Experimental approaches to the study of the social meaning of language variation
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New approaches to measuring the social meaning of language variation

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In line with the strong empirical tradition of Cognitive Sociolinguistics, this talk sets out to study the cognitive representation of language variation using novel methods to measure language attitudes. For decades, quantitative language attitude research has known little methodological innovation (Speelman et al. 2013). This contrasts sharply with the explosion of new attitude measures in social psychology, a field that is engaged in the study of attitudes more generally. The question this talk centres around is: can these new social psychological methods be used to measure attitudes towards language variation and if so, how do we adapt them to become useful tools for Cognitive Sociolinguists to study the social meaning of language?

In this talk, I will focus on two of these novel attitude measures: the Personalized Implicit Association Test (P-IAT, Olson & Fazio 2004) and the Relational Responding Task (RRT, De Houwer et al. 2015). Both methods use reaction times to measure automatic associations with the attitude object under study, in this case different language varieties. More specifically, I will present two case studies that use the P-IAT and the RRT to measure associations with standard and colloquial varieties of Belgian Dutch. In addition to discussing the results of these case studies, the paper will reflect upon the usefulness of the P-IAT and RRT as new measures for Cognitive Sociolinguists to study the cognitive, more specifically axiological representation of language variation.

