

INTD0112

Introduction to Linguistics

Lecture #19
Nov 11th, 2009

Announcements

- HW5 is now posted online. It's due a week from today. It's mainly an "activity" HW, so it should be straightforward as long as you do the activities. Have fun with it!

Language and social justice

- Linguistic profiling study by John Baugh.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPGx1icFdLQ&feature=Playlist&p=4DC464EA70E42A6D>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAZMIC_OwTw
- Linguists, using their extensive knowledge of languages and dialects, strive to draw people's attention to the "equality" of all speech varieties by showing how each variety is a rule-governed system, and that there is no such thing as a dialect without rules.

Linguistic Egalitarianism: All speech varieties are equal

- Because of that, there's no sense of speaking of a "better" or "worse" dialect.
- After all, there is no set of objective criteria that we can use to "evaluate" languages, dialects, accents, or any speech varieties.
- As we will see later, attitudes towards particular languages or dialects are typically based on socio-political or socio-economic and other non-linguistic factors.

Transition from last class

- We have seen examples of **regional** dialects.
- Today we look at other instances of linguistic variation internal to the same speech community:
 - language and ethnicity;
 - standard vs. nonstandard varieties;
 - registers/styles/slang/jargon;
 - code-switching; and
 - language and gender.

Dialectal variation by ethnicity

- Ethnicity has also been studied as a factor in dialectal variation, as in the case of African American English, a dialect that shows systematic linguistic differences from the so-called Standard American English.

African American English

- AAE is a cover term used by linguists to refer to a continuum of English varieties typically spoken by African Americans.
- Notice, however, that there is more than just ethnicity here. Other factors influencing AAE varieties include age, socioeconomic status, gender, and style of speech.

African American English

- AAE is a rule-governed system, exactly as SAE is. It shows the same kind of systematic differences that distinguish dialects of English around the world.

AAE Phonology

- *r*-deletion is pretty common in AAE, such that the following words would come out the same:

guard-god

sore-saw

- Some speakers also drop their [l] in coda position:

toll-toe

all-awe

help-hep

AAE Phonology

- Word-final consonant cluster simplification is also common:

passed → [pæst] → [pæs]

- So, when an AAE speaker says

I pass the test yesterday

they are not making a mistake in tense morphology. They're simply simplifying the consonant cluster.

- Evidence: "*hated*" is pronounced [hejɪd] and does not become [hejt].

AAE Phonology

- Neutralization of [ɪ] and [ɛ] before nasals: Also common in many dialects, resulting in *pen* and *pin* being homophonous.
- Loss of interdental fricatives [θ] and [ð] word medially and word-finally: [θ] is replaced by [f], and [ð] is replaced by [v]:
mouth [maʊf]
brother [brʌvə]
- Word-initially, [θ] and [ð] become stops [t] and [d]:
think [tɪŋk] *the man* [də mæn]

AAE Morphosyntax

- Double (or multiple) negatives:
You don' know nothin'.
I don' never have no lunch.
- Copula "be" deletion:
He nice.
You crazy.
- Habitual "be":
The coffee be cold. (= always)
He be tired out. (habitually)

AAE Morphosyntax

- Absence of possessive -s:
John hat; Byron car
- Absence of third person singular -s:
she talk; he sing
- Absence of plural -s after quantifiers:
three dog; some cat
- Use of stressed “bin” as an auxiliary:
She bin married.
I bin known him.

AAE is just another English variety

- So, as you can see, AAE differs from SAE in systematic ways, and in the same manner that other dialects of English differ from SAE.
- As usual, popular beliefs turn out to be rooted in irrationality and ignorance. Claims about the “deficiency,” “incompleteness,” and “illogicality,” of AAE are simply ridiculous and in fact should be ridiculed when made.

Jeopardy!

- Jeopardy with a new twist:
<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/standardamerican/>
- History of AAE:
<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/AAVE/#>
- An excerpt about linguistic discrimination against AAE speaking students:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWIbIA9BltQ&feature=related>

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*.

