THE SILLINESS OF THE STANDARD

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Abstract

This article examines the silliness of standard languages. It begins by first noting the absurdity of some claims about the supposed superior logic of standards (e.g., "two negatives make a positive") and the even more subjective notion of the beauty and expressiveness of standards. The major portion of the paper, however, is spent in showing that standard languages are very poorly organized, if by organization one means consistency, symmetry, and simplicity of operations. Nonstandards win these contests in each examined case. The article concludes by evaluating some competing notions about the source for this standard disorganization or silliness: Is it a product of linguistic isolation? Is it outright classism? The answer appears to be complex.

Keywords

<Standard languages> <Language attitudes> <Language and logic> <Language and aesthetics> <Social class>

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la estupidez de las lenguas estándares. Comienza subrayando el carácter absurdo de algunas afirmaciones sobre la pretendida mayor lógica de las variedades estándares (por ejemplo, "dos negativos hacen un positivo")

y la incluso aún más subjetiva noción de belleza y expresividad atribuida a tales variedades. Sin embargo, la mayor parte del trabajo se centra en mostrar que las variedades estándares están organizadas de manera muy pobre, si por organización se entiende consistencia, simetría y simplicidad de las operaciones. Las variedades no estándares ganan esa pugna en cada caso examinado. El artículo finaliza evaluando algunas nociones en conflicto sobre las fuentes de esta desorganización o estupidez propia del estándar: ¿es un producto del aislamiento lingüístico?; ¿es un clasismo absoluto? La respuesta parece ser compleja.

Palabras clave

<Lenguas estándar> <Actitudes lingüísticas> <Lenguaje y lógica> <Lenguaje y estética> <Clase social >

At a US sociolinguistics meeting a number of years ago, a young graduate student stood up at the end of a panel on the status of African American English (AAE) and asked the following question: "William Labov wrote 'The logic of Nonstandard English' several years ago [1969, to be precise] and completely debunked the idea that a nonstandard variety lacks the ability to express complex, logical thought. Why do we have to keep talking about this after that conclusive demonstration?"[1] A member of the panel, a distinguished scholar of AAE, replied: "Thank you for your question. May I ask what kind of toothpaste you use?" The young man responded "Ipana." "Well," said the linguist, "has the Ipana company told you only once about the superiority of their toothpaste, or have you seen countless pieces of advertising from them in numerous media formats, giving you the same information over and over?"

It would appear that since that time many linguists have taken that suggestion to heart. Milroy and Milroy (1985, now in its 3rd edition, 1999) devote an entire book to surveying the arbitrariness of standard forms and the vehemence throughout history with which the public and self-appointed arbiters[2] of usage react to any infringement on what they see as correct, logical, and traditional in language. Lippi-Green (1994) continued further debunking of the "standard language ideology," a cultural imperative that values standard varieties above all others on the usual grounds of its superior logic, aesthetic and expressive qualities, and even its reflection of a speaker's personal responsibility. In 1997 Lippi-Green followed up on this theme in her book *English with an accent*, in which she identifies popular culture sources that help instill the belief in

standard language superiority as well as professional and personal outcomes in the lives of those prejudiced against (now in its 2nd edition, 2012). In 1998 Bauer and Trudgill commissioned a number of articles for *Language myths* that dealt mainly with folk or popular beliefs about standard and nonstandard varieties, and Bex and Watts (1999) is an anthology of papers that provide an excellent historical account of arguments for and against the standard language ideology in the US and Britain. Niedzielski and Preston (2000) provide extensive quotations from Northern US residents (southeastern Michigan) in a general study of folk linguistic beliefs that show the dominance of the attraction and defense of the standard as well as the degrading of all other varieties.

This ideology is by no means limited to Anglo-American venues. The chapters in Preston (1999) and Long and Preston (2002), edited volumes of research in perceptual dialectology, show an intense regard for the standard among respondents from Belgium, Canada (French and English), Cuba, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mali, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and Wales. A book-length study that focuses on attitudes towards Spanish in Costa Rica (Jara Murillo 2006) finds prescriptivism and positive attitudes towards standard Spanish to be very well entrenched there as does the recent work of Mailikänen and Palander in Finland (2014). Recent articles in the new *Journal of Linguistic Geography* add China and Poland to that list, and there are doubtless many more.

