

The influence of intralinguistic factors on the usage of prothetic /v/ in the Prague vernacular

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Abstract

In vernacular Czech, the prothetic /v/ could be used before word-initial or stem-initial /o/ (e.g. Standard Czech /okno/, meaning 'window', or /operace/, meaning 'operation', could be realized as /vokno/ or /voperace/ in the vernacular). This variable is especially interesting because it does not behave categorically, the usage of /v/ varies, i.e. it is quite common to find both instances of /vo-/ and /o-/ in the same speech and even in the same sentence. The variable usage of prothetic /v/ has been a phenomenon noticed in the earlier research literature (see Brabcová 1973; Dejmek 1981, 1987; Jančák 1974; Jančáková 1974; Krčmová 1981; Sgall & Hronek 1993; Townsend 1990; Wilson 2010) and various factors have been suggested as influencing the usage of /v/. However, none of these researches provided a thorough statistical analysis of the variation and as a result, it still remains unknown which factors (both intralinguistic and extralinguistic) actually constraint the usage of /v/. The aim of this paper is to provide such analysis for intralinguistic factors.

The analysis is based on linguistic interviews (each approximately 1 hour long) with 13 native Prague vernacular speakers (aged 20–30 years). Altogether, the material comprises 1740 instances of the prothetic (v) variable. Based on a generalized linear mixed model it has been concluded that the usage of (v) is best explained by these predictors (fixed effects): word length (counted in phonemes), prefixation, word class, the position of the variable (at the beginning vs. inside the word), and borrowedness of the word. Other variables, like word frequency, sex or the rank of (v) in the interview did not show any effect. The data showed a small random effect of the speaker.

The results of this research were compared with older Prague vernacular data from the study by Pavel Jančák (1974). The older data are limited in that only the role of one independent variable (word type, with four values: pronouns, prepositions, prefixed lexical words, non-prefixed lexical words) were analysed, and furthermore, the study was based only on a group interviews with 9 children (aged 13–14 years). However, the older results suggest a significantly higher usage of /v/ in all four word types. Therefore, based on the apparent-time hypothesis (Bailey et al. 1991) it seems the prothetic (v) variable is undergoing a language change. In other words, the usage of /v/ in the Prague vernacular seems to be on a slow decline.

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