The “standard”

- It is crucial to repeat that the standard-non-standard distinction is not linguistic.
- There is no sense in which the standard dialect is a more “correct” or “proper” way of speaking.
- There are several false, albeit popular, beliefs about the “status” of standard dialects, so let us do some “debunking” here.

I am rich and powerful, therefore I speak standard

- **First**, it is not really an accident that in almost every society around the world, the so-called standard dialect is typically that of the educated, wealthy, and those in power.
- If this is the case, it would be really quite absurd to even suggest that “standard” has anything to do with the linguistic properties that a dialect has.

Standard dialect and prescriptivism

- **Second**, the so-called standard dialect is often the one that conforms to the prescriptive rules in books of grammar.
- But many of these rules (in the case of European languages) were put by people some centuries ago who believed that a language's grammar must be modeled on the grammar of Latin and Greek.
- Besides, what's wrong with stranding your prepositions? Or splitting your infinitives? And do we really need to answer "*Who is it?*" by saying "*It's I*"?

Language change is NOT corruption

- **Third**, this whole fuss over "standard" language is fundamentally misguided. It's based on the very bizarre idea that language change is corruption.
- Language change is neither good nor bad. It's not progress nor decay. Language change is just that: *Change*.
- Passionate attitudes about standard language are typically rooted in an irrational attitude towards language change.

The "standard = logical" fallacy

- **Fourth**, they tell us that using double negatives is bad. It's illogical, hence substandard. Two negatives make a positive:

You don't know nothing.

- Ok, let's see. That makes French, Spanish, Russian, Greek, Hungarian, modern Arabic, all "illogical" languages. Not only so, it also makes Old and Middle English "illogical":

He never yet no villany not said

In all his life to no kind of creature.

The "standard = logical" fallacy

- But here's the more serious question: Who said that language is a logic-governed system, anyway?
- What's logical about this third person singular *-s* at the end of verbs in the present tense in English? Why have tense morphology at all? Why can't all languages be like Chinese?
- And what's logical about the rule of *Do-support* in English?
- And is it better to have more vowels or less vowels?
- And am I at an advantage or disadvantage if my language is fusional?
- And is having these long polysynthetic words in a language like Mohawk or Eskimo good or bad? Logical or illogical?

So, should I drop my "r" or keep it?

- **Finally**, if there's any sense at all to these claims about the superiority of a standard dialect, why is it that the same linguistic feature is considered standard in one dialect but nonstandard in another?
- Compare *r*-dropping by the British and by New Yorkers.
- Notice that historically *r*-drop was a marker of prestige when it first appeared in New England and the South. But what about now?

Nonstandard means "different": Period.

- So, you can easily see how absurd it is to pass judgmental values on dialects.
- There is no such thing as a "better" or a "more expressive" dialect. There's simply a "different" dialect.

So, ...

- It all comes down to *prestige*, a totally nonlinguistic concept.
- Linguistically, no dialect is inherently better or worse than another.
- Dialects are just *different* language varieties. And this is just another instance of diversity.
- And diversity is not bad. Conformity is not required. And forcing conformity on people is a form of lunacy.

Some instances of lunacy: Linguicide

- Russian tsars banned Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Georgian, Armenian, and anything non-Russian.
- Cajun English and French were banned in southern Louisiana by practice, if not by law.
- And now they want to kill Singlish and replace it with the “Speak Good English” nonsense.

Some instances of lunacy: Banning

- France? They have an academy to regulate this absurdity: “We hereby declare *le parking*, *le weekend*, and *le hotdog* forbidden.”
- Not to mention all these efforts to ban the use of hundreds of local village dialects, or *patois*, including those that are separate Romance languages, or even non-Romance at all (e.g., Breton).

The “divine” and the beast

- Arabic? In Arabic-speaking countries, Classical Arabic has the status of a close to divine language, obviously because of its ties to the Quran and Islam.
- Colloquial dialects are looked upon as “corrupt” versions of the “standard” language, which is still used though mainly in writing.
- But as usual, people are totally misguided and misled by wrong ideas from prescriptive grammarians. Modern dialects are as rule-governed as Classical Arabic.