In spite of all this outpouring of evidence and argumentation, their companies would go broke if linguists were in charge of toothpaste sales. There is evidence, however, of some cracks in the façade of the all-powerful standard. Studies of European varieties in particular suggest that the old standards may be withering in some places and being replaced by younger, less conservative varieties or by the standardization of local varieties, particularly with regard to pronunciation (e.g., Kristiansen and Grondelaers 2013). In most places, however, the changes are taking place outside the conscious awareness of speakers (i.e., "change from below"), and the standard language ideology remains in place, even though the standard has changed. That allows old-fashioned ideas to remain firmly in place, and one need only consult internet chatter about good and bad language to see how firmly those conservative notions still surface, in many cases with considerable vehemence against those who use forms that show they are not only ignorant of the rules but also lacking in the intelligence or, even worse, the will to learn them.

In this paper, however, I will not duplicate Labov's long-standing proof of the ability of nonstandard grammars to express complex and logical thought, in spite of the fact that that "toothpaste" has not yet been widely accepted. I want to expose instead the failure of standard grammars to be more aesthetically pleasing and expressive on the one hand and more logical, more consistent, and better organized on the other. I tackle the easiest job first.

If standard languages are so powerfully expressive, why do so many standard speakers feel the need (or even obey the necessity) for nonstandard language characteristics in so many of their "expressions"? Preston (2015) listed and analyzed numerous colorful, metaphoric, and slang expressions in English in which nonstandard features are required. Here is a short sampling:

1) How (a)bout them apples.

2) If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

3) That'll learn ya, dern ya. (alternatively "That'll larn ya, darn ya.")

4) You ain't seen nothin' yet.

#1 above means "So there!" (Or, to be standard about it, "I have just shown that your position is incorrect and mine irrefutable)). The standard "How about those apples?/!" is a question or exclamation about apples; the nonstandard expression has nothing whatsoever to do with apples.

#2 advises would-be fixer-uppers to leave things alone that are still operating lest they completely destroy them. I have never heard it in the standard form: "If it isn't broken, don't fix it."

3# is clear, if one knows that "learn" is a widespread nonstandard form for "teach," — someone has had a comeuppance (i.e., "taught a lesson" because of their own misdeed), but the standard form (That'll teach you, darn you) is not only lacking in rhyme but also much less expressive (and "darn," a euphemism

for "damn," may not be "standard" either).

#4 means I have shown you or you have seen some interesting or entertaining things but the best is yet to come. The standard form simply suggests that whatever is to be seen has not yet occurred or been presented.

This list could be considerably expanded, but in these and many more cases the artistic and expressive nature of the nonstandard forms compared to the blandness and literality of the standard shows how inexpressive the latter may be. One may argue, of course, that these are all clichés and should be avoided, but in the hands (well, mouths) of speakers known for their folk artistic expressiveness they are a necessary part of their arsenal of linguistic devices. One might also argue that folk artistry is not Hochkultur, but that would deny the tradition in many languages to write poetry, short stories, novels, and dramas in authentic vernaculars, the very ones considered nonstandard in their own domains. Popular culture also imposes requirements on nonstandard use. For example, films dubbed in another language often turn to the use of local nonstandard varieties to represent the nonstandard speech of the original (e.g., Queen 2004 on the use of nonstandard German for African American speech in US films). But those "higher culture" uses of nonstandards are seen by many in the critical trade as not simply representations of the demographic status of the speakers represented but also as authentic artistic expressions in themselves (e.g., most of the chapters in Taavitsainen and Melchers 1999).

I will spend no more space on the aesthetic claim that standard languages are more beautiful than nonstandard ones except to point out that beauty is in the eye (ear) of the beholder (hearer).

I turn now to the claim that standard languages are more structured or rule-governed and (perhaps therefore) more logical. Double negation is a good place to start, and we turn first to the Oxford Dictionaries blog site:

Is there a specific grammatical slip that's guaranteed to make you wince? I bet there is! While it's hard to say why certain linguistic errors cause our hackles to rise rather than others, everyone has their own bête noire. You could split your infinitives till kingdom come

and I wouldn't bat an eyelid, but whenever I hear something like:

I don't know nothing about computers.

OR

It won't do you no good.

