INTD0112 Introduction to Linguistics

Lecture #20
Nov 16th, 2009

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."
- One can distinguish two major styles of speech: formal and informal, with a range of styles in between forming a continuum.
- One characteristic of informal style is the use of **slang**.

Slang

- Certain words used in informal styles are called *slang*, e.g.,

  barf, flub, rave, ecstasy, pig, fuzz.
- 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).

Slang

- Some slang words gain acceptance over time, e.g.,

  dwindle, glib, mob, hang-up, rip-off, fan, phone, TV, blimp, hot dog

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, wh-in-situ, morpheme, constituent*, etc.
- Computer jargon: *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." That's why you have to *** them in writing 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.*

Sociolinguistic variation due to bilingualism or multilingualism

Code-switching

- Another pattern of sociolinguistic behavior is ***code-switching***, where bilingual speakers typically move back and forth between two languages in their speech.
- 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. In the US, this is common among bilingual speakers of English and Spanish.

Code-switching is rule-governed

- Code-switching does not produce "broken" English. The process is still governed by the rules of each language.

Code-switching is rule-governed

- In Spanish NPs, for example, the adjective usually follows the noun (unlike in English NPs):
  My mom fixes green tamales. Adj N
  Mi mamá hace tamales verdes. N Adj
- In a code-switching situation a bilingual Spanish-English speaker may produce:
  My mom fixes tamales verdes.
  Mi mamá hace green tamales.

  but not:
  *My mom fixes verdes tamales.
  *Mi mamá hace tamales green.

Language and gender

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

- Dictionaries often give us clues to social attitudes. Examples in the 1969 edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* include examples such as

  "*manly courage*" and "*masculine charm*"

  but

  "*womanish tears*" and "*feminine wiles*"
- In Webster's *New World Dictionary of the American Language*, "*honorarium"* is defined as

  "*a payment to a professional man for services on which no fee is set or legally obtainable.*"

Language and gender

- Perhaps "man" has two meanings: "male" and "human".
- But:

  "If a woman is swept off a ship into the water, the cry is *Man overboard*. If she is killed by a hit-and-run driver, the charge is *manslaughter*. If she is injured on the job, the coverage is *workmen's compensation*. But if she arrives at the threshold marked *Men only*, she knows the admonition is not intended to bar animals or plants or inanimate objects. It is meant for her."

  A. Graham: "How to make troubles"

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.
- A. A. Milne wonders;

  "If the English language has been properly organized … then there would be a word which meant both 'he' and 'she', and I could write, 'If John or Mary comes, heesh will want to play tennis,' which would save a lot of trouble."

  (*The Christopher Robin Birthday Book*)

Language and gender

- Some of the gender-biased aspects of language are 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 do **their** best.*

  chair (not *chairman*)

  police officer (not *policeman*)

  firefighter (not *fireman*)

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?"
- Or perhaps the studies didn't take into account other factors than just gender.

Nichols (1983)

- Study of linguistic behavior in an African-American community in Georgetown County in South Carolina.
- After several months living there, she described the sociolinguistic situation as:

  "a speech continuum which ranges from an English creole known as *Gullah* or *Geechee* on the one end, to a variety of Black English [AAE] in the center, to a regionally standard variety of English at the other end."
- Of the three, Gullah, is the most local and least prestigious.

Nichols (1983)

- Nichols studied how frequently speakers use the following Gullah terms in their speech:
  a. the pronoun ***ee***, e.g., *Miss Hassel had – ee had all kinds of flowers*.
  b. the word ***fuh***, used to mean 'to', e.g., *I come fuh get my coat*.
  c. the preposition ***to***, used to mean 'at', e.g., *Can we stay to the table?*

Nichols (1983)

- It turned out that older men and women used Gullah terms generally, but among the younger women and men there was a sharp difference.
- Beginning at age 10, males used more Gullah than females.
- Obviously, age differences mattered here.
- An analysis of the social network of the community might explain the patterns.

Nichols (1983)

- Men, both young and old, take construction jobs, which require little education but pay well. On the job, they use Gullah for interaction and group identification.
- Older women primarily worked as farm day laborers or maids, where interaction is again with coworkers.
- Younger woman, by contrast, are taking up jobs in the tourist industry, as sales clerks, mail carriers, and school teachers, hence need a higher level of education and interact with speakers of Standard English.

Nichols (1983)

- Nichols' study thus shows that we cannot isolate gender as the only factor leading to differences in standard language use. In Georgetown County, it is also the economic opportunities afforded women and men that shape their language usage.

Language change

So, do you speak English?

- Yes!
- And so did Shakespeare:

  A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

- Translation?

  Not really!

So, do you speak English?

- Yes! And so did Chaucer:

  Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
  The droght of March hath perced to the roote.

- Translation?

  When April with its sweet showers
  The drought of March has pierced to the root.

So, do you speak English?

- Yes! And so did the guy who wrote *Beowulf*:

  Wolde guman findan þone þe him on sweofote sare geteode.

- Translation?

  He wanted to find the man who harmed him while he slept.

Languages change over time

- So, you get the point: Languages do change over time.
- There are two main questions with regard to language change:

  First, how does a language change?
  Second, why does a language change?

- It is probably more reasonable to answer the "how" question before we attempt to answer the "why". That's what we do today.

Language = Lexicon + Grammar

- Remember that a language has two components: a *lexicon* (simply a list of words) and a *grammar* (a system that manipulates the lexicon in several ways).
- The grammar of a language includes rules that affect pronunciation (phonology), word formation (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and meaning (semantics).
- As we should expect, language change occurs in all these areas. Let's see how.

