Documenting taboo-motivated lexical variation in an avoidance register of Datooga

The phenomenon

For married Datooga women, the following kinds of words are taboo:
- the names of one’s senior in-laws, e.g., Gídá-básòoda (‘masc.-lake’)
- component lexical items of the names, e.g., básòoda ‘take’
- near-homophones of the names, e.g., básàat ‘thin’

To avoid these taboos, women use a special avoidance vocabulary:
- married female names
- components of names
- pronunciation variants

Similiar phenomenon to hlonipha in Xhosa (Finlayson 2002)

Lexical variation

Most ordinary words have several conventionalized avoidance equivalents
because avoidance words are also taboo if they sound like the name of a senior in-law

Interspeaker variation

Who uses the avoidance register? (Relevant variable in blue)

- female (GENDER)
- married (MARITAL STATUS)
- leads relatively ‘traditional’ lifestyle (RETENTION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES)
  - little to no formal schooling
  - practice traditional religion
  - live in rural areas in polygamous households

- change in these aspects of Datooga lifestyle is leading to the simplification and ultimate disappearance of linguistic avoidance

Variation across users of the avoidance register

- the lexical variants a woman uses depend on the names she needs to avoid
  - i.e., her MARITAL CLAN (or, more precisely, lineage)
  - thus woman A and woman B make use of different avoidance words

Future directions

Capturing dialectal variation
- conduct a large-scale survey across dozens of households in different regions
- investigate the avoidance language of other Datooga dialects

Understanding situational variation
- build a larger and more representative corpus of naturally-occurring speech in multiple households

References


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Alice Mitchell
Asien-Afrika-Institut
University of Hamburg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lexical item</th>
<th>ordinary Datooga</th>
<th>avoidance words</th>
<th>source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WATER</td>
<td>bêega</td>
<td>garábângi</td>
<td>from garâbu ‘cold’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hálâkka</td>
<td>from hálâka ‘well’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dâlliõonga</td>
<td>from dâli ‘clear’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>häshâsânga</td>
<td>from häsh ‘light’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEAT (v.)</td>
<td>bar</td>
<td>dab</td>
<td>phonological replacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BÉD</td>
<td>bûlîlîida</td>
<td>sisînda</td>
<td>‘bed on ground’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>qâtánîida</td>
<td>borrowing from ìraqw lg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEE</td>
<td>daah</td>
<td>ng’wear sig</td>
<td>‘look’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG</td>
<td>häw</td>
<td>hêajânêati òrumân</td>
<td>‘senior; old’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variation across users

- the lexical variants a woman uses depend on the names she needs to avoid
- i.e., her MARITAL CLAN (or, more precisely, lineage)
- thus woman A and woman B make use of different avoidance words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Words avoided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Udáagìyàda</td>
<td>gíyi ‘grille’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gídábánnda</td>
<td>bar ‘beer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bâlsheqónta</td>
<td>básì ‘silk’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Future directions

- build a larger and more representative corpus of naturally-occurring speech in multiple households

References