I cringe and have to restrain a nitpicking urge to say, 'two negatives make a positive: do you really mean that you know something about computers?'.

http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2012/02/grammar-myths-3/

It is perhaps gratuitous to notice the visceral reaction this writer describes — wincing and cringing. Later on he tells us, as so many have, that two negatives make a positive in math and logic. Let's just look at math. All the pundits who say this forget to tell us what mathematical operation they have in mind. Surely not addition since -2 + -3 is -5. Two negatives always make a negative in addition. Maybe they have subtraction in mind, but since -5 - -2 = -3, apparently not, but if you subtract a larger negative number from a smaller one, you do indeed get a positive (-2 - -5 = 3), but this is a very specific requirement in subtraction and cannot bear the weight of the "two negatives make a positive" linguistic claim. Perhaps division is the answer; a negative number divided by a negative number yields a positive (e.g. -8/-4 = 2), and sure enough a negative divided by a positive and a positive divided by a negative are both negative (and, of course, a positive divided by a positive is positive). In fact, the same rules apply to multiplication, but it is difficult to see how any of these operations (except perhaps addition) applies to human language. That, however, would not deter grammar pundits who might point out that it goes without saying that correct usage is complex. Math too is complex, but it does not rest on the certainty (or "logic") that double negation wincers imagine. The very basis of the division and multiplication laws depends on a convention, one simply arbitrarily agreed on by mathematicians so that the rest of the theory will work. "Nimrod" (user name on Yahoo Answers) lays it out this way:

So the real question is,

(-1)(-1) = ?

and the answer is that the following convention has been adopted:

(-1)(-1) = +1

This convention has been adopted for the simple reason that any other convention would cause something to break.

For example, if we adopted the convention that (-1)(-1) = -1, the distributive property of multiplication wouldn't work for negative numbers:

(-1)(1 + -1) = (-1)(1) + (-1)(-1)

(-1)(0) = -1 + -1

0 = -2

Since everything except +1 can be excluded as impossible, it follows that, however improbable it seems, (-1)(-1) = +1.

In other words it is not so much as a rule but rather a convention to make some of the previous assumptions work. It really could mean that the concept of negative numbers introduced conflicts so basic to math itself that this workaround had to be assumed for everything else that follows to work. It could be that negative numbers should fail the distributive property because by their very nature negative numbers would normally do that but mathematicians don't like that. ("Nimrod," Yahoo Answers)

At higher mathematical levels, the "rule" that two negatives make a positive (at least in multiplication and by extension division) is just a convention. Why don't speakers of human languages also get to lay down conventions? Of course they do, and the convention for some nonstandard English is just as mathematically plausible (necessary in fact if one appeals to addition) as the somewhat more arcane assumption of the standard language. For most multiple negation speakers of American English, the rule is rather simple: to negate a clause, negate the verb and negate every other indefinite noun phrase in the clause.[3]

I went to a bar last night.

Standard negation: I didn't go to a bar last night.

Nonstandard negation: I never went to no bar last night.[4]

Equally important is the fact that a large number of human languages seem to be happy with what English grammar pundits call a mathematical and logical misuse.

Spanish: No tengo nada. I don't have anything (Literally *Not have-I nothing*)

Zulu: Abantu abasebenzi. The people are not working (Literally *Plural-person not-SC-work-not*, where "SC" equals "subject concord")

Many more could be cited, but which is better (simpler, more regular, more logical)? A language like Spanish that takes both a negative particle

(no) and a negative indefinite (nada) to express negation or English that takes a negative particle (not, n't) but chooses a special indefinite to go along with negatives (any)? Maybe Zulu is better. It puts a negative marker on both the front and back ends of the verb (like Standard French "ne … pas"). I suspect this is a contest that English will not win (nor perhaps lose either). But the appeal to math and logic that the English way is somehow superior seems very silly.[5]

But there is silliness in the very grammatical paradigms of Standard English itself. I will take it as a fact that symmetry in language makes it more learnable and that asymmetry makes it harder to learn. Look at third-person singular hissing and buzzing in English:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	I walk	we walk
2nd person	you walk	you walk
3rd person	he, she it walks	they walk

What is the logic of this? Why hissing and buzzing only in 3rd person singular verbs? If, like me, you believe that symmetry is at least more learnable, then you will approve of one conjugation in African American English:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	I walk	we walk
2nd person	you walk	you walk
3rd person	he, she it walk	they walk

