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1 Abstract

Hypercorrection is an overgeneralization of a prestige semantic structure (Piattelli-Palmarini and Uriagereka, 2004). In this study on the feasibility of the study of hypercorrection in English, I discuss the implications of hypercorrection of first-person pronouns within noun pairs, such as “Bill and me,” versus “Bill and I”, in terminal and medial positions. Results show that speakers hypercorrect to an extent which is significant to draw some conclusions and warrant a further study, as well as showing that age appears to have a significant effect on the frequency of hypercorrection.

2 Introduction

Hypercorrection is often demonstrated as being an intrinsic factor of those from a nonstandard dialect of English (DeCamp, 1972). This prescriptive approach to the use of hypercorrection therefore implies that the act is a mistake made by those who are not as skilled in the language as a well-educated native speaker. The following section will provide some degree of background of this topic, which will be followed by the methodology for the study undertaken, and the results, all of which come together to ask: How often do native speakers of American English hypercorrect, what factors influence hypercorrection, and is it something which should be discussed in English Education? As such, the study will be looking into the extent to which First-Language (L1) speakers of American English hypercorrect utterances, specifically looking at those which change from the first-person accusative case into a nominative form.

2.1 Linguistic Viruses

A linguistic virus, here defined as a summarization of Piattelli-Palmarini and Uriagereka (2004) and Lasnik and Sobin (2000), would be a prestige form
of a language which emerges as a grammatically incorrect construction. A phonetic example of this would be the pronunciation of the word “forte” as [fɔːteɪ], rather than the phonologically- and historically-driven pronunciation [fɔːt]. The former, given its spelling and French-esque pronunciation, could easily be perceived as the more prestigious, given the tendency of Latinate languages to be so determined in English-speaking communities (Lutz, 2013).

In order to understand hypercorrection we must first regard the concept of a linguistic virus and how, precisely, one may come to be. To begin, the universal grammar version of a linguistic virus takes it as a biological leftover, in the strain of so-called junk DNA (Ponting and Lunter, 2006; Piattelli-Palmarini and Uriagereka, 2004). This concept essentially posits that language, upon the emergence of a different linguistic system in a speaker, leaves behind its lexical and semantic footprint, as a sort of interlanguage (Kasper and Blum-Kulka, 1993). This causes the speaker of a language to be reliant upon their original linguistic system in order to produce language in a Second Language (L2), this leading to a system-wide interlanguage (Selinker and Rutherford, 2013). This is certainly one manner through which a linguistic virus may emerge. However, a truer one would be best looked at less as a result of maintaining linguistic information by one speaker, and more along the lines of a grammatically incorrect piece of language passed from one speaker to another, either vertically or horizontally, by way of a community of practice and prestige speech (Piattelli-Palmarini and Uriagereka, 2004; Lasnik and Sobin, 2000).

2.2 Hypercorrection

A linguistic virus hereforth shall refer to the phenomenon of maintenance of form and structure of a phrase or word based upon not its grammatically correct position and conjugation, but upon the method through which it operates in accordance to special rules which allow it an exceptional place wherein rules of grammar or orthography need not apply.
Hypercorrection is often defined as being an aspect of L2 English speakers, these speakers overapplying rules and concepts which were given to them in order to correct their language into one which is far beyond what the rules of English actually permit (DeCamp, 1972). This overapplication of a rule serves as the basis for our concept here.

Take, for example, an L1 English speaker who determines, whether consciously or unconsciously, that “I” is a more socially advanced use of the first-person pronoun than is “me.” This belief then translates into a consistent use of the believed privileged form of the pronoun, even in situations when it would be grammatically correct to use the less-privileged form. An example of this would be the use of “were” in order to create a subjunctive sentence which is not intended as such, though processed as being a more advanced and “prestigious” form of grammar. This is further explored in Ryan (1961). This is the definition of hypercorrection which shall be studied in the following experiments.

For the purposes of this study, we will observe the hypercorrection of the English-Language accusative case into the pronoun form which is generally present in the nominative case. Take, for example, the sentences:

1. Lily loves James and me.
2. Lily loves James and I.

**Example 1**

Sentence 2 in Example 1 demonstrates the supplantation of the accusative form the English first person “me” in a group with one which does not track with traditional grammatical structures, specifically, “I.” This rule of “I” being perceived as more prestigious may very well be due to the understanding of “me” in the nominative case is traditionally used in media to portray those who have an incomplete handle on language and/or are unintelligent. As such, the rule of saying “I” instead of the accusative alternative is established as being prestigious.
Given that the occurrence of this instance of hypercorrection is generally agreed upon in the linguistic community, the objectives of this paper will be A) to establish its frequency of use among members of the target population and B) to establish the extent to which L2 English learners may need to know about this change.

