Editorial

The current issue contains four research articles. Three of them explicitly focus on language change; one indirectly suggests a possibility of the synchronic variation arising through diachronic change. The paper by Shoji Takano and Ichiro Ota revisits a widely reported observation on pitch flattening among younger speakers across Japan. The study suggests that using spontaneous speech data leads to superior and deeper insights into the understanding of pitch movements compared to studies based on decontextualized read speech alone, a practice commonly followed in studies of prosodic patterns in linguistics across sub-disciplines. The study further suggests that the findings based on decontextualized read speech may not necessarily be replicated in studies based on more spontaneous speech data.

Takano and Ota report on pitch variability involving relatively more or less dynamic movement of pitch contours as well as variability in dephrasing (not observed earlier) associated with pitch variability. The variability is conditioned by a number of internal factors such as types of Accentual Phrases (AP), duration of an AP, combination of AP types, variable dephrasing as well as an intricate interplay of region/urbanity, gender and age. The findings affirm the reported observation on an ongoing change that younger speakers show a relatively less dynamic pattern of pitch movement, but add that the observed phenomenon is more confined to the unaccented APs and AP types containing unaccented APs. A similar development is reported to be taking place in dephrasing, more evident in the speech of younger speakers. The two changes are interlinked and are more active in urban areas. Pitch-related gender differences (also reported in earlier studies) are attested in accented APs, where women regardless of region and age show a more dynamic pattern with relatively steeper declination.

Wenhua Jin and David Silva’s paper revitalizes the debate on Sapir’s drift and asks whether it is still worth looking at it again. The issue has been raised time and again (see Krishnamurti, 1998; Lass, 1987), and is often offered as an explanation for similar changes taking place in related languages separated in time and space – especially when other explanations fail. The study reports on a Voice Onset Time (VOT) shift taking place in Korean spoken in China. The shift has affected the VOT patterns for an earlier three-way contrast among tense, lax and aspirated plosives by converging the values for lax and aspirated categories. However, the underlying contrast is not lost as the shift is accompanied by a rise in the relative prominence of F0 among the younger speakers. A similar shift is also attested in other diaspora...
varieties of Korean spoken elsewhere (in North America) as well as in Korean spoken in the homeland. How can this parallel development be explained? By ruling out the possibility of contact with the mainland Korean as a possible source of change, the authors argue that the shift in question is an independent change motivated by the power of drift. A second factor contributing to the outcome is the new bilingualism and contact with the local language – Mandarin in China (and English in North America). This is not unlikely given the fact that a new ‘tense’ versus ‘lax and aspirated’ distinction in Chinese Korean seems to correspond to the VOT values of Mandarin unaspirated and English voiced stops (short-lag) and Mandarin aspirated and English voiceless (long-lag) respectively.

Morphological irregularities are not necessarily the result of historical residuals alone (Maiden, 2004). Irregularities within a paradigm may also arise through active processes of variation and change, whereby certain morphemes may fall out of their regular paradigms by becoming a new competing form. High-frequency forms in particular have been shown to be either conducive to change or resistant to change. The debate, though goes back to the 19th century (e.g., Wheeler, 1887), it continues to be the subject of discussion (see Bybee, 2006; Fertig, 2016). This is the focus of the paper by Kevin Heffernan and Yo Sato.

Heffernan and Sato demonstrate the presence of similar tendencies attested in the two sets of frequently occurring adjective/adverbial forms in Kansai dialect of Japanese. These include: (i) mitai-na ‘like ATR’ (belonging to a class of adjectives that take -na as an attributive suffix) and (ii) adverbial adjectives yoi ‘good’ and hayai ‘quickly’. The study shows that the new monomorphemic form mitaina developed from an earlier bimorphemic mitai-na over time. The new form occurs more in the speech of younger speakers than the older speakers. As an adjective mitai is expected to occur with -na attributive when it modifies a noun. However, in this case, unlike the na- adjectives, -na when co-occurring with mitai no longer serves the attributive function. It frequently occurs without a following noun, as well as with a sentence final particle.

In the other case, the two adverbial forms have fallen out of their paradigm by not participating in the ongoing process of standardization. In this process, some of the adjectives are increasingly inflected with the standard Japanese suffix -ku to derive adverbials. -ku inflected forms are on the rise in the speech of younger speakers. However, yoi and hayai are the only adverbial forms which do not follow this pattern and remain uninflected (a process the authors call ‘onbin’), demonstrating resistance to change.

Hui-Huan Chang and Victoria Rau report on variation in Yami, the only Philippine language spoken in Taiwan. Even though the use of Yami is on the decline among younger speakers, Yami shows robust variation in its relative clause structures. The variation involves an alternation between head-initial and head-final
relative clauses based on whether a head noun precedes or follows the relative clause. The variation is conditioned by two factors: (i) whether the head NP refers to new or given information, and (ii) whether the NP in the relative clause happens to be a transitive object or an intransitive subject. The study further reports that the head-final relative clauses occur far more frequently than the head-initial relative clauses. This seems typologically unusual for such languages. If Yami indeed is different in its relative clause constructions, then it adds to what is known about the typological diversity of the Philippine languages. Alternatively, this deviation might be the result of change taking place within Yami. As data was not tested for any social factors, this would require future research. The authors also raise an issue on the adequacy of the descriptions of such lesser-studied languages given the possibility of their typological distinctness. The authors report on difficulties in interpreting the particle a in Yami, which may have functions other than attributive (connecting relative clauses with the noun modified) as well. Such difficulties are not uncommon as particles and affixes in general and typologically unusual ones in particular are notoriously difficult to interpret in many languages (see Meyerhoff, 2015).

The study suggests that Yami presents much greater internal diversity – both at the macro and the micro level – than what has been uncovered in the existing research on relevant language typologies. Collaborations between sociolinguistics and typology are well attested (e.g., various articles in Kortmann, 2004). The Yami research further underscores the need for greater collaboration between variationist research (which primarily focuses on intra-language variation) and typological research (which focuses on crosslinguistic-variation).

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References


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