That's much better. You surely don't need the hissing on "walk" to let you know it's third person singular since you already said *he, she, it, Mr. Pfeffer, Sally, or the little dog from next door.* English is not a pro-drop language so, unlike the Spanish sentence given above, the *–o* marker on the verb is not necessary to indicate person and number. The AAE system looks more efficient and, if you like symmetry, even prettier. Here's another solution:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	I walk	we walk
2nd person	you walk	you walk
3rd person	he, she it walks	they walks

This is essentially the US Appalachian system, and again there is a nice symmetry — all third persons are marked with hissing and buzzing. This is another good solution to the asymmetry of the standard.[6]

Perhaps you have also noticed in the above that Standard English has the same form for *you* singular and *you* plural. This is a little silly, isn't it? I have personally witnessed (and been involved in) confusion over this in more than one situation. ("Would you like to go get a drink?" "Do you mean just me or all of us?"). Nonstandard speakers will not put up with such silliness, and they have widespread resolutions to the problem in US English, where *you* remains the singular form only and regional variants of *you* plural abound: you-all, y'all, youse, yinz, you-uns, yunz, and you-guys (this last of which has done away with the gender specificity of *guys*).[7]

And now the sad case of *whom*. The use of *whom* for all non-subject positions or instances derived from non-subject positions perhaps strikes more terror in the hearts of would-be standard speakers than any other prescription. Afraid that they might *who* when they should have *whomed*, they produce such

things as "Whom did you say was at the front door?" and "I'm pretty sure that the man whom Mary said was a thief was in our back yard yesterday." Alas, their strivings earn them only the contempt of the pundit guardians of the standard since those two sentences require *who*. These acts of hypercorrection are indeed traps for those who would like to do well but are tempted by the fancier sound of *whom*.

Whoming is complicated by another silly rule — "Don't use prepositions to end sentences with." I find this sentence a little clumsy and have no trouble "correcting" to "Don't end sentences with prepositions." But what about this? "He's the man I walked home with." In such cases, moving the preposition to the front of the relevant clause ("He's the man with I walked home") results in gibberish and exposes the fact that the original sentence has had its clause marker deleted. If it is re-inserted ("He's the man who/that/whom I walked home with"), prescriptivists will insist on *whom* because it is the object of the preposition *with* (and cetainly not *that* since *the man* is human). But if you also follow the no-preposition-at-the-end rule, it must be "He's the man with whom I walked home." I would rather miss a good meal than be caught saying a sentence like that.[8] I like the deletion strategy of the original, and I might go for a *who* or (horror of horrors) even refer to a human with a *that*. In this I take comfort in George Orwell's dictum in "Politics and the English Language" to "break any … rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous" (1946), and I think the ears of many good English speakers find prepositon + *whom* forms moved to the beginnings of clauses "barbarous" (at least in speech at anything except the most formal level).

Finally, some syntactic nonsense that you might not have thought about. If we know what Bill bought, we can say sentences like this:

Bill bought a new pair of shoes.

If we don't know, we might use something like this to represent it.

Bill bought ?

where "?" indicates an unknown, which will have to be some sort of nominal since that is a requirement of the verb "buy."

We can "fill" this empty "?" with the word *what*, maintaining the idea that a question is involved.

Bill bought what?

This exclamation or echo-question is appropriate in some cases, but it is not the ordinary question; this is:

What did Bill buy?

And that simple question requires a speaker to perform several operations:

1) Move "what" to the front of the clause
2) Insert the word "do"
3) Remove the preterit marker from the verb "bought, yielding "buy"
4) Attach the preterit marker to the verb "do," yielding "did."[9]

Children don't acquire this operation early on; they produce strings like "What Bill bought," and later "What did Bill bought" (as do some learners of English as a second language) before settling on the form Standard English prefers. Now for the silliness. Let's embed this question sentence as the complement of another — "I don't know "X," where "X" is the question we have just asked. Any reasonable person would say:

I don't know what did Bill buy.

Remember all the trouble children and second language learners went through to get to this odd "do-supported" form? Now, amazingly, we ask them

to undo all that work and use the form that many of them used earlier on for the simple question in their learning process that we so roundly disapproved of, namely "What Bill bought?"

I don't know what Bill bought.

