

INTD0111A/ARBC0111A

The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Lecture #20
Nov 21st, 2006

Announcements

- No class on Tuesday Dec 5th. Make up class will be given on Wednesday Dec 6th, at 7pm. I'll arrange a room for that and let everyone know by e-mail.

Dialectal variation cont.

- Let's review the main conclusions so far.
- Sociolinguistically, a language is a collection of dialects that are mutually intelligible, but which differ lexically, phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically.
- All dialects are equal. There is no such thing as a linguistically "better" or "worse" dialect.
- Standard dialects gain their privileged status because of speakers' desire for overt prestige.

Dialectal variation cont.

- We have also seen how African American English (AAE) is just another dialect of English that differs systematically from the so-called Standard American English (SAE) in phonology, morphology, and syntax, and exhibit the same linguistic phenomena that we find in other dialects of English as well as in other human languages.

Code-switching

- Another example of the relationship between language and ethnicity comes from the varieties of English spoken by the Hispanic communities in the US.
- Many of these speakers are bilingual, and many of them move back and forth between English and Spanish in their speech. This process is called code-switching.

Chicano English

- Code-switching is common in places where more than one language is used. We see it in certain parts of Canada where speakers code-switch between English and French. The Swiss also switch between French and German.
- While there is no single English dialect spoken by all Latinos, Chicano English (ChE) represents another instance of the ethnicity and 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.,
[šip] for both *ship* and *sheep*
[rid] for *rid* and *read*

ChE Phonology

- The š-č alternation:
show is pronounced as [čo]
check is pronounced as [šɛk]
- Devoicing of [z], e.g.,
[isi] for *easy*
[gajs] for *guys*
- [θ] becoming [t] and [ð] becoming [d]:
[tin] for *thin* and [de] 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 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.
- Notice that many ChE speakers are bidialectal, and they can use either SAE or ChE in their speech depending on the social situation.
- Maybe this would be a good point to transition to how speakers vary their speech depending on the situation.

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 formal contexts, e.g., written language, 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.

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.

Slang

- Certain words used in informal styles are called *slang*, e.g.,
 - barf, flub, rave, ecstasy, pig, fuzz, cool.*
- Some slang words gain acceptance over time, e.g.,
 - dwindle, glib, mob, hang-up, rip-off, fan, phone, TV, blimp, hot dog*

Slang

- Some slang words originate in the underworld:
 - crack, sawbuck, to hang paper (to write “bum” checks), con, brek (from breakfast), burn (tobacco), screw (prison officer).

Jargon

- Jargon or argot refers to the technical language used in a particular domain.
- For example, in this course we used a lot of linguistic jargon, e.g., head, complement, parameter, attraction, morpheme, constituent, etc.
- Computer jargon: PC, CPU, RAM, ROM, modem, hacking, virus, download, etc.

Taboo or not taboo? That’s the question

- Some words are considered taboo and are not to be used, at least not in the presence of “polite company.”
- F-words in English. Names of sexual organs. That’s why you have to star them in writing (“F***ing dumb”) or bleep them on TV.

Euphemisms

- The presence of taboo words leads to the creation of so-called euphemisms, expressions that are used to avoid a taboo word.
 - “pass away”* or *“pass on”* for *“die”*
 - “funeral directors”* for *“morticians”*
- Other instances of taboo words are those that have “racist” associations, e.g., *kike, wop, nigger, towelhead, slant.*

Language and gender

- Language use may also reflect certain attitudes or expectations about sexes in society.

Compare:

My cousin is a professor.

My cousin is a nurse.

- As with racism, language use can reflect sexism in society, e.g., compare the connotation of *spinster/old maid* with that of *bachelor*.

Language and gender

- In many languages, terms referring to males are also used generically to refer to “mankind” or to everyone in a group:

All *men* are created equal.

Every student should do *his* best.

- This is changing, however, under the influence of the feminist movement and a common desire to avoid bias and stereotypes, and more general terms are used:

Every student should *their* best.

chair (not *chairman*)

police officer (not *policeman*)

firefighter (not *fireman*)

Language and gender

- Language variation may also relate to the gender of the speaker. In some languages, this variation may actually be linguistic.
- In Koasati, spoken in Louisiana, words that end in /s/ when spoken by men, end in /l/ or /n/ when spoken by women, e.g.,

lakawhol (for women) and lakawhos (for men)

Language and gender

- Sociolinguistic studies on the speech of men and women showed also that both genders differ in their usage of language.
- For example, women have been noted to use more standard forms than men.
- “Linguistic insecurity?” “Child rearing?”

Happy Thanksgiving everyone. Enjoy the break.