

## INTD0111A

# The Unity and Diversity of Human Language

Lecture #17  
April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## Announcements

- Assignment 3 is officially assigned. It's due next Monday April 20<sup>th</sup>.
- BTW, scores for Assignment 2 are posted online.
- Those of you who have questions regarding what counts as a violation of the Honor Code, please do get in touch with me.
- For one thing, copying answers from someone else's work, whether it's the work of another student or of someone on the internet is a VIOLATION, and will be treated as such. Please refer to this again:
- <http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/acadinfo/honorcode/statement.htm>

## Announcements

- If you have questions on your LAP project, please come to my office hours.
- The LAP is due May 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Remember also that each one of you has to do a 5-minute presentation on your project in the last week of classes.

## Transition from last time

- We know now that languages do change in all aspects of their lexicon and grammar.
- The question we raised last time was: Why? We have discussed some reasons.
- In particular, however, we should be intrigued by why a language changes its syntax.

## A view from the “parametric” window

- Language change is systematic.
- Language change never takes a language outside the confines of what is a “possible human language.”
- If so, then language change must be regulated by the same principles governing cross-linguistic variation in general.
- Hypothesis: Language change is the result of a change in a language's parametric settings because of a change in the primary linguistic data (PLD).
- Let's look at a couple of examples.

## Change of word order in English

- As we mentioned last time, there was a change in word order from SOV in Old English to SVO in Middle and Modern English.
- OE had sentences like (a) below (using ModE words simply for convenience):
  - a. *The man the dog bit.*

## Change of word order in English

- But OE also developed a stylistic rule such that the verb will come before the subject if the sentence is introduced by a conjunction like “and” or a transition word like “then”:
  - b. *And bit the man the dog*
- Suppose the occurrence of this type of sentence becomes really frequent in the PLD. What would the child infer about word order in her language?
- “Hmmm ... is my language SOV or SVO?”

## Change of word order in English

- Well, the sentence in (b) could be derived either from
  - c. *The man the dog bit.*  
(which is the case in the adult grammar)
- or,
- d. *The man bit the dog.*

## Change of word order in English

- Suppose further that OE speakers also frequently produce sentences with the verb right after a topic phrase (e.g., adverbial):
  - e. *Yesterday bit the man the dog.*
- Since subjects can also be topics, sentences such as (f) will also occur more frequently in the PLD of a child learning OE:
  - f. *The man bit the dog.*

## Ambiguity in the input

- For adults, the verb is fronted from final position. But for children, the PLD is ambiguous.
- Children may thus be driven to conclude that their language is actually verb-initial, not verb-final.
- Later on, when the fad for verb fronting dies out, English will be left with the rigid SVO order of today.

## Language change as parameter re-setting

- The view of language as a biological system, thus, takes language change (at least in the area of syntax) to be the result of parameter re-setting by children because of innovations in the PLD.
- So, while innovations start with adults, under this approach, language change is actually done by children.

## From V2 to non-V2 in OE

- Using the parametric approach, David Lightfoot provides an analysis of the change of verb placement from OE to MidE and ModE.
- To remind you, some languages like German, Dutch, and other Scandinavian languages have a restriction on the position of the finite verb in the sentence: The verb has to come in second, no matter what the first constituent is.

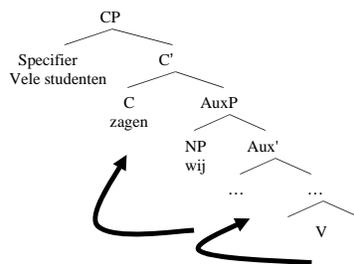
## V2 in Dutch

- [Wij] zagen vele studenten in Amsterdam.  
We saw many students in Amsterdam.
- [Vele studenten] zagen wij in Amsterdam.
- [In Amsterdam] zagen wij vele studenten.
- [Vaak] zagen wij vele studenten in Amsterdam.
- \*[In Amsterdam] wij zagen vele studenten.
- \*[Vaak] wij zagen vele studenten in Amsterdam zagen.

## V2 in Dutch

- In our discussion of syntax, we explained the V2 effect in terms of the V2 parameter, whose positive setting forces finite verbs to move all the way from V to Aux, then to C, when specifier of C is filled.
- A tree is given on the next slide:

## V2 in Dutch



## Setting the V2 parameter: The trigger

- What the Dutch-learning child needs to do, as opposed to, say, the English-learning or French-learning child, is simply observe positive evidence in the PLD for the setting of the V2 parameter.
- Examples of such evidence will be sentences like (b-d) above, repeated here for convenience:
  - [Vele studenten] zagen wij in Amsterdam.
  - [In Amsterdam] zagen wij vele studenten.
  - [Vaak] zagen wij vele studenten in Amsterdam.

## Setting the V2 parameter: The threshold

- Statistical counts for V2 languages, however, show that the XP in specifier of C is subject 70% of the time in conversational speech, and nonsubject 30% of the time.
- It must be then that 30% is enough to set the V2 parameter positively. Sometimes, this is expressed as the “**threshold**” for setting the parameter.

