

Research methods in the Indian diaspora: An investigation into folk scrutiny and accent variation

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Recent research on the Indian diaspora has raised the question of the extent to which linguistic differences inform our understanding of community structures, attitudinal orientations and identity development (Sharma 2017; Hundt & Sharma 2014). However, little attention has been given to research methods aiming to investigate folk perceptions regarding accent variation in Indian transient communities.

The present work intends to focus on the relationship between language attitudes and folk awareness in a multilingual transient speech community of Indian university students located in Heidelberg, Germany. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data collected through sociolinguistic interviews, surveys and accent identification tasks, the paper will report on the importance of relying on experimental research designs and mixed-method approaches in order to shed light on the highly complex sociolinguistic situation of transient communities. As a matter of fact, in a community where no previous investigation had ever been carried out - except for the author's master thesis research (Regnoli 2016) - a quantitative or qualitative approach alone seemed rather unrealistic. For this reason, the study used a convergent parallel design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011) drawing on perceptual dialectology, linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistic research methods in order to test whether students' folk perceptions regarding accent variation had a common ground with analysed linguistic data (Niedzielski & Preston 2003; Duranti 1997).

Reported results suggest that methodology triangulation may be an effective paradigm in folk linguistic and attitude studies for its valid, replicable and reliable results. As far as the present study is concerned, network integration played a crucial role on attitudinal orientation and identity development. Moreover, the transient aspect of the community proved to be a valuable sociolinguistic factor in the fostering of in-group affiliations and distance and that speakers' constant need to renegotiate identity is indexed in their willingness (or not) to shed their regional, linguistic and ethnic identities in deference to their pan-Indian ones depending on the community's fluid sociolinguistic circumstances.

References

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