2.3 *Identity in L1 English Hypercorrection*

This phenomenon of rule overgeneralization extends beyond second language learning, however, as students from nonstandard American dialects of English have been shown to demonstrate hypercorrect responses in up to 15% of cases in the L1 English language classroom, specifically in primary school grammar classes (Pfaff [1976]). This phenomenon has been demonstrated as not established solely in the English language classroom. As a matter of fact, there are established cases of this specific rule generalization in native speakers who rank highly in academia, the likes of which exchanged “was” for “were,” which is used in order to make the mood subjunctive, but was not standard in the studied dialect at the time (Ryan [1961], Cazden [1975]).

Looking more into the processes behind these changes, previous literature makes apparent the system of linguistic stratification among pronunciation and lexical decisions. Take, for example, Labov [1972], wherein the language choices made by speakers of AAE designate them as members of the African American community. Taking this into account with the findings of Pfaff [1976], one may draw the conclusion that the hypercorrection undertaken may be in order to form an identity which fits in more with a population showing a distinct lexical variety which may be different from that which the speaker is already a part of, which further adheres to the definition of hypercorrection as established here.

This phenomenon of identity construction and deconstruction by way of linguistic choices is established rather thoroughly in the literature. Take,
for example, the work which has been done by Podesva (2011) in the California and Texas Gay communities, which indicate that individuals’ linguistic choices underlie their intended persona within a community of practice. For example, the structures which a speaker takes in order to get across a set of identity markers may indicate that this speaker is a set of personality markers which indicate their intended final personality structure. In the case of Podesva and Chun (2007), multiple factors came together in order to determine that a speaker may be a “diva,” with this determined by a set of personality traits and phonological choices. In Podesva (2011), a speaker attempts to identify themselves as being part of a specific community by way of specific lexical and phonological choices which they make. This concept is seen in the gay community, both with members who are well-established and those who are new thereto (Podesva and Chun, 2007; Podesva, 2011), as well as various high school communities (Eckert, 2000; Moore, 2003), and among members of various family rank in linguistic diaspora (Zhang, 2005).

One possible explanation of this process stems from the concepts surrounding hypercorrection as a linguistic practice of adherence to, or separation from, another linguistic system. For example, one of the potential precipitators of the Great English Vowel Shift is that of hypercorrection, either to or away from the Norman French system of vowel pronunciation (Nevalainen and Traugott, 2016). According to one theory, the speakers of English at the time wanted to differentiate themselves from the French, leading to a hypercorrection in order to identify more with the English-speaking commonfolk, with this taking the vowels further away from French (Brinton and Arnovick, 2006). Similarly accepted, however, is the theory that the hypercorrection took place in order to more closely resemble the vowel structure of the Norman French-speaking ruling class (Brinton and Arnovick, 2006). Though only two of the massive library of theories regarding the Great Vowel Shift, these two hypotheses alone demonstrate the potential of influence on the part of the social dynamic upon the hypercorrections made on the part
of the populace.

Thus, it may be established that the hypercorrection rules noted previously may not be sufficient, as the hypercorrection noted here was made by native speakers of a language. As such, it would appear as though hypercorrection more accurately may be defined as a dialectical change made by members of a population in order to identify more strongly with another. This is certainly the case in ELL hypercorrection, as these attempts are made in order to change one’s use of words and phrases from that of the “ELL” social group to the “English Speaker” social group.

Thusly considered it is important to recognize that, while some degree of error is always to be expected in language, given its status as a dynamic system (Larsen-Freeman 2013), trends have indicated that the errors made to hypercorrect into a linguistic system generally have social implications which are directly related to the identity which the speakers are attempting to construct. This identity construction, as well as the facets and motivations thereof, are a major motivating factor for hypercorrection which is grievously underexplored in the native English-speaking group.

