

INTD0112

Introduction to Linguistics

Lecture #18
Nov 9th, 2009

Announcements

- None, for a change.

Do you speak American?

- <http://www.pbs.org/speak/ahead/change/vowelpower/vowel.html>
- Vowel shift in Northern Cities:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoJ1-ZGb1w&feature=Playlist&p=4DC464EA70E42A6D>

Variables affecting language use

- Region.
- Ethnicity.
- Socio-economic background.
- Education.
- Age.
- Gender.
- Register/Style
- Whether or not you know another language.

Labov's study of Martha's Vineyard

- Speakers on the island varied in their centralization of the diphthongs /aj/ and /aw/ in *why* and *now* to [əj] and [əw], respectively.
- The centralization feature was characteristic of people living on the island (as opposed to summer tourists), hence it was a *regional* feature.

Labov's study of Martha's Vineyard

- But within the island population, some residents centralized, while others didn't. Why?
- Labov investigated the factors that might be involved in this variation. His study showed that several variables were at play here.

Labov's study of Martha's Vineyard

- People who lived Up-Island (strictly rural) centralized more than those who lived Down-Island.
- Centralization increased with age, peaking between 31 and 45 years.
- Going to college with the intention of coming or not coming back mattered.
- Ethnicity did matter as well.

Labov's study of Martha's Vineyard

- Centralization on Martha's Vineyard thus seemed like a marker of *group identification*.
- How closely speakers identified with the island, wanted to enter into the mainstream, saw themselves as Vineyarders and were proud of it, was positively correlated with the degree of centralization.
- This became obvious when Labov partitioned his informants in terms of their attitude towards the island.

Centralization and attitude towards Martha's Vineyard

Persons	/əj/	/əw/
40 (Positive)	63	62
13 (Neutral)	32	42
6 (Negative)	8	9

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 this week's classes we discuss some of the main topics in sociolinguistics.

The language-dialect distinction

- Sociolinguists focus on linguistic diversity internal to speech communities. One such case of linguistic diversity is dialectal variation.
- So, what's the difference between a language and a dialect?
- 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 each other.

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 us 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

- 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

- 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*?”

Phonological dialectal variation

- We have already seen the *Northern Cities Vowel shift*.
- Are you *r-ful* or *r-less* in words such as *park* and *car*?
- Do you distinguish *cot* and *caught* in pronunciation?
- Do you “vocalize” your /l/ as a glide: *hill* [hrw] and *belt* [bewt]?

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 do you need “*that*” in subject relative clauses?
The man lives down the road is crazier than a loon.

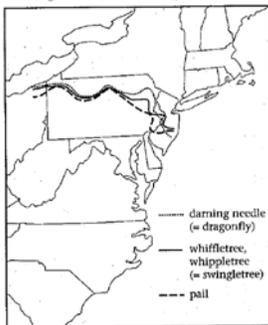
Syntactic dialectal variation

- 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.
- And how about?
The table needs cleaning.
The table needs to be cleaned.
The table needs cleaned.

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* (from 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*. A bundle of isoglosses may correspond to a *dialect boundary*.

(2) Bundling of three northern isoglosses



Copied from the
Language Files, Ohio
State University Press.

Reproduced by permission from the University of Michigan Press from Carver, *American Regional Dialects* (1987), p. 12 (original source *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States*, 1949, fig. 5a).

(3) Approximate dialect regions of the United States



Copied from the
Language Files, Ohio
State University Press.

Dialectology: dialect maps

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGxlxOcS-tE&feature=Playlist&p=4DC464EA70E42A6D>
- You can see a map for the regional dialects in the US with some comments on some 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

- So, which dialect is the best? We talk about this on Wednesday.
- Continue to read Chapter 7.