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Modeling adolescents' online writing practices: The operationalization of non-standard writing on social media

We fitted multiple statistical models to capture patterns of non-standard writing practices by Flemish adolescents on social media. The models are generalized linear mixed models (GLMMs) which try to explain the frequency of certain non-standard features (response variable) through the youngsters' age, gender and educational track (predictors).

'Non-standardness' was operationalized by a wide variety of eleven deviations from the formal, written standard. The use of these features can be related to (at least) one of the maxims of chatspeak, i.e. the implicit 'rules' of informal online communication that chatters tend to apply in instant messaging and that are related to principles of brevity/economy ('type fast / be concise'), orality ('write as you speak'), and expressiveness ('compensate typographically for the lack of intonation, facial expressions and other non-verbal cues') (Androutsopoulos, 2011:149). Each maxim corresponds to a certain subset of the eleven deviations and together they cover both 'old' and 'new' vernacular (Androutsopoulos, 2011:146).

We fitted a different GLMM per subset, which allowed to capture more fine-grained tendencies: different patterns and different interactions and dynamics between the predictors emerged for the distinct sets of non-standard writing features. In other words, while a very general model in which the counts for all non-standard features are combined into one response variable reveals certain age, gender and education patterns in the data, distinct practices for distinct kinds of 'non-standardness' emerge in the more specialized models. This suggests that different types of vernacular or different types of deviations from formal standard writing are favored by different social groups and thus calls for a nuanced approach of 'non-standardness' in CMC.

References

Androutsopoulos, Jannis. (2011). Language change and digital media: A review of conceptions and evidence. In Kristiansen, Tore & Coupland, Nikolas (Eds.), *Standard Languages and Language Standards in a Changing Europe*. Oslo: Novus Press. 145-161.