2.4 **Instructional Implications**

Given that hypercorrection occurs outside of the realm of second language acquisition, and is established as an interdialectal demonstration of an attempt at a more prestigious form of language, there appears to be evidence which would suggest that the formerly established limitations of hypercorrection are not, in fact, so. Rather, it appears that hypercorrection may very well have simply entered into modern English, with its use existing in certain phrases, making English into a blend of levels of prestige in language, especially among those of a lower social class, a process which is established as taking place in Western Stratified languages, such as middle English (Bloomental and Kahane 1979).

The specific instantiations of these linguistic viruses which will be
regarded in the following are more specifically in the prepositional area. There are instances which have been regarded by previous studies, specifically “Who/whom,” the latter of which is considered a prestige from (Bumenthal and Kahane, 1979), and “I/Me,” with the former being considered more prestigious (Emonds, 1986).

This “I/Me” virus appears in instances where the pronoun is paired with another pronoun, establishing that, for instance, English speakers would find “*He gave the flowers to I” an unnatural utterance, where “He gave the flowers to Jim and I” is acceptable and natural. This appears to extend to initial phrases, where “*Me went to the park” is viewed by native speakers as less acceptable than “Bill and me went to the park,” (Emonds, 1986) The issue here appears to be that, though this hypercorrection is a linguistic virus of the same category of “OK” and others, the “I/Me” seems to go directly against established linguistic structures, rather than creating a unique lexical item, as long as it is accompanied by another object, usually in the form of a proper noun, most likely in order to encourage reevaluation of the case (Emonds, 1986). In spite of these studies regarding general trends among hypercorrection, there are shortcomings among the available literature.

For example, there is little regarding this first-person pronoun supplantation, and there is a minimal amount of regard given to the possible implications of instruction and what may happen when language learners encounter nonstandard English constructions. In order to establish whether this is a legitimate concern in terms of prestige speech in the current linguistic structure of the language, as well as establish patterns among speakers of English and hypercorrection, a study was devised.

2.5 Objective

There is little statistical evidence for the presence of hypercorrection as anything more than an extension of the process of the overgeneralization of a rule. In order to improve language teaching and ensure that what is
taught is accurate, one must consider the extent to which native speakers of Standard American English use this process of hypercorrection. This could determine whether hypercorrection should still be treated as such, or if it is simply using a linguistic virus for the purpose of communication in a certain context, just as is done with native speakers of the dialect.

There is little to no information which specifically regards in-depth the hypercorrection of the first-person pronoun to the nominative in a terminal position. Though hypercorrection, as previously mentioned, is regarded, there is a distinct lack of attention paid to specific instantiations, and types of hypercorrection are generally overlooked. Maier (2007), for instance, offers a relatively in-depth analysis of the first person hypercorrective nominative, yet does not establish its prominence among native English Speakers, or observe it in any was as separate from the more general trends of the language.

Most literature is at least 15 years old, and little is less than 40. Given the rate of language change in the information age, relying upon hypercorrection data from decades ago proves to be a guessing game more than a science. What’s more, statistical understanding and, often, social understanding has changed in the intervening time. As previously established, most studies are based upon the concept of hypercorrection being in some way limited to those who are mimicking a different dialect or language, acting in the role of the ELL, yet there should be some indicator of what constitutes hypercorrection among speakers of the language as an L1. Especially given that this may very well be a common part of English dialects, instructors should be able to establish whether teaching their students about this particular phrase in order to prepare them for the world of English speaking is necessary.

Following from the age of the research, the final point is generic: most studies provide a qualitative, instruction-focused approach to the concept of hypercorrection, noting the trends in L2 Learners’ actions and thereby extrapolating a thought process by which hypercorrection comes into being. This study will be focusing more on a quantitative aspect of language learn-
ing, using the concepts of language study in contemporary literature in order to establish a more secure and statistically sound interpretation of hypercorrection among L1 English speakers. The advent and evolution of the internet allows for greater resources and greater contact, the latter of which can lead to more, faster language change \cite{Blumenthal and Kahane 1979}. This, coupled with a more qualitative approach to language, appears to be representative of a tendency toward presumption-based, rather than statistically- and representationally-based language learning. The tools which are available to the research community now allow for us to more accurately define what, precisely, may be happening with language and how one may be able to more appropriately represent exactly what is taking place with language, and how instructors may more accurately represent it to ELLs, students of nonstandard Englishes, and students who study English as a first language.

As such, this study was devised in order to determine the viability of a future study regarding factors which significantly influence the frequency of hypercorrection in first-language English Speakers.