Luckily, there are dialect speakers who simply won't put up with this. "You wanted me to learn your silly, complex rule for forming these "what" questions; well, forget it; I'm not going to undo them now after I went to all that trouble. I'm sticking with 'I don't know what did Bill buy.'" That seems to me to be a very reasonable solution.

What can we make of all this silliness in the standard? It is filled with asymmetrical conjugations, complex considerations in assigning superficial case, holes in paradigms, and arcane syntactic adjustment rules (not to mention a host of irregular verb forms; try to get any school child to tell you about Standard English lie-lay and sit-set).

I first turn to Trudgill (2011) for the answer we should have (but do not). Trudgill says languages get sillier (i.e., have more complex and irregular paradigms, irregularities and idiosyncrasies of lexicon, phonology, morphology, and syntax) the more isolated they are. The main upshots of that isolation are 1) the language has very few adult learners (perhaps an occasional linguist), and 2) the children who learn it are not exposed to any alternatives to the models presented to them.

Trudgill offers convincing scenarios from various sources. Of the Scandinavian (North Germanic) varieties, for example, he points out the relative complexities of Icelandic and Faroese, the two varieties of the group with much less contact (and therefore many fewer adult learners) and internal variation (and therefore many fewer opportunities for children to hear alternatives) than Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish. In English he points out the development of complexity in isolated dialects as well as international varieties (i.e., "World Englishes") compared to the standard, and here we run into a contradiction. All my examples point to a lesser complexity in dialects (or "nonstandard") varieties when compared to the standard. I can think of two solutions:

1) The process is as Trudgill suggests; adult learners of standards continue the process of simplifying them.

2) Something about standards resists simplification.

I have no doubt that 1) is still working. I see more and more often in written English (that makes no attempt at nonstandard representation) examples of a failure to undo the do-support (or auxiliary movement) in embedded clauses discussed above. From my local newspaper I find the following on June 12, 2015: "X [name withheld] was asked how can something like this be prevented in the future." This is fine in Standard English direct quotation: "X was asked the following: "How can something like this be prevented in the future"? But the author of this news story was paraphrasing, not directly quoting, and the incidence of "movement-failure" is a nice example of at least Modern Standard American English responding (however unwittingly) to the pressure of simplification, a strategy offered by adult learners of American English as a second language or learners of Standard American English as an alternative dialect.

But I have no doubt that 2) is also in play and that it rests in what one might call "resistance from above to change from below." Labov (1966) is explicit about it.

These two cases [i.e., change having its source in a stigmatized language feature or a prestige language feature] are relatively simple examples of the pressure of society upon language. These forces are applied from above — they are the product of overt social pressures consonant with the social hierarchy. The process is out in the open for us to observe, in public performances, in the attitudes of teachers in the schools, and in the conscious reactions of some

middle class persons (224).

In other words, resistance to the simplification offerings of the nonstandard or nonnative speakers comes from higher-status persons (or those seeking higher status through linguistic means) and retards or even defeats those offerings. Kroch (1978) suggests a deep-seated motivation for this:

First, the public prestige dialect of the elite in a stratified community differs from the dialect(s) of the non-elite strata (working-class and other) in at least one phonologically systematic way. In particular, it characteristically resists normal processes of phonetic conditioning (both articulatory and perceptual) that the speech of non-elite strata regularly undergo. ... Second, the cause of stratified phonological differentiation within a speech community is to be sought not in purely linguistic factors but in ideology. Dominant social groups tend to set themselves off symbolically as distinct from the groups they dominate and to interpret their symbols of distinctiveness as evidence of superior moral and intellectual qualities. This tendency shows itself not only in speech style but also in other areas of social symbolism as dress, body carriage, and food. In all these areas dominant groups mark themselves off by introducing elaborate styles and by borrowing from external prestige groups [emphasis mine] (17-18).

Although Kroch's article was written early on in the sociolinguistic enterprise when most of the stratified variables studied were phonological ones,[10] I believe that anecdotal evidence will substantiate this for lexicon and

that subsequent studies have shown this differentiation to be true for morphology and syntax as well.

