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## **A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY: AGE GRADING AND LANGUAGE CHANGE**

**Makhmadaminova Mahliyo**  
 Scientific Supervisor: **Gulrukh Elmuradova**

***Abstract.** Distinguishing linguistic change at the community level ('generational change') from linguistic change at the individual level ('age grading') is "one of the major issues in contemporary sociolinguistics" (Tagliamonte 2012:247). This article gives a brief history of the study of language change in the community, before turning to the types of linguistic behavior that have been observed across individuals' lifespans. The article also discusses the meanings that have been attributed to the term 'age grading', arguing that consensus cannot be reached without more longitudinal work to determine the limits of lifespan linguistic change. associated with a specific life stage and is therefore no longer present in one of the groups analysed. ...*

***Key words.** Linguistic change, Generational change, Age grading, Tagliamonte 2012:247, specific linguistic features.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

7 This longitudinal method provides the advantage of working with authentic and reliable data, but as explained in Section 1, these comparable data are hard to

find, especially for 20<sup>th</sup>-century conversational Spanish. As a result, very few studies are supported by real-time evidence (Wagner 2012). ...

Consequently, the features found in the speech of older generations are expected to reflect the linguistic situation of an earlier time period, when these speakers were young. The language of the older generations can thus also reflect the state of the community at an earlier stage (Wagner 2012). For processes of language change, this implies that older generations would use a linguistic form as it was found in earlier periods, whereas younger generations would use the form in a more innovative way.

As an alternative to the notion that the speech of third-or fourth-generation speakers reflects language usage from several decades ago, the concept of "age grading" has been introduced. Age grading entails individuals incorporating specific linguistic changes into their speech as they age, thus contributing to community-wide shifts in language patterns (Bowie 2005, Wagner 2012). ...

The theory of language change has identified four basic language change profiles: generational change, communal change, stability, and age-grading (Sankoff, 2006; Wagner, 2012). Generational change refers to a situation where younger and older speakers differ in a linguistic feature. ...

This includes obtaining data from speakers representing various age groups at one and the same point in time. If age-related differences are identified, these are interpreted as an indication of generational change (Wagner, 2012). The well-acknowledged issue associated with this method is that apparent-time approaches do not enable us to distinguish between generational change and age-grading (e.g., Boberg, 2004; Wagner, 2012): what may seem like a difference between two generations could be indicative of the fact that a certain phenomenon is instead associated with a specific life stage and is therefore no longer present in one of the groups analysed. ...

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This exploration of language change through generational perspectives highlights the intricate interplay between age, linguistic evolution, and the challenges of accessing authentic historical data. While the longitudinal method offers valuable insights into language variation across time, the scarcity of comparable data, especially for conversational language, necessitates alternative approaches.

Examining the speech of older generations, while potentially reflective of earlier linguistic patterns, must be considered within the framework of "age grading." This concept recognizes that language use can evolve throughout an individual's lifespan, with individuals incorporating changes as they age, contributing to broader community-wide linguistic shifts.

Therefore, the assumption that older generations' speech perfectly mirrors language use from decades past requires careful scrutiny. Further research incorporating diverse methodologies and embracing the complexities of age grading is crucial to gain a more nuanced understanding of how language evolves across generations. Exploring innovative data collection strategies and expanding access to authentic historical linguistic data will be essential for future investigations into the fascinating relationship between age and language change.

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