3 Methods

In order to study the hypercorrective tendencies of various L1 English speakers, a series of tests were devised. These tests were constructed to resemble a series of quizzes. The subjects’ grammatical and mental acumen were thereby challenged, so as to ensure that the subjects were put under conditions which have been demonstrated to elicit hypercorrective responses in populations which speak a nonstandard variety of English.

In addition, in order to ensure accuracy and timeliness in a sample large enough and with a reliable response time, only one condition was selected. Specifically, hypercorrection of the accusative case into which the speaker has inserted a first-person nominative pronoun in place of an objective one, as demonstrated in Example 1 in Section 2.2.
These experiments were implemented in the form of two separate tasks. The first was solicited spontaneous formation of an accusative group in an environment which would allow for hypercorrection, and was tested in 4.1. The task discussed in 5.1 asked respondents to identify the response which they best believed to fit into the location in the sentence.

A total of 56 respondents participated, with a final pool of 44 participants after coding out incomplete responses and unqualified participants. These participants were speakers of English as a first language at a mid-size university in the midwestern United States. Participants were told that they were taking a quiz in American English, and they were asked to identify the form which was more likely to appear in their daily lives. The experiments were administered in sequence, with the experiment explored in 4 immediately preceding that in 5.

These were previously explored in larger-scale pilot studies, with Experiment 1 being the open-response solicitation. Experiment 2 has been performed before, and the significance of those results, as well as the surrounding questions regarding them, inspired the creation of these experiments.

4 Experiment 1

The intent of Experiment 1 was that of ascertaining whether there is a variable which affects the likelihood of soliciting a hypercorrect response. This task was open-ended so that the respondents would have the opportunity to answer in a manner which was targeted but open-ended.

4.1 Methodology, Experiment 1

The first was an elicited response tasks. Participants were asked to read 2 randomly selected paragraphs and respond to them with the correct phrase to complete the response sentence, e.g.: 
The fire went out, and Jan began to leave the campsite. I was ready to stargaze, and I knew that Robert felt the same way. However, upon opening our chest, we realized that the lens had broken in our telescope. Without any other option, we asked Jan to pick us up. She dropped Robert off at the store to get a new lens, and the two of us went to buy food for the night. We bought two scoops of snow peas, picked up Robert, and returned to the campsite.

Jan and I / Jan and me went to buy food.

**Example 2: Control**

I went to the store with James and Mary. Mary walked with me to the back, where we picked out a set of flowers. At the front of the store, James was deciding on candy for that evening. When we left the store, James gave both of us half of the candy. Mary and James talked for a brief moment before going into a store, where I followed. Inside, my family was present. They all shouted at me, and I gasped in surprise! They were all there to celebrate my birthday!

The Candy was given to Mary and I / Mary and Me.

**Example 3: Dependent Variable**

The first of these narratives, as demonstrated in Example 2, were intended to elicit the response in the accusative case of either a paired group or a group of three, as this allowed for a more specific context in which to elicit a response. The second narrative, as demonstrated in Example 3, was intended to act as a control, with the questions placing the group at the beginning of a sentence so as to ensure that the respondents would be most likely to identify this as a nominative case. The control was made to always
appear second, so as to ensure that the respondents were not biased as to their responses in the objective case.

These were then compared against the demographic information supplied by the respondents at the end of the test in order to determine their length of time in their present position, the length of time which they have lived in their current place, their age, and their highest completed degree. This information would serve to determine the likelihood of familiarity of context and language learning to correlate with the likelihood of production of hypercorrection.

Following the elimination of unusable data, 17 total responses were tallied, with 11 of these responses in the two-object group and 6 in the multi-object group. The results of this experiment were then examined using a generalized linear model.

### 4.2 Results, Experiment 1

Regarding the use of hypercorrection in self-supplied tasks, the significance was low for every variable, as is expressed in Table 1. The significance being low here as demonstrated by the generalized linear model shows none of these factors are significant, save for the fact that time of residence approaches significance, though with a minimal impact.

The influence of degree upon language was also found to be minimally significant, with the influence there of demonstrated in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\hat{\beta}$</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time in Job</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>[-0.021, 0.043]</td>
<td>0.514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Residence</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>[-0.06, -0.003]</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Level</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>[-2.186, 4.276]</td>
<td>0.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.528</td>
<td>[-3.623, 4.952]</td>
<td>0.786</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Influence of factors upon solicited hypercorrection

These data demonstrate a significant error percentage, all of which
overlap with the 100% correct (Meaning non-hypercorrect) response rate, leading to overall minimally informative data.

