

## INTD0111A/ARBC0111A

### The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Lecture #18  
Nov 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006

### Announcements

- No office hours this Thursday. Make-up office hours will be held today after class from 4:30 to 6pm. And there will be extended office hours tomorrow Wednesday from 2 to 5pm.
- I'm out of town with less than optimal access to e-mail from Friday morning till Monday evening. So,...
- If you want to see me about the homework, you have today and tomorrow.

### Announcements

- Speaking of Assignment #3, does anyone have any questions?
- You can listen to a vocalization of each sound on the IPA chart I gave you last time on the following webpage:  
<http://wso.williams.edu/~jdowse/ipa.html>

### Diversity over space

- So we looked at diversity over time. Starting today, we look at another aspect of linguistic diversity: Diversity over space, aka *sociolinguistic* diversity.
- Sociolinguistics is the study of language in social contexts. It focuses on the language of the *speech community* rather than the language of the *individuals*. To use our terminology from last time, it focuses on *E-language*, and not on *I-language*.
- For our two classes this week we discuss some of the main topics in sociolinguistics.

### The language-dialect distinction

- Earlier in the semester we discussed the language-dialect distinction. Our conclusion then was that the distinction is not linguistic, but sociopolitical.
- That really does not matter for formal linguistics, since the object of study in this approach is the I-language of individual speakers. For this approach, there are as many I-languages in the world as there are people.

### The language-dialect distinction

- Sociolinguists, by contrast, focus on linguistic diversity internal to speech communities.
- One such case of linguistic diversity is dialectal variation.
- For sociolinguists, dialects are mutually intelligible varieties of a language that differ in systematic ways.

## The language-dialect distinction

- So, if one of you grew up in New England and another one was born and raised in Georgia, you're still able to understand one another, despite differences in the language variety each of you speaks.
- We say you both speak two *dialects* of the same language, that is, English.

## The dialect continuum

- But as we discussed earlier in the semester, the mutual intelligibility diagnostic does not work all the time.
- First, dialectal variation can be thought of in terms of a *dialect continuum*, say, on a scale from 1 to 10:  
1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
- Each two adjacent dialects on the scale are mutually intelligible, but as we move leftward, differences increase and mutual intelligibility decreases, and by the time we reach dialect 10, dialect 1 becomes mutually non-intelligible with dialect 10.

## The dialect continuum

- Remember what Stephen Anderson says in one of the readings for the first class of the semester?

“Suppose you were to start from Berlin and walk to Amsterdam, covering about ten miles every day. You can be sure that the people who provided your breakfast each morning could understand (and be understood by) the people who served you supper that evening. Nonetheless, the German speakers at the beginning of your trip and the Dutch speakers at its end would have much more trouble, and certainly think of themselves as speaking two quite distinct (if related) languages.”

## The dialect continuum

- The problem then is where we can draw the line. Thinking of dialectal variation in terms of sharp and clear break points is obviously an oversimplification.

## Non-linguistic factors

- The second problem with the mutual intelligibility criterion is that it just does not work all the time. Other considerations “override” it.
- This happens in two scenarios: (1) When two mutually intelligible varieties of the same language are treated as separate languages. And (2) when two mutually non-intelligible varieties are treated as dialects of the same language.
- Both scenarios are attested.

## Who do you think you are to speak my language?

- Think of the recent evolving of “Serbian”, “Croatian”, and “Bosnian” languages in the former Yugoslavia.
- Prior to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, people in this part of the world all spoke something they called “Serbo-Croatian”.
- Today, they still speak the same thing, but it's not called Serbo-Croatian any more. It's Serbian, Croatian, or Bosnian.
- Well, after all, you don't want to say you speak the same language as the guy you fought in war against.

### **Who do you think you are to speak my language?**

- Similar considerations explain to us why we have Macedonian and Bulgarian, rather than, say, Macegarian. Or maybe Buledonian.
- Or why there is still Hindi and Urdu, rather than, say, Hindurdu or Urdindi.
- And why not Nembbari or Kalanembe, for Nembe and Kalabari in Nigeria?
- And the list goes on.

### **Your language is my language; doesn't really matter if I don't understand a word you say**

- On the other hand, we find the exact opposite scenario in a country like China, where political and cultural unification requires all people to speak dialects of the same language, even if they do not understand each other, such that Cantonese and Mandarin are talked about as "dialects" of Chinese.

### **Your language is my language; doesn't really matter if I don't understand a word you say**

- Same situation seems to hold for many of the Arabic dialects in the Middle East, though there the picture is obscured by the use of the so-called Modern Standard Arabic among educated speakers. But the Arabic of a bedouin in Saudi Arabia might be mutually non-intelligible with the Arabic of a farmer from Morocco. Still, because of historical, cultural, and political reasons, Arabs like to think of themselves as speaking the same language.

### **Language = D + A + N**

- D for "dialect," A for "army," and N for "navy."
- Max Weinreich was right:  
*"A language is a dialect with an army and a navy."*

### **That said, ...**

- The mutual intelligibility criterion does work in so many other situations, and that's where sociolinguists do most of their work on language variation.
- In what follows, we discuss how mutually intelligible varieties of the same language differ in systematic ways from another.

### **Two more terms: idiolect and accent**

- Before we do that, let me introduce a couple of terms that are also frequently used in the sociolinguistic literature: *idiolect* and *accent*.
- An idiolect is an individual's unique way of speech. Since no two people speak in the same way, we say that each one of them has an idiolect.

