly the two combined in one lexical entity - have to be left out of the standard, the Flemish have coined lots of what are called "Flemish Purisms", substitutions of correct standard words that are French in origin and also occur in the dialects, which contain an average of 2000 French words. One of those Flemish Purisms is "voetpad" (sidewalk) ; the standard for this word is "trottoir", obviously of French origin and also occurring in most of the Flemish dialects. Here there is no overgeneralization of a grammatical rule, as primary hypercorrection entails. What is overgeneralized is a kind of meta-rule that French and dialect are bad in the standard. This meta-rule is valid in some, but certainly not all environments ; the overgeneralization of it leads to phenomena such as Flemish Purisms. As a consequence words are chosen which lack the features French and dialect.

It is around the choice of features that the differentiation between primary and secondary hypercorrections evolves. Primary hypercorrections are triggered by a grammatical feature, such as /+copula/ in Table 3. Secondary hypercorrections are connected with non-grammatical features such as /+or-French/ in the sidewalk example.

### 1.b.3. Different grammatical levels.

Another possible categorization of hypercorrections can be made according to the part of the grammar in which they are found. Table 2 and 3 contain lexical and pragmatic hypercorrections. In most grammatical models, these parts are outside the grammar as a structure of rules governing the construction of sentences. This has its consequences for the nature of the hypercorrections involved, in that for instance features or meta-rules and not grammatical rules are overgeneralized.

Table 1 on the other hand, shows syntactic, morphological and phonetic hypercorrections, in which grammatical rules are overgeneralized.

Typologies such as the one I have made an attempt at may be helpful to determine the level of standardization, a process which has a different rate of spread according to social stratification. Some types of hypercorrection occur in earlier stages of the standardization than others. Their presence may be a signal that standardization has reached a certain stage in a particular stratum.

## 2. Hypercorrection and the theory of intervariants.

As I have mentioned earlier, the transition from a dialect-governed to a standard-governed linguistic situation in Flanders, is an accelerated process, which nevertheless results in a great many intermediate stages. The variants used there are based on the standard language, but carry more or less heavy and more or less constant dialect-characteristics. These characteristics vary substantially according to the region the speaker comes from, the formality versus informality of the situation and, to a lesser extent, the social class one belongs to.

I would like to call the intermediate stages intervariants, analogous with Selinker's "interlanguages". Interlanguages are stages that the learner of a second language has to go through before s/he reaches a satisfactory level. As says Selinker (1972 : 214) : "One would be completely justified in hypothesizing, perhaps even compelled to hypothesize the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a Target Language norm". In the theory of intervariants, the notion "Native Language" of Selinker

is replaced by "dialect, or endogenous variant", the notion "Target Language" by "standard or exogenous variant" ; "Interlanguage" is replaced by "intervariant". Intervariants are for groups of speakers in an unstable diglossic situation, what interlanguages are for individual learners of a second language.

Of course the two phenomena do not run parallel to the very end ; it is rather so, that the analogy between the acquisition of a second language and that of the standard language is restricted to certain phenomena.

What strikes me in particular is the usefulness of the notion "fossilization", that Selinker considers essential for interlanguages. "Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular Native Language will tend to keep in their Interlanguage relative to a particular Target Language, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the Target Language" (Selinker 1972 : 215).

The systematic interferences from the Flemish dialects into standard Dutch to which many hypercorrections belong, bear a striking resemblance to fossilized items.

Fossilized items can be considered, in my view, linguistic evidence for the existence of intervariants. I think that dialect-interferences on the whole are imitated rather than resulting individually from every native dialect speaker who attempts to speak the standard. Hypercorrection as such for example, is a very ephemeral phenomenon. It triggers language change, but this process is not repeated in every member of the speech community. I suggest that the resulting linguistic phenomenon, rule over-generalization, is taken over by imitation, not, as DeCamp says, by the second generation, but already by speakers of the same generation.

Extra-linguistic evidence for this hypothesis is provided by Flemish speakers who use fossilized items without speaking the native dialect themselves. In this case the causal relation between the dialect and the fossilized items is non-existent and it is clear that those speakers have acquired the fossilized item in the process of imitating an intervariant.

It seems clear to me, since fossilized items are so crucial

in the study of intervariants, that much insight in this phenomenon is to be gained by the systematic study of these items. Most interesting among those seem to me to be the hypercorrections, since they are the result of reverse interference.

