Practicing what the party preaches: Loanword variation, language contact, and politics

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This study extends Hall-Lew et al.'s (2010) sociolinguistic research on politically influenced loanword variation, which finds the rate of the 'foreign (a)' (Boberg 1997) in *Iraq* to differ amongst U.S. politicians, with liberals preferring unnativized [ɑ] and conservatives preferring nativized [æ]. In the current study, variable loanword production is examined amongst non-politicians in terms of political alignment to determine if Hall-Lew et al.'s findings hold more generally. The current study also considers Weinreich's hypothesis (1968:27) that one's attitude "toward the source language" mediates adaptation, such that if one associates more prestige with a language they are less inclined to nativize it in linguistic production, and vice versa. Thus, factors beyond politics are examined, including attitude toward a linguistic region or group, language contact ideology, and approbation of a 'global persona'. Two separate methodologies are developed to carry out this work, including a production survey and an experimental production task alongside an Implicit Association Test (IAT) and Likert questionnaire.

A language survey utilizing a geography-guised quiz was conducted in New York City, eliciting placename utterances from approximately 100 respondents. Of the placenames used, three with variable pronunciations were analyzed (listed with the unnativized variant first): *Iraq* ([ɑ]~[æ]), *Quebec* ([k]~[kw]), and *Chile* ([e]~[i]). A follow-up questionnaire elicited respondents' self-reported political affiliations (liberal, moderate, conservative) and other demographic factors. Political affiliation is identified as a significant predictor in the expected direction: those identifying as more "liberal" used the unnativized variants more. Other factors expected to play a role, such as age, education level, and regional identity are not found to.

Experimentally, a word list task elicited utterances of multiple placenames, including *Iran* and *Iraq*. Subjects (N=30) then performed an IAT (Greenwald et al. 1998) between Iran and Samoa (assuming Samoa to be politically uncharged) to measure relative implicit biases. Finally, subjects answered an extensive Likert agreement questionnaire, which elicited stances regarding political alignment, the Middle East, language contact ideology, and global vs. nationalist persona using multiple distinct items per factor. Logistic regression models were used to compare predictors of [ɑ]~[æ] pronunciation of *Iran* and *Iraq*. Here, political leaning is not found to be a significant predictor; rather, attitudes (both implicit ($p<.05$) and explicit ($p<.01$)) toward the source region, as well as one's 'global persona' indexation ($p<.05$) are.

The findings of this multi-method research suggest that loanword variation across political identities is not limited to politicians, and it holds for words from multiple source languages and for variables beyond foreign (a). Moreover, the findings demonstrate that other factors besides political identity may more strongly and directly predict loanword variation, such that *political identity* could be a second-order indexation to factors of *political ideology* like attitudes toward the source region and toward language contact. Finally, this work expands upon Weinreich's notion that one's attitude toward the source language mediates adaptation, suggesting that it is one's attitude toward a region or group, not just the language itself, that is at play.

References

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