### Two more terms: idiolect and accent

- An accent is a person's distinctive way of pronouncing words, which is typically associated with a particular region, e.g., a Boston accent, a Brooklyn accent, or a British accent. It is also often used for the pronunciation of nonnatives speaking a foreign language.
- Notice also my use of the word "variety" as a convenient cover term for language varieties, whether these are distinct languages, or dialects, or even individual differences among speakers.

### So, how do dialects differ?

- Remember what a language is?  
Yes, Language = Lexicon + Grammar.
- Dialectal variation is expected therefore in both components: In the lexicon (lexical), as well as the grammar (phonological, morphological, and syntactic).
- Let's illustrate this from dialectal variation in English.

### Lexical dialectal variation

- In England people take a *lift* to the *first floor*, but in the US they take an *elevator* to the *second floor*.
- "In Britain, a *public school* is "private"... , and if a student showed up there wearing *pants* ("underpants) instead of *trousers* ("pants"), he would be sent home to get dressed."

### Lexical dialectal variation

- If you ask for a *tonic* in Boston, you will get a drink called *soda* or *soda-pop* in LA; and a *freeway* in LA is a *thruway* in NY, a *parkway* in New Jersey, a *motorway* in England, and an *expressway* or *turnpike* in other dialect areas.

### Lexical dialectal variation

- Hans Kurath in "What do you call it?":  
"Do you call it a *pail* or a *bucket*? Do you draw water from a *faucet* or from a *spigot*? Do you pull down the *blinds*, the *shades*, or the *curtains* when it gets dark? Do you *wheel* the baby, or do you *ride* it or *roll* it? In a *baby carriage*, a *buggy*, a *coach*, or a *cab*?"

### Dialectology: dialect maps

- The study of variation among dialects is called *dialectology*, and dialectologists typically represent this variation on dialect maps or dialect atlases, like the cheese map provided in the Fromkin *et al*'s chapter from today's readings.
- A line drawn on a map indicates a difference in a linguistic feature in the areas on both sides of the line. A line of this sort is technically referred to as an *isogloss*.

### **Dialectology: dialect maps**

- You can see map for the regional dialects in the US here:  
<http://www.geocities.com/yvain.geo/dialects.html>
- You can also see Bert Vaux's dialect maps for pronunciation here:  
<http://cfprod01.imt.uwm.edu/Dept/FLL/linguistics/dialect/maps.html>

### **Phonological dialectal variation**

- Speaking of pronunciation, how do you say “*caught*” and “*cot*”?
- And  
    “*Will Mary marry in a merry wedding?*”
- And is the Otter *Creek* a [krik] or a [kɹɪk]?
- And do you “*Pahk the cah in Hahvahd yahd*”?

### **Phonological dialectal variation**

- And where do you put the stress in “*address*” and “*cigarette*”?
- Is there an [h] in your “*herb*”? How about “*house*” and “*hero*”? [aws] and [iro]?
- And can you tell if I need a “*pin*” or “*pen*”?
- And do you like to simplify your consonant clusters to the *more natural* CV syllable?  
    Hello *pofessor!* (no typo here)

### **Morphological dialectal variation**

- How about variation in morphology?
- Some rural British English dialects use the possessive morpheme with pronouns, but not with nouns:  
    *my life; his dog*  
    but  
    *Tom cow; the old lady purse*

### **Morphological dialectal variation**

- In parts of Northern England and South Wales, the morpheme -s is not just a third person singular marker in present tense, but a general present tense marker:  
    *I likes him.*  
    *We goes.*

### **Morphological dialectal variation**

- Many dialects of English have *hisself* and *theirselves*.
- Appalachian English has *clumb* and *het* for “climbed” and “heated”.

### Syntactic dialectal variation

- Dialects also differ syntactically.
- So, can you double your modal verbs?  
*He might could do it.*  
*I used to could do it.*
- And who needs “that” in subject relative clauses anyway?  
*The man lives down the road is crazier than a loon.*

### Syntactic dialectal variation

- Can you use “done” as an auxiliary?  
*She done already told you.*
- And are you one of those people who would  
*"Smear your sister with jam on a slice of bread"*  
and  
*"Throw your father out the window his hat."*

### Syntactic dialectal variation

- And do you like to put in as many negation elements as you want?  
*He ain't never done no work to speak off.*

### Factors in dialectal variation

- Most of the examples mentioned above for dialectal variation are regional, that is, they typically occur in certain regions but not others.
- As it turns out, however, there is more to dialectal variation than just location. Several other factors could be involved. As a case in point, let's consider Appalachian English.

### Appalachian English

- In Appalachian English, we hear utterances like these:  
*I used to could read.*  
*I ain't no girl now.*  
*he had a broken back was never set.*  
*Put some bakin' sody on it.*  
*I fell upside of the building.*

### Appalachian English

- But there is more to these utterances than just reflecting a regional dialect.
- The speaker is an 68 year old male, belonging to a lower socioeconomic status group. He was actually a native of a southeastern Ohio county that borders several Appalachian counties.

### **Factors in dialectal variation**

- In addition to region, then, the linguistic features in these utterances may also be related to age, gender, and socioeconomic status. On Thursday, we will also look at how ethnicity can be a factor in dialectal variation. And that seems to be true of most, if not all, dialects in general.

### **But, ...**

- Whereas linguists and sociolinguists love variation, this is not the case with everyone else in society in general.
- Under the influence of prescriptive injunction and “purism,” one dialect in a speech community typically acquires a higher status and social prestige and gets to be viewed as the “correct” way of speaking.
- This is what is typically referred to as the “*standard*” dialect”. The remaining dialects then become *nonstandard*.

### **Next class agenda**

- On Thursday we will discuss the issue of language attitudes and how they arise. This will allow us to spend some time debunking some popular beliefs about language and linguistic variation.