Per the general linear model, then, time in place of residence approaches significance on whether a speaker will hypercorrect ($\hat{\beta} = -0.03$, 95% CI = -0.06, -0.003, $p=0.068$). For every year increase in length of stay in current residence, the odds of hypercorrecting decrease by a factor of $0.62(e^{0.03})$.

Finally, in order to determine the correlation of possible overlap of factors which appeared significant, a correlative analysis was performed on the amount of time which respondents spent in the same place and in the same job in order to determine if the two were likely to correspond, with a 68% correlation found between the two factors.
4.3 **Discussion, Experiment 1**

Before beginning to discuss this experiment’s results, it is well worth noting that there is the issue of a lower-than-preferred number of respondents. Though this could be remedied in a future experiment, these results are presented and discussed here in terms of what the current data demonstrate.

4.3.1 **Hypercorrection and grouping**

The data here demonstrate that hypercorrection is bound by the form of the group. Though this is not necessarily the case grammatically (discussed further in [5.3]), there is some degree of evidence here that the structure of the constituent is, in fact, important in terms of just how hypercorrect it may be. Given that the significance and the degree of responses were very different for the two-group, which is more prototypical of hypercorrection, and 3-group, which is less typical, this lends some degree of credence to the idea that hypercorrection is the result of a specific lexico-syntactic role.
which is being filled. Though there is not enough evidence here to make a particularly strong conclusion, as more data would be required for this, there does seem to be enough evidence to say that there is at least some degree of influence regarding the number of objects within the group acting as the object.

This is, at least partially, due to the influence of the linguistic virus’ grammatical structure. Confirming previous studies (e.g., Emonds 1986; Blumenthal and Kahane 1979; Lasnik and Sobin 2000; Ryan 1961), linguistic viruses must act in a specific manner and fit into a particular formula in order to form or, in our case, hypercorrect.

4.3.2 Hypercorrection and time in residence

The data reveal that there is the possibility of an influence of time in the current residence upon the likelihood of hypercorrection, with more years in a place positively correlated with hypercorrection. This goes rather against what was presumed by the hypothesis, as previous studies have indicated that familiarity tends to eliminate the conditions of personal and cultural differentiation which tends to underlie hypercorrection. As such, it is well worth considering that one of the factors which leads to this curious hypercorrection tendency may be a facet of age.

The extent of time within one’s place of residence is demonstrated to be possibly correlated with identity (Knez 2005). This would imply that, due to a person identifying with a location, they would, theoretically, feel more comfortable there and, as per the information in Cazden (1975), should be more likely to not hypercorrect. However, this is unsupported by the evidence gathered in Experiment 1, as there is no significant influence of location upon hypercorrect responses.

In terms of the correlations in job time and hypercorrection, it is then unsurprising that the time spent in one’s job is not particularly influential, as there is a 68% correlation between the two, indicating that, as a person
spends a greater deal of time in their current job, they are more likely to spend more time in one place. This shows that neither element of place or job familiarity appears to have a particularly significant influence upon the results demonstrated.

4.3.3 Hypercorrection and age

However, there is a large degree of overlap in the few significant times in one particular place and the age of the respondents, indicating that there is a greater influence more likely to be found in the latter. Specifically, there is a far greater likelihood of a person hypercorrecting if they are older. This seems to go against what traditional knowledge would indicate of lower hypercorrection with increased formal education. However, the data indicate that, not only is this the case, but also that this is one of the few significant bits of data which is yielded here. Even with a relatively limited dataset, the results indicate that the hypercorrection appears almost exactly as likely with age, as indicated in Figure 2.

4.3.4 Hypercorrection and degree

Interestingly, the data indicate that there is a difference in clustering among the degree of the respondents in Ex1. Though relatively small, there is certainly a smaller spread of data in the more advanced degrees, indicating a higher likelihood of an advanced degree leading to less hypercorrection. This factor appears more significant in terms of potential factors of interest.

4.4 Overall Discussion

Overall, however, there is very little data which may be taken from Experiment 1. The solicited narrative experiment did reveal interesting data. However, the limited pool of information from which to interpret the data demonstrated the impracticality of this experiment on the current scale.
Though the elicited data allows for some potential points of interest, the scale simply did not allow for any data to be demonstrated as a point of interest for future studies.

