

## INTD0111A

# The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Lecture #18  
April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## Announcements

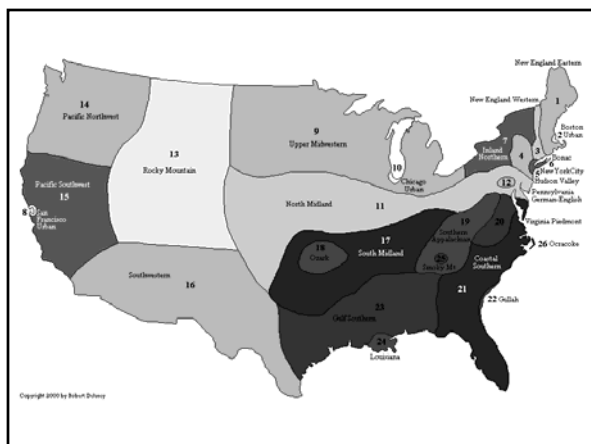
- In case you don't know, I put the Writing Code DVDs on reserve for this class.
- Any questions on Assignment #3?

## Today's agenda

- Look at more regional dialectal variation.
- Discuss examples of dialectal variation tied to particular ethnicities.
- Debunk some myths about language variation.

## Transition

- Sociolinguists look at cross-linguistic variation in speech varieties internal to the speech community: dialects, accents, idiolects, styles, registers, etc.
- One factor in dialectal variation is "region."
- Last time we looked at a map of the main dialects in the US.



## Dialectology: dialect maps

- Interesting work on dialectal variation has been done by Bert Vaux.

<http://www4.uwm.edu/FLL/linguistics/dialect/maps.html>

### **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 do you like to put in as many negation elements as you want?

*He ain't never done no work to speak off.*

### **Linguistic Egalitarianism: All speech varieties are equal**

- Dialects are rule-governed systems. Whatever features they have follow from general rules and principles that regulate human language in general.
- 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 compare languages, dialects, accents, or any speech varieties.
- As we will see later, attitudes towards particular languages or dialects are typically based on socio-economic and other non-linguistic factors.

Some examples of the so-called  
“substandard” dialects of  
American English

## Appalachian English

- Appalachian English (AE) is the term used primarily to refer to nonstandard varieties of English spoken in the southern Appalachian mountain range, including mid and southern regions of West Virginia, western North Carolina and Virginia, eastern Tennessee and Kentucky, northwest Arkansas and southern Missouri.

## Appalachian English phonology

- There are systematic vowel correspondences between AE and Standard American English (SAE), e.g.,

| Word         | AE      | SAE     |
|--------------|---------|---------|
| <i>pinch</i> | [pɪntʃ] | [pɪntʃ] |
| <i>ten</i>   | [tɛn]   | [tɛn]   |
| <i>push</i>  | [puʃ]   | [puʃ]   |

## Appalachian English phonology

- Instances of metathesis is found in AE as they are in other varieties of English:

| Word           | AE        | SAE       |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| <i>prevail</i> | [pɹævɛjl] | [prəvɛjl] |
| <i>album</i>   | [ælbəm]   | [ælbəm]   |
| <i>asked</i>   | [æskt]    | [æskt]    |

## Appalachian English phonology

- AE places primary stress on the first syllable of certain words where SAE places the stress elsewhere:

| Word            | AE       | SAE      |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| <i>Detroit</i>  | Détroit  | Detróit  |
| <i>cigar</i>    | cígar    | cigár    |
| <i>November</i> | Nóvember | Novémbér |

## Appalachian English morphology

- AE has preserved the aspectual prefix *a-* (used commonly in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) in certain verbal conjugations:

*He came a-running.*

*I knew he was a-telling the truth.*

*I was a-washing one day.*

## Appalachian English morphology

- AE has also preserved certain irregular verb conjugations in the past tense:

*climb-clumb*

*heat-het*

*rake-ruck*

*drag-drug*

### **Appalachian English syntax**

- AE makes use of double modals:  
*I might could make one up.*  
*I useta couldn't count.*
- Multiple negation:  
*There ain't never none on that shelf.*  
*I can't hardly read it.*
- Deletion of the relative pronoun in subject relative clauses:  
*He had a broken back was never set.*  
*That man lives down the road is crazier than a loon.*

### **Appalachian English lexicon**

- AE also has its own lexical expressions that do not exist in SAE, e.g., counterfactual *liketa*:  
*I laughed so hard I liketa died.*
- AE also uses *right* as a degree adverb:  
*It's right nice weather today.*

### **Appalachian English**

- Notice there is more to AE utterances than just reflecting a regional dialect.
- The speaker of some of these utterances for example is a 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.

### **Dialectal variation by ethnicity**

- In addition to region, then, the linguistic features in these utterances may also be related to age, gender, and socioeconomic status.
- Ethnicity has also been studied as a factor in dialectal variation, as in the case of African American English and Chicano English, two dialects that also show 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's 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 from other dialects of English that occur between many of the world's major dialects.
- Let's discuss some of these here.

## 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, particularly when one of the two consonants is an alveolar (e.g., t, d, s, z):  
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 [hetɪd] and does not become [het].

