Unn Røyneland
Dept of Linguistic and Scandinavian Studies
University of Oslo
e-mail: unn.royneland@iln.uio.no

The use of correspondence analysis in a sociolinguistic study of dialect levelling

Abstract

In this paper I will present some of the results from a comparative study of dialect levelling in Norway. In particular I focus on examples which demonstrate the use of correspondence analysis, a descriptive and explorative multivariate statistical analysis. This method has been developed, and used mostly, by French sociologists. However, it has become increasingly popular in the Anglo-American social sciences as well, thanks to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his analysis of the "social space" (e.g. Bourdieu 1984). But, as far as I know, this statistical method has not previously been used in sociolinguistic research.

Correspondence analysis may turn out to be particularly profitable within sociolinguistics, since we here often deal with complex situations where many variables work together. This method makes it possible to display the totality of relations between the different variables – linguistic and social – together in one graphic picture, and thereby discover hidden patterns in the material. Bivariate statistics, the method most commonly used within traditional variationist studies, is not as well suited to uncover the patterns and structures of big and complex data sets (i.e. Clausen 1998).

The examples I present, reveal the relative relations between twelve social and fifteen linguistic variables. Among other things we see that group membership among adolescents, and local or urban orientation, is more important to their linguistic behaviour than for instance gender and social class. We also see interesting differences between the two communities of this study which can be related to differences in ethno-linguistic vitality and to the commodification of the dialect at the linguistic marketplace.

References
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