5 Experiment 2

The objective of this experiment was that of indicating general preferences in whether or not to hypercorrect, as well as the import of position in the sentence to hypercorrecting, among the native speakers of American English.

5.1 Methodology Experiment 2

In the second experiment, participants were presented with a set of cloze tasks, with the instruction to select the most natural-sounding response among the two options which they were offered. 20 distractors were interspersed with 10 target structures, the 10 target structures being divided into 3 controls, which placed the group with the first-person pronoun at the beginning of the sentence, as demonstrated in Figure ??, as well as, in terms of the dependent variables, 5 sentences which placed the grouping in the center of the statement, as demonstrated in Figure ??, and 2 sentences which placed the group at the end of the sentence, as in the manner demonstrated in Figure ???. All of these experimental variables, however, placed the target structure, which was in the objective case, in a position following the accusative noun or pronoun.

These sentence structures were used to secure the data within a variety of different environments. In addition, sentences were designed in order elicit either a more casual response or a more formal response, given the information provided within the sentences themselves.
5.2 Results, Experiment 2

Regarding the use of hypercorrection in selection tasks, the significance was as demonstrated in Table 2. Here is demonstrated the fact that the advanced degree has a strong effect at groups positions, where the other two conditions are not significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable and pronoun placement</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Terminal</th>
<th>Total (M+T)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree Level</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.0002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Current Position</td>
<td>0.598</td>
<td>0.477</td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Current Residence</td>
<td>0.343</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>0.128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: P-Values of Positions of object groups with hypercorrection under tested variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\hat{\beta}$</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree Level</td>
<td>1.218</td>
<td>[0.527, 1.592]</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.218</td>
<td>[0.320, 1.574]</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Current Position</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>[-0.053, 0.024]</td>
<td>0.444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Current Residence</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>[-0.040, 0.010]</td>
<td>0.233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Influence of tested variables upon hypercorrection probability

In opposition to the results of the previous section, these results indicate strong significance in a different area, specifically that formal education has a significant effect on probability of hypercorrection, with a greater degree of formal education correlating with a lower probability of hypercorrecting, with this appearing to have a rather large effect size and a great degree of significance.

Degree level has a large impact upon the likelihood of hypercorrection, with the correctness of an utterance going up with more advanced degrees. There is no error overlap, even with a relatively limited pool of respondents, indicating that this is a strong factor for future research.

This information is further demonstrated in Figure 4 which shows the fast climb across age groups.
Figure 3: Mean influence of degree level upon hypercorrection

Figure 4: Mean influence of age upon hypercorrection selection
There is an apparent generational divide, with the influence of age upon scores apparent, hypercorrection being more prominent among those in the younger age group. Though there is a degree of overlap in the standard error, the large impact demonstrated in [3] demonstrates that this is a factor which is well worth studying among a larger sample size.

Finally, in order to determine the possibility of co-influential factors, a correlative analysis was performed on age and degree, with a 30.4% correlation found among the two. This minimal degree of correlation seems to indicate that there is a minimal likelihood of the two causing a false significance in one of the others.

5.3 Discussion, Experiment 2

5.3.1 Positional Import

The position of the hypercorrect utterance appears to have little to no influence upon the frequency of selection, with both testing as significant according to degree and insignificant in the other two conditions tested. This appears to satisfy the hypothesis that there is minimal influence of position upon the tendency to hypercorrect. What does this tell us about hypercorrection in general, though? To begin, it further appears to cement its case as a grammatical virus.

One of the defining aspects of a grammatical virus is that is present without regard as to its position within a sentence. As is apparent in the results, there is little import as to where the structure appears and why it does so. Rather, as discussed in [4.3.1], there is primarily the import of the structure of the virus itself, the environment only serving to allow for it to come to the surface.
5.3.2 Education

In terms of the initial conditions tested, the only one which showed significance was that of level of formal education. Part of the reason for this is the age overlap, but it still fails to explain some degree of the occurrences. To begin, the data make clear that hypercorrection is negatively correlated with the degree level. Thus, formal education seems to lead to a lesser degree of hypercorrection. This does go to some extent against the concepts introduced in Ryan (1961), wherein academics have a tendency to hypercorrect in certain instances, at least in part due to the need to present as prestigious. In addition, this appears to demonstrate that there is some minimal link between one’s level of knowledge and their tendency to hypercorrect. Thus, one may begin to see some semblance of a pattern emerging: Specifically, that there is little in the way of predictor variables when describing hypercorrection beyond exposure to the linguistic virus in question, and exposure to prestige media without the hypercorrect form, as well as one other detail. Degree also happened to correlate to an extent with age, implying that those who hold higher degrees are generally older, leading one to posit the possibility of the influence of age and the state of academia at the time of aging to do with one’s linguistic choices.

