

The background of the slide is a dense, overlapping pattern of green leaves, likely from a tropical plant like a banana tree, rendered in various shades of green and brown. The leaves are detailed with veins and some have small holes or imperfections.

Not gonna lie:

An investigation into constructional change

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Overview

- What are constructions and how do they change?
- How did *I'm not going to lie to you* become *not gonna lie*?
- Possible prosodic influence?
- Outlook

What are constructions...

- Constructions = form-meaning pairings
- Technically, all linguistic entities are constructions in construction grammar (Goldberg 2006: 5), e.g., the *V-ment* construction (f.ex., *abandonment*) (Hilpert 2013), *the Xer the Yer* (f.ex., *the more the merrier*) (Goldberg 1995)
- Most well-known and commonly used definition: „Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is **not strictly predictable** from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they **occur with sufficient frequency.**“ (Goldberg 2006: 5).

...and how do they change?

- Changes in form, e.g., phonologically, specificity, compositionality, size etc.
- Changes in meaning, e.g., connotation (amelioration/perjoration), semantic widening/narrowing etc.
- f.ex., *It is needless to say that* > *needless to say* (Schmid 2020), from compositional clause meaning ‘there is no need to say sth’ to an evidential marker

Chunking

- “[Chunking is a] repetition-driven routinization and usualization process driven by the strengthening of syntagmatic associations between the elements of recurrent sequences. It develops gradually over a potentially long period of time, marked by stages in which older and more advanced uses of a pattern coexist within communities and even within the usage repertoires of individual speakers.” (Schmid 2020: 316)
- However, chunking affects also low-frequency patterns like *it is needless to say*
- Possible explanation: “[...] Interlocutors notice that [these expressions] deviate from conventional utterance types and realize a special pragmatic potential [...]” (Schmid 2020: 135)

Not gonna lie

- How did *not gonna lie* develop?
- *Not gonna lie* developed from the near-compositional AGENT BE *not gonna/going to lie* to PATIENT to the pragmatic marker *not gonna lie*
- Which slots are available in each step? What are the paradigmatic choices for these slots?

Material

- *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)*
- 1990–2010s
- Written (4/5) and spoken (1/5) material from different registers and genres

Method

- search query: * * not * * lie * *
- After exclusion: 851 results

Stage 1:

AGENT BE *not going to lie to* PATIENT

- Attested from 1990–2019.
- Most common form *I'm/I am not going to/gonna lie to you/ya* (275 attestations) > AGENT-slot: first person singular, PATIENT-slot: second person (singular), BE in present tense singular form
- Other forms do exist, but are rare (40 attestations), most forms still have either *I* in AGENT-slot or *you* in PATIENT-slot, only four attestations have neither
- No attestations in past tense
- Usage: increase from 1990–2014, then decline

Stage 2a: AGENT BE *not going to/gonna lie*

- Attested from 1991–2019 (roughly same time frame as Stage 1), but only 3 attestations from 1990s, the rest occur after 2000
- Most common form: *I'm/I am not going to/gonna lie* (449 attestations)
- Only 10 attestations with different AGENTS
- F.ex.: “My dreams are really big. I'm not going to lie. I'd love to win a Super Bowl one day” (COCA, NYT, 2006)

Stage 2b: *Not going to/gonna lie to you*

- Rare, only 2 attestations
- Both from 2006, both from scripted TV shows (constructed dialog)

Stage 3: *Not gonna lie/Not going to lie*

- First attestation 2008
- 72 attestations in total, slight increase in use from 2008 to 2019
- “He's got a lot of charisma, definitely. Yeah. Not going to lie.” (SPOK, 2008)

Summary

- *I'm not going to lie to you* > *I'm not going to lie* > *not gonna lie*
- Already in the 1990s, the phrase had lost some of its compositionality (BE *going to lie* already fixed), verly limited paradigmatic choices for the other slots (mostly *I* and *you*)
- Loss of *to you* part early on
- Loss of AGENT BE part early to mid-2000s

Musings about prosody (1)

- Generally: lexical = stressed, non-lexical = unstressed
- Subordinate clauses usually constitute their own intonation units (e.g., Carr 2020)
- Delineation of intonation units in English in unmarked clauses: main-stressed syllable (nucleus) = main-stressed syllable of last lexical item (e.g., Carr 2020), first stressed syllable = main-stressed syllable of the first lexical item (e.g., Quirk et al. 1985).
- non-lexical items that are often stressed: negation (Carr 2020: 113)

Musings about prosody (2)

I'm NOT gonna LIE to you

- *Lie* as last lexical item
 - *Not* as a commonly-stressed non-lexical item
- > *I'm* and *to you* are comparatively unstressed

Musings about prosody (3)

Parallel reduction theory:

As constructions grammaticalize, their “phonetic bulk” decreases
(Bybee et al. 1994: 20)

- For prosody this means: there is a general decrease in stress
- Only focuses on production side

Musings about prosody (4)

- When listeners encounter a clause like *I'm not gonna lie to you*, they recognize its pragmatic potential, so they might want to use the expression
- The “edges” of the clause are unstressed and are eventually omitted
- Cause: production or perception? Are they omitted because their phonetic bulk becomes zero? Or are they omitted because the edges occur surrounded by more stressed items and are therefore not perceived by listeners?

Outlook

- Does this sound plausible to you?
- How could this hypothesis be tested experimentally?

References

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