## Now, back to OE/MidE

- OE and MidE texts show evidence for verb-second orders as well as other orders.
- On the surface, then, it looks like, V2 was optional at this stage in the history of English.
- As it turns out, however, there is good evidence provided by Kroch and Taylor (1997) that MidE actually had two main dialects: A northern, Scandinavian-based V2 dialect, and a southern non-V2 dialect.
- The alternation in texts then is the result of the presence of these two dialects.

## Now, back to OE/MidE

- The challenging question now is: Why did the V2 grammar in MidE die out?

## The loss of V2 from English

- Under the parametric approach, Lightfoot provides three reasons for the death of V2 in English.
- **First**, children in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire as they mingled with southerners, must have heard sentences where the verb is in second position much less frequently than before.
- According to one statistical count of V2 structures in *Sawles Warde*, a 13<sup>th</sup> century text, only 17% of main clauses had V2 where the initial element was a nonsubject. This is less than the 30% threshold we noted for the V2 languages of today.

## The loss of V2 from English

- **Second**, northern children must have also started hearing sentences where the verb was in third position, e.g.,
  - a. Æfter his gebede he [<sub>v</sub>ahof] þæt cild up  
“After his prayer he lifted the child up.”
  - b. þis he [<sub>v</sub>dyde] eat for þes biscopes luene  
“This he did all for this bishop’s love.”

## The loss of V2 from English

- **Third**, around that same time, the V-to-Aux-to-C movement to form yes-no questions was being lost from the grammar.
- As a result, forms like “*Visited you London last week?*” were becoming infrequent in the PLD, giving way to “*Did you visit London last week?*”.

## The loss of V2 from English

- As a result of these three factors, Lightfoot argues, the “trigger” to set the V2 parameter positively was no longer “robust” in the PLD of children learning English, and as a result, children were forced to set the parameter negatively, giving rise to the non-V2 English of today.

## Summary

- The theory of UG, thus, not only accounts for cross-linguistic variation, but also for language change over time.
- In both domains, diversity is a reflex of the process of parameter setting.

## Another kind of diversity

### Diversity over Space.

### Sociolinguistic variation

- 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*.
- For today and the next two classes we discuss some of the main topics in sociolinguistics.

### The language-dialect distinction

- Earlier in the semester we briefly 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 language of individual speakers. For this approach, there are as many 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 the mutual intelligibility diagnostic does not work all the time, however.
- 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

- Let's consider this quote from Stephen Anderson in one of the articles on the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) website:  
"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 other nonlinguistic 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.
- 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 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 makes Cantonese and Mandarin talked about as "dialects" of Chinese, even though they are mutually non-intelligible.

## 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 is mutually non-intelligible with the Arabic of a farmer from Morocco. Still, because of historical, religious, 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.

## Idiolect, accent, and variety

- Before we do that, let me introduce three terms that are also frequently used in the sociolinguistic literature: *idiolect*, *accent*, and *variety*.
- 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.

## Idiolect, accent, and variety

- 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 non-natives speaking a foreign language.
- Finally, the word “**variety**” is typically used as a convenient cover term for linguistic systems, 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 therefore expected in both components: In the lexicon (lexical), as well as the grammar (phonological, morphological, and syntactic). And again the change is systematic and follows from general principles that regulate human language.
- Let’s illustrate this from dialectal variation in English.

## Lexical dialectal variation

- From the readings:
- 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

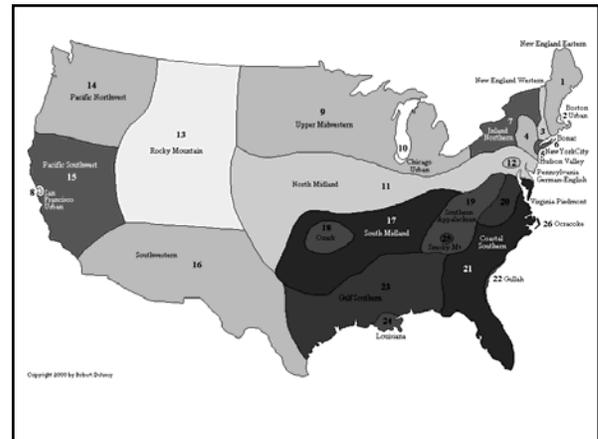
- If you ask for a *tonic* in Boston, you will get a drink called *soda* or *soda-pop* in LA; and a *freeway* in LA is a *thruway* in NY, a *parkway* in New Jersey, a *motorway* in England, and an *expressway* or *turnpike* in other dialect areas.

## 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 book.
- 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 a map for the regional dialects in the US with some comments on dialectal differences here:  
<http://www.geocities.com/yvain.geo/dialects.html>
- You can also see Bert Vaux's dialect maps here:  
<http://www4.uwm.edu/FLL/linguistics/dialect/maps.html>

## Next class agenda

- More on dialectal variation: Phonological, morphological, and syntactic.
- Social dialects: African American English and Chicano English.
- Read Fromkin *et al*'s Chapter 10.
- Follow the two links on the previous slide to know more about dialectal variation in the US.