5.3.3 Age

Age, in confirming to previous pilot studies, demonstrated the most significant relation to hypercorrection. Age in general was negatively associated with hypercorrection, with those who are older hypercorrecting less than those who are younger.

To begin, this is likely due at least partially to the tendency on the part of certain populations to use more prestige forms of grammar, though the concept of prestige forms declining in recent years (Blumenthal and Kahane 1979). As such, this could be due to younger people attempting to fit in more with the perceived prestige around them. Looking at it from this perspective,
then, we may be able to look at the lexical information as though it is a marker of verbal identity and semantic structure, as well as an encoding of prestige forms of grammar, thereby making the sociolinguistic evident in the semantic via taking a cross-section of people of multiple age groups.

In addition, those who responded majorly have some link to academia. As such, this may be a reflection upon the change of import of prestige forms in academia throughout time therein, with certain sectors now being more beholden unto clarity and simplicity with correctness, rather than using the prestige speech of previous generations of researchers.

6 General Discussion

Considering these information together, then, there are certain ideas which need to be detailed regarding the sociocultural and semantic implications.

6.1 Degree and hypercorrection in culture

The degree of the respondent is the most significant predictor of hypercorrection, as indicated in tables 1 and 3. Though there is no definite reason as to why, there are some factors which are likely to have had some degree of influence regarding responses.

One factor which may have influenced the responses is the degree of formal education undertaken by the higher degree-holders has likely exposed them to a higher number of instances of grammatically-correct, non-hypercorrect writing from prestigious sources, which may in turn influence fewer examples of hypercorrection in order to fit in with the community with which they identify.

Though this is a distinct possibility, there are two issues with this idea. Firstly, there is not enough significance in the first experiment to make this assumption, especially given that age group proves far more significant.
Given these information and the minimal overlap of age and degree in the sample population, it seems perfectly reasonable to identify this factor as one of import for future studies.

6.2 Age and hypercorrection in culture

When looking at linguistic change over time, there are two primary manners through which the development of language may be more successfully tracked. One type, the longitudinal study, is more inclusive of the change of linguistic data in a similar group over time. However, this study found a more pertinent undertaking in the use of a latitudinal methodology, looking at the ages of one group and treating them as a sort of linguistic "time capsule" which allows for subjects’ dialects at the time of growing up or being acquainted with a community to influence their language, which generally ends in childhood [Labov 1972, Wolfram and Fasold 1974, Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010]. However, there is evidence that an additional aspect of linguistic phonological and/or syntactic structure may be gained as a result of exposure at a later age, as per Tagliamonte and Molfenter (2007). Though this could explain the influence of academia upon the respondents’ accents, there seems to be more likelihood in the influence coming earlier.

Take, for example, the Kinzler and DeJesus (2013), which demonstrates that children begin to identify certain phonological aspects of speech as being more or less prestigious even before their own accent had finalized. This implies that children may fault toward prestige forms of grammar before they are fully aware of the grammatical and syntactic functions of their language. As such, it could be determined that linguistic viruses are, at least partially, based upon perceptions of culturally prestigious forms as determined by the speaker at a young age. As such, there is a distinct probability that the hypercorrection of this particular phrase structure is a linguistic virus derived from the prestige construction of younger members of society.
6.3 The linguistic virus’ structure

Oftentimes in nature, viruses are dangerous not because of their ability to work in a wide variety of environments (the opposite often being the case), but because of their internal structures’ mechanisms of recoding and decoding being varied and advanced to such an extent that they reproduce and recreate themselves before the body can adapt. We find that linguistic viruses maintain neither of these.

Rather, as per the data in [5], we find the first two defining factors of a linguistic virus as demonstrated by hypercorrection to be the opposite. These linguistic viruses are generally constrained by a specific structure and function, only existing within a particular formula.