A typical example of a fossilized item which is at the same time a hypercorrection, is the following. A western Fleming is often recognized immediately as such by the confusion between velar fricative /ɣ/ and laryngal /h/. As can be seen in Tables 4 and 5, /ɣ/ is phonetically realized as [ɣ̣] in the standard and [ḥ] in the dialects, whereas phoneme /h/ is realized as [ḥ] in the standard and [ø] in these dialects. Phonetically, no [ɣ̣] is present in the western dialects.

In switching from the dialect to the standard, a speaker has to replace his/her own [ḥ] by /ɣ/ and, which is much more difficult, he/she has to fill in [ø] spaces with [ḥ]. Thus the phoneme /h/ has to be transferred from certain words and positions to completely other words and positions. This is an intricate procedure which gives rise to two kinds of hypercorrections.

Occidental Flemings overgeneralize the transition-rule that dialect [ø] has to be replaced by [ḥ], to positions where [ḥ] does not occur in the standard. These positions are accidental gaps, since /h/ is always possible there according to the morpheme structure rules. This you see illustrated in example (1) in Table 5. An occidental Fleming will say [ḥɛmər] instead of /ɛmər/.

Example (2) illustrates a second kind of hypercorrection. Here a rule, that [ḥ] from the dialect is to be replaced by [ɣ̣] is overgeneralized to the [ḥ] of the standard. Thus we get [ɣ̣ant] instead of standard [hant].

Table 4. Configuration of the phonemes /ɣ/ and /h/ in the standard (Dutch) and the western dialects.

	phonological level		phonetic level	
dialect	ɣ	h	h	ø
standard	ɣ	h	ɣ	h

Table 5. Hypercorrection in the 'standard' of western Flemings.

	English	standard	western dialect	western interviant
(1)	bucket	ɛ mər	i <sup>a</sup> mər	hɛmər
(2)	hand	hant	ant	ɣant
(3)	Ghent	ɣɛnt	hɔnt	hɛnt

These kinds of hypercorrections are fine examples of fossilized items : they even "reemerge in Interlanguage productive performances of linguistic structures which were thought to be eradicated", which is in Selinker's opinion "perhaps the most crucial fact which any adequate theory of second language learning will have to explain".

Starting from the particular Flemish hypercorrections that I used as examples, I want to propose a number of hypotheses concerning the relation between hypercorrections and interviant.

(a) Certain types of hypercorrection occur most frequently when interviant are being formed and can thus be considered interviant-markers. Hypercorrections like (2), for instance, will not occur in the speech of dialect-users who speak the standard for the very first time. They occur after the deviation of the native system from the exogenous system has been stressed by more authoritative persons and they point to a definite awareness of this deviation, or else they occur after the native dialect speaker has been in more or less intensive contact with interviant-speakers.

On the other hand examples (2) and (3) in Table 5 do occur frequently with speakers whose native system is an interviant. Here we can apply again what I mentioned earlier, namely that this proves the lack of continuous direct dialect-interference in, and the linguistic and sociolinguistic reality of, interviant.

(b) From (a) follows that the study of hypercorrections can be used to develop a measuring-device for language-change, more specifically in interviant. For instance : example (3) is quite a constant element in interviant systems, whereas (1) disappears faster than (2) in the speech of western interviant speakers ; thus the occurrence of (1) in an interviant points to a higher

dialect-level. On the other hand interviant-users with a high dialect-level in the interviant do not necessarily use more hypercorrections than speakers with a lower dialect-level. The type of hypercorrection is more important here than the frequency with which it occurs.

(c) The type of hypercorrection that I have illustrated just now is unsystematic. A speaker will not show it in all environments, and especially the re-emergence of it is unpredictable. Moreover it is a stigmatized hypercorrection, since it originates from an unfavored dialect. As a consequence it is in no way influencing the standard. Other types however, are geographically more diffused (such as the Flemish Purisms) or stem from a higher valued language variant, and sometimes do have an impact on the standard language. The Dutch word "bevrijden" (i.e. to free) for instance is the result of a hypercorrection which "took place" more than hundred years ago ; it is the normal standard form now. This illustrates that hypercorrection can be a factor in language change, in addition to being a change marker.

When one looks at hypercorrection from this point of view, the sociolinguistic relevance of the systematic study of this phenomenon becomes clearer still.

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