Irrational prejudices: Sign languages

- In many places of the world, the use of sign languages among the deaf was banned, so they can continue to read lips and produce sounds.
- But as we mentioned before, sign languages exhibit the same exact linguistic properties that we find in all “spoken” human languages. The only difference is in *modality*: Spoken languages use the oral-aural modality; sign languages use the visual-manual modality.

Unfortunately, though, most people just “don’t get it”

- That said, linguists are quite a minority, and people who take linguistics courses are much fewer in number than those who do not.
- Bottom line: The majority of people in human societies do not understand what we said here. For them, there is indeed a “better” dialect.
- As a result, whether we like it or not, certain sociolinguistic patterns evolve, and are worthy of studying.

Standard = Success

- As you should expect, one such pattern of behavior arises as a result of stigmatization of nonstandard dialects.
- Speakers of these nonstandard varieties are told that their dialects are wrong and inferior and that they have to learn the standard variety in school to become successful.

Standard = Success

- That makes children who come from homes where nonstandard varieties are spoken at a disadvantage in school, because they need to make adjustments from the language they speak to the standard varieties they learn in class (an adjustment unnecessary for children who come from homes where standard varieties are spoken).

Standard = Success

- Some make these adjustments and they become *bidialectal* speakers. Others become more or less fluent in the standard, but they retain their nonstandard dialect still. And yet some others master the standard dialect and reject the nonstandard altogether.
- Which adjustments are made depends on a number of factors, one of which is *prestige*.

Prestige: Overt

- In sociolinguistics, a distinction is often made between ***overt prestige*** and ***covert prestige*** in the use of language varieties.
- Overt prestige is the one attached to a particular variety by the society-at-large, which defines how people should speak in order to be successful and gain status in society.

Prestige: Covert

- Covert prestige, on the other hand, is what makes speakers of nonstandard varieties retain their dialects as a means to maintain their “belonging” to a particular community.
- Nonstandard varieties, despite being stigmatized, still persist, because their speakers use them as a marker of *group identification*.

Testing people’s language attitudes

- The linguistic insecurity test
- The matched guise test.

Further aspects of sociolinguistic diversity

Styles (aka Registers)

- Style or register refers to the kind of language that one uses in a particular situation. It is a kind of “situation dialect.”
- This is another instance of language variation: situation-based language variation.
- One can distinguish two major styles of speech: formal and informal, with a range of styles in between forming a continuum.

Style

- Formal style is typically used in writing, speeches, the media, educational institutions, etc.
- Informal style is typically used in daily conversations with family and friends for example.

Informal style

- Informal style is characterized by deletion, contraction, simplification of some syntactic rules, and the use of certain words that would not occur in formal styles.
- Notice, however, that “informal” does not mean “without rules”. Informal use of language is still rule-governed and does not mean that “anything goes.”

Informal style

- For example, question-formation can be shortened in informal registers by deletion of both the subject and auxiliary or the auxiliary alone, but never the subject alone:

Are you running the marathon tomorrow?
Running the marathon tomorrow?
You running the marathon tomorrow?
**Are running the marathon tomorrow?*

Informal style

- Other aspects of variation in casual speech include saying “*Where’s it at?*” for the more formal “*Where is it?*”
- By contrast, the subjunctive is pretty much confined to formal contexts.
- Also, passive constructions are more likely to be used in formal, rather than informal styles.

Formal vs. informal address terms

- Many languages have rules for register. For example, the *tu-vous* and *du-sie* distinction in French and German, respectively.
- French even has a verb *tutoyer* and German has *duzen*.
- Japanese also has a system of honorific marking.
- Check also McGregor's discussion of respect varieties in Australian languages.

How do you say “eat” in Thai?

- Thai has a lot of “eat’s”:
 - kin*, used with intimates, and about criminals and animals
 - thaan*, used with nonintimates informally.
 - rabprathaa*, used with dignitaries on formal occasions.
 - Chan*, used only for Buddhist monks.

Next class agenda

- More about sociolinguistic variation.
- Language change. Read Chapter 12.