6.3.1 The Linguistic Virus’ Internal Structure

The linguistic virus here appears to have little to no change in its internal variability. There appears to be a maximum of two items: one being a noun, the other being a pronoun. These must be in the objective position (in the case described herein), and they must be identified as the two items fully: They may not use only one pronoun, as this would not allow for the hypercorrection to take place. This internal structure is completely opposed to the way that a virus works in nature, yet shows the apparent staying power of the linguistic virus: a consistent structure which may be applied repeatedly in order to gain prestige among all save for the particularly pedantic.

Interestingly, however, one of the other defining aspects of biological viruses, namely, that they are neither truly dead nor alive, is also true of the linguistic virus. Though the linguistic virus which we have described is not necessarily beholden to having one particular set of options within it, there is the consistent change of one of the two components of it, namely the specified noun. Thus, the virus is always alive and changing. However, the linguistic virus is ultimately a structure which does not change and is based
in a prestige structure which is unchanging, thereby not being quite as active as other linguistic structures, implying that it is not entirely "alive" either.

6.3.2 The Linguistic Virus’ External Placement

A linguistic virus, once again in opposition to the actions of a biological virus, is able to survive in a variety of locales. There is no significance regarding the placement of this particular linguistic virus, as, whether it is medial or terminal, the results nonetheless remain the same regardless as to where the structure appears within a sentence.

6.3.3 The Linguistic Virus’ Virulence

The sole area in which the concept of a linguistic virus is accurate to being referred to as such appears to be the virulence, as just under 1/4 of responses were hypercorrect. This large degree of hypercorrection demonstrates that it is accepted in a large portion of American English, with there being apparently relatively little in the way of language policing, likely due to this being an attempt at a prestige form of grammar.

6.4 Implications for instruction

Regarding instruction, the main information which we can garner from hypercorrection is the need to make second language learners aware of prestige forms of speech and how certain lexical items circumvent grammatical structure. Though this is generally learned by simple exposure to the language later in language learning, it still may do well to inform the learners that morphology isn’t the only irregular part of the English language.

In addition, there is evidence to support the need for prestige constructions to be taught in the second-language classroom. To begin, identity formation, though largely uncoachable, does have a significant factor in the learning of a second language. the classic example of Wes’ identification not
with the English-speaking society in which he lived, but with the Japanese society which informed his work and life ([Schmidt, 1983]). This example demonstrates the importance of finding identity within language, and therein lies the import of having ELLs work outside of their comfort zone when it comes to language. It is important that ELLs not be put under the false belief in perfect speech as exhibited by native speakers of the language, but rather that they be aware of the fact that nonstandard grammar exists in language at various levels. In addition, learners would be able to understand that language as it is used at many levels would allow for one to identify a certain way, not only correctness, but word choice and sentence structure.

Though grammatical incorrectness is not and likely should not be taught in the ESL classroom, these grammatical choices, though something that an L2 speaker will likely grow to understand over time, should be touched upon in Second-language classrooms. The instruction of common errors made by native English speakers could help the learners of English as a second language to identify certain types of errors and fossilized grammatical structures which they are likely to encounter in their linguistic journey.

As a final note on hypercorrection and education, though in this case the L1 language education, it is important for the speakers of various dialects to recognize their language choices and how their perceptions of languages may be affected by the apparent prestige in the world around them. Native speakers are, as demonstrated here, completely capable of producing grammatically incorrect constructions for prestige reasons, which means that L1 learners of English must be careful to ensure that a form of imagined prestige not factor in on their language learning.

7 Conclusions

In conclusion, it would appear as though the linguistic structure of English is beholden to the same weaknesses as any system: glitches and
viruses may appear, causing a lexical differentiation and societal perception which is based upon purely the conceptualization of the language itself.

Further, we see here that the perceptions of language change over time, with the prestige speech being more significant with those of an older age group, and speech becoming more lax and, as a result, more traditionally correct among the younger groups.

We also see that ”Linguistic virus” is likely not a fair term for the type of action undertaken by hypercorrection and similar structures. In fact, it appears as a way to pathogenize a lexical structure, which, though certainly virulent, is not necessarily accurate. In taking a similar concept from biology, we here propose the ”Linguistic capsule,” which is far more accurate to the intended meaning and biological allegory.

8 Implications for Future Research

In the future, a larger group would be good to pull from, especially as regards experiment 1. Further, Experiment one acts relatively well as an accessory to Experiment two, but would likely do better and have more significant and definite results as a longer survey with a greater degree of questions, responses, and respondents.
References