## AAE Phonology

- Neutralization of [ɹ] and [ɛ] before nasals: Also common in many dialects, resulting in *pen* and *pin* being homophonous.
- Loss of interdental fricative [θ] and [ð] word medially and word-finally: [θ] is replaced by [f], and [ð] is replaced by [v]:  
*mouth* [mawf]  
*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.

## Chicano English

- The same can be said about Chicano English (ChE). While there is no single English dialect spoken by all Latinos, ChE represents another instance of ethnic dialectal variation.
- And as the case is with AAE, ChE shows systematic differences from SAE in phonology, morphology, and syntax.

## ChE Phonology

- While SAE has 11 stressed vowels, Spanish has only five [i, e, u, a, o].
- ChE speakers whose native language is Spanish may substitute the Spanish vowel system for the English, resulting in different words being pronounced the same, e.g.,  
[ʃip] for both *ship* and *sheep*  
[rid] for *rid* and *read*

## ChE Phonology

- The ʃ-tʃ alternation:  
*show* is pronounced as [tʃo]  
*check* is pronounced as [ʃɛk]
- Devoicing of [z], e.g.,  
[isi] for *easy*  
[gajs] for *guys*
- [θ] becoming [t] and [ð] becoming [d]:  
[tin] for *thin* and [dej] for *they*

## ChE Phonology

- Word-final consonant cluster simplification:  
*star-start*  
*war-ward*
- Notice also that the process leads to dropping of tense endings, e.g.,  
*poked* is pronounced [pok]  
*He love her.*
- This is not a grammatical error. It's a phonological process of consonant cluster simplification.

## ChE Phonology

- Spanish also has a phonological constraint against starting a word with an [s] cluster. As a result, some ChE speakers will epenthesize a vowel at the beginning of words such as *scare*, pronouncing it as if it were spelled *escare*, and *school* as if it were spelled *eschool*.

## ChE Syntax and Lexicon

- Double negatives are common in ChE, as the case is with several other dialects:  
*I don't have no money.*  
*I no want nothin'.*
- Using "more" in contexts where SAE would use "more often":  
*I speak English more.*
- Using "out from" for "away from":  
*They hope to get out from their problems.*

## ChE Syntax and Lexicon

- ChE “borrow” is SAE “lend”:  
*Borrow me a pencil.*
- It should be noted that many ChE speakers are bidialectal, and they can use either SAE or ChE in their speech depending on the social situation.

## Conclusion

- Sociolinguistically, a language is a collection of dialects that are mutually intelligible, but which systematically differ lexically, phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically.
- Crucially, each dialect is rule-governed and exhibit the same linguistic characteristics we see in other human languages.

## 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*.

## My dialect is “more equal” than yours—Orwell’s style

- It’s reminiscent of the situation in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*:  
*“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”*
- Same here: “All dialects are equal, but some dialects are more equal than others.”

## My dialect is better than yours

- These lucky “more equal” dialects are typically those of “prestigious” groups, and they are the ones that are typically referred to as the “standard,” “correct,” and “proper” way of speaking.
- The remaining unlucky dialects now get labelled “nonstandard,” “substandard,” “wrong,” or “inferior” dialects.

## Class agenda: Debunking

- Ok, there is a lot of “bunk” when it comes to the issue of standard vs. nonstandard dialects, so we need to do some “debunking” here.

### **I am rich and powerful, therefore I speak standard**

- **First**, it can't be really an accident that in every society around the world, the so-called standard dialect is always that of the educated, wealthy, and those in power. Have you ever heard of a standard dialect spoken by the blue-collar inhabitants of an impoverished town in a country?

### **I am rich and powerful, therefore I speak standard**

- 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.
- But this is exactly what we hear: Standard is "more correct" and "more proper". Even "purer" and "more logical" when the absurdity goes too far.

### **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 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 change is corruption. For some reason, people like to think that the past forms of language are "better" or "more correct."
- 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 thus rooted in an irrational attitude about language change.

### **The "standard = logical" fallacy**

- **Fourth**, they tell us that using double negatives is bad. It's illogical. Two negatives make a positive:  
*You don't know nothing.*
- Ok, let's see.
- That makes French an "illogical" language. 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 putting heads initial or final?
- And what is 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?



### The “standard = logical” fallacy

- And is it better to have more vowels or less vowels?
- And am I at an advantage or disadvantage if my language does not have object incorporation or verb serialization?
- And is having these long polysynthetic words in a language like Mohawk or Eskimo good or bad? Logical or illogical?

### Nonstandard means “different”: Period Linguistic Egalitarianism

- Well, you learned a lot about human language in this course, and you now know how languages differ and how they are the same.
- So, you can easily see how absurd it is to try to compare languages. And it is equally absurd to try to compare dialects of the same language.
- There is no such thing as a “better” or a “more expressive” dialect. There’s simply a “different” dialect.

### 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.
- Remember that *r*-drop was a marker of prestige when it first appeared in New England and the south. But what about now?

### 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 “change-is-corruption” fallacy**

- 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.

### **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 will see later, 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. We do this on Monday.

### **Next class agenda**

- Prestige: overt and covert.
- Code-switching.
- Styles.
- Language and gender.
- Read the relevant sections in Fromkin *et al*’s chapter.