Lexical change

- The lexicon of a language undergoes change in either one of two ways: "**word gain**" or "**word loss**".

Word gain

- New words are always added to the lexicon of every language, almost on a daily basis. We have already seen in our discussion of word-formation that there are systematic word-formation processes that create new words and add them to the dictionary of every language:

  derivation, word coinage, conversion, clipping, blending, acronyms, borrowing and loan translations, compounding, back-formation, and eponyms.

Word loss

- So, Shakespeare used *beseem* (= to be suitable), *wot* (= to know), *fain* (= gladly).
- And technology might drive some words out of use, e.g., *buckboard, buggy, dogcart, hansom*, etc.

Two bits?

Iceboxes?

Word loss

- Euphemisms can also eventually lead to loss of words:

  lavatory, bathroom, restroom, lady's room/men's room, etc.
- Hugh Rawson's *Dictionary of euphemisms and other doubletalk* includes:

  act of God *for* disaster

  administrative assistant *for* secretary

  associate *for* co-worker of lower rank

Semantic change

- Language change may also take the form of changing the meanings of existing words. There are three such cases: *broadening*, *narrowing*, and *semantic shift*.

Semantic broadening

- The Middle English *dogge* meant a specific breed of dog, but then it was broadened to refer to every member of the canine family.
- Same thing with “holiday” and “quarantine”.

Semantic narrowing

- In 17th century English, “meat” meant “food”. Not any more.
- “Hound” meant dog. More specific now.

Semantic shift

- “Knight” used to mean “youth”, then shifted to mean “mounted man-at-arms.”
- “Lewd” meant “ignorant.”
- “Silly” meant “happy”, and “nice” meant “ignorant.”

Types of semantic shift

- Amelioration (*pretty* meant “tricky, cunning.”)
- Perjoration (*wench* meant “girl.”)
- Also read McGregor’s discussion in Chapter 12 for:
- Hyperbole.
- Understatement.

Morphological change

- Languages also change morphologically over time. And morphological rules may be lost, added, or changed.

Loss of morphology

- Latin had case markings on nouns. Romance languages do not have any of these.
- Here's how the word for "wolf" inflected in Latin:

lupus	(nominative)
lupī	(genitive)
lupō	(dative)
lupum	(accusative)
lupe	(vocative)
lupō	(ablative)

Loss of morphology: OE

- Old English actually did have case markings, as in the following example for the word meaning "stone" in OE:

Case	OE sing.	OE pl.
Nominative	stān	stānas
Genitive	stānes	stāna
Dative	stāne	stānum
Accusative	stān	stānas

Loss of morphology: OE

- Of all cases, only genitive case remains.
- The loss of the case system was compensated by the use of prepositions, particularly "to" for the dative, and "of" for the genitive. It also led to restrictions on word order, as we'll discuss later.

Loss of a derivational morpheme

- A derivational rule may be lost with or without remnants. If there are many remnants, we say that the rule has become unproductive. This is what happened to the suffix *-t*, which was once used to derive nouns from verbs in English:

  draw → *draft*
  drive → *drift*
  shove → *shift*

Loss of a derivational morpheme

- Old English had a suffix *–u* to make nouns from adjectives:

  menig "many" → *menigu "multitude"*
  eald "old" → *aeldu "old age"*

- This was completely lost; there are no remnant words.

Adding rules: Borrowing of derivational affixes

- Latin *–bilis* was borrowed into English via French words (e.g., *change* → *changeable*). But it was afterwards applied also to native words, such as *wash* → *washable*.

Grammaticalization

- **Grammaticalization** is a process whereby a lexical item acquires a grammatical function in the language:

  lexical morpheme → grammatical morpheme
- English *–ly* developed from the word *līc* meaning "body", which then changed its meaning to "having the characteristics of."

Grammaticalization

- The possessive morpheme *bita:ʕ* in Egyptian Arabic is a metathisized form from the verb *tabaʕ* (=follow), a case of grammaticalization:

  ʔil-kitaab bita:ʕ Ahmad

  the-book Possessive Ahmad

  "Ahmad's book"

New affixes from compounding

- A common source for new affixes lies in compounding. A N+N compound with a certain N in a certain position may become the model for a new suffixation rule because the second N is reanalyzed as a suffix. A new affix may thus arise from compounding, as in the case of Dutch *boer*, which originally means "farmer," but was then extended to mean "supplier/seller of":

groenteboer	"one who sells vegetables"
visboer	"one who sells fish"
kolenboer	"one who sells coals"
patatboer	"one who sells French fries"

New affixes from "false" analysis

- New affixes may also arise from a *false* analysis of words that have a morphological structure. The process is also called ***folk etymology***:

  alcoholic → *work**aholic**, choc**aholic**, shop**aholic***

  hamburger → *cheese**burger**, fish**burger**, chicken**burger***

New affixes out of "nowhere"

- In some cases, there's no morphological structure at all, or at least not one that falls within the realm of English morphology:

  watergate leads to *Irangate, contragate*

Extending affixes to new categories

- Sometimes, morphological change takes place when an affix is used with categories that it normally does not apply to, thereby deriving new words:

  -able in *objectionable*

  -ese in *motherese* and *journalese*

Next class agenda

- Syntactic change.
- Phonological change.
- Reconstructing dead languages: Read Chapter 13.