Finally, let us return to Labov's discussion of social pressures and try to reconcile it with Kroch's and Trudgill's claims and a more recent observation — the distinction between *diffusion* and *transmission* (Labov 2007). In transmission, learners learn the details of their language in local social and geographical settings, and change comes about slowly, incrementally, and below the level of consciousness; it includes all the complexities and details of the system. In diffusion learners come in contact with a variety, but it is not their native one; they borrow from it, but they do not get the details quite right, and the details they miss are exactly those of greater complexity. Let's review some basic concepts:

1) Some varieties are more irregular and more complex (i.e., sillier) than others:

a) They are transmitted gradually (Labov 2007)

b) to learners in more isolated environments where there are few learners of the variety as a second language or alternative dialect (Trudgill 2011), and

c) carry symbolic value of higher-status persons (Kroch 1978).

2) Some varieties are more regular and less complex than others:

a) They result from diffusion to learners outside the geographical or social space of the more complex variety (Labov 2007),

b) take place in socially and/or geographically open environments where there are many learners of the more complex variety (Trudgill 2011), and

c) reveal regular phonological (and other) processes (Kroch 1978).[11]

Once these positions are listed together it is easier to see that they are really not contradictory. The only thing that may not be obvious is the variable nature of the possible processes. For example, a learner (perhaps lower-status) group regularizes (i.e., makes "unsilly") a complexity of the standard. To the extent that this regularizing sound change is spread throughout the community (outside the awareness of the higher status speakers) it may develop into a new norm in the speech community (a process outlined in detail in Labov 1972b: 178-179). If this pattern always obtained, languages would all reach maximum simplification, but, as Kroch points out, higher status speakers have a vested interest in their own socially distinguishing (and more complex) forms, and they are assisted by media, prescriptivists, schools, law, and even commerce and industry, where nonstandard speakers are discriminated against in employment (Markley and Cukor-Avila 2000). Labov (1972b) was aware of this alternative pressure and described the path of "change from above' (i.e., from higher social status levels) in detail (179-180), including the specific case of "correction from above," in which a change originating in lower status groups was noticed and cut off by pressure from higher status groups and their allies.

It is Kroch's notion of *elaborate style* (i.e., silliness) that I believe is at work in maintaining many of the great sillinesses of standard languages, and certainly in more environments than that of just English. Of course the main purpose of all this is not to cast aspersions on standards; it is, rather, to discourage the position of intellectual and even moral authority so often taken by proponents of the standard variety. I fear, however, that this is "toothpaste" that we will have to keep selling over and over.

Notes

[1] I make no claim that these are the exact words of the young man who asked the question or of the response, but I stand by the gist of the interaction. (Nor do I recall the brand of toothpaste exactly).

[2] An excellent survey of media-based self-appointed norm defenders with regard to Spanish is given in Antonio Reyes and Juan Eduardo Bonnin's paper, "Negotiating use, norm and authority in language ideological debates in internet forums" (2015).

[3] It is in fact a little more complicated; in some varieties of African American English, negation may reach across a clause boundary (e.g., "It ain't no cat can't get in no coop." Labov 1972a:130) with no sentential negation of the second clause; i.e., the correct interpretation is "There is no cat that can get into any coop."

[4] Standard English speakers may misread this sentence, interpreting "never" to mean "at no time" or "not ever"; in fact, in many nonstandard varieties it is a simple negator, replacing "not" or "n't."

[5] These comments on negation only scratch the surface of a complex linguistic area of inquiry. My personal favorite to learn more about it is Horn 2001.

[6] I also ignore some complexity here since third person plural buzzing is dispreferred immediately after the 3rd person plural pronoun, a feature known as the "Northern Subject Rule" that points to the Scots and Scots-Irish origins of this feature.

[7] I ignore the raging argument among scholars of Southern US English over the ability for *y'all* to be singular.

[8] Alas, it was apparently not Churchill who chided a correctionist for doing away with a final preposition with the rebuff "This is the type of arrant pedantry up with which I will not put." See http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/001715.html

[9] This may not be your favorite representation of what "goes on" in this sentence; just go along with me and admit that the surface output is what we have in the standard language, regardless of your preferences in theoretical syntax.

[10] See Preston, Ocumpaugh, and Roeder (2009) for a detailed account of the simplification of a complex Northern US vowel system by Mexican-American learners, involving an appeal to system symmetry rather than to Spanish system

influence.

[11] This short-changes many factors considerably, e.g., the role of gender, age, communities of practice, social networks, and many other social and linguistic factors in the process of variation and change.

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