

INTD0112

Introduction to Linguistics

Lecture #21
May 3rd, 2007

Announcements

- Homework 7 due tomorrow by 4pm.
- Speaking of Homework 7, please solve the first exercise assuming that the following statement holds true (at least for this exercise):
"A glottal stop is more likely to change into another stop, than vice versa."
- Course response forms next week.

Summary from Tuesday's class

- Sociolinguistically, a language is a collection of dialects that are mutually intelligible, but which systematically differ lexically, phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically.

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 better than yours

- Linguistically, all dialects are equal. Each is a linguistic system with a lexicon and a grammar.
- But sociopolitically and socioeconomically, dialects are, quite irrationally, not treated equally.

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 become “less equal” and for that they get punished by the label “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 the impoverished southern region of 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.
- Ok, 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. After all, these are the languages of the great Classics.
- But we know now that this was an erroneous assumption. So, why are some of us clinging to these prescriptive rules?
- Well, to keep it “standard”!

Standard dialect and prescriptivism

- 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?*”
- Ok, let's expose this fallacy. Compare
 - a. *Kim and I went to the store.*with
 - b. *Kim and me went to the store.*
- Which one do you think is standard?

Standard dialect and prescriptivism

- Now, do the same here:
 - a. *This is a matter between Kim and I.*
 - b. *This is a matter between Kim and me.*
- Which one do you think is standard?
- Many standard English speakers will actually argue that (a) is the correct form, through some sort of *hypercorrection*, i.e., the act of producing nonstandard forms by way of false analogy.

Language change is NOT corruption

- **Third**, this whole popular 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 bad nor good. 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*
- Too many negatives there, Chaucer!

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 your wh-phrases at the front of the sentence? Wouldn’t it make more sense to leave them *in situ*?

The “standard = logical” fallacy

- And what’s logical about putting the object after the verb? Well, if it’s logical, then almost half of human languages are illogical, since they put the object before the verb.
- 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?
- Well, let’s see.
- If you have more vowels, then the phonological system of your language is more sophisticated than if you have less vowels.
- Really? I thought if I can do more with less, then I am sophisticated. Isn’t economy good?

The “standard = logical” fallacy

- And in my Arabic dialect, I have all these pharyngeal sounds that you guys don’t have. So, what does that make me? Superman?
- And am I really at a disadvantage because my language does not have object incorporation?
- And is having these long polysynthetic words in a language like Mohawk or Eskimo good or bad? Logical or illogical?

The “standard = logical” fallacy

- And what’s logical about using a dummy element like “there” or “it” in sentences like
There is a man in the room.
It is obvious where this discussion is going.
- And how about this funny *Do-support* rule in English? Why would a language need to have a dummy word to form questions and negate sentences? Isn’t that kind of wacky?

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.

But this is not over yet

The debunking continues!

So, should I drop my “r” or keep it?

- **Fifth**, 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?
- Think of *r*-dropping in English dialects. What do you think of the BBC announcers dropping their *r*’s?
Brilliant. It’s the Queen’s English. RP!
- Now, what do you think of New Yorkers dropping their *r*’s?
- Hmm...! 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. 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.

The “change-is-corruption” fallacy

- Arabic changed like every other language did, despite the efforts by Arab grammarians to keep the language “pure”.
- And when it changed, the changes were systematic, not random, again reflecting the constraints that govern what is a possible human language.
- Egyptian Arabic, for instance, developed a wh-in-situ strategy for asking questions, which did not exist in Classical Arabic, in what we can explain as a process of parameter re-setting.

The “change-is-corruption” fallacy

- Many of today’s Arabic dialects also developed a bipartite negation system like the one we see in French:
ʔana ma-fhim-t-iš
I neg-understood-1sg-neg
- This is not corruption. This is simply a change in the negation paradigm coupled with a process of grammaticalization of the word *šayʔ* (= “thing”).

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 we have already seen how sign languages exhibit the same exact linguistic properties that we see 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 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.

Standard = Success

- As you should expect, one such pattern of behavior arises as a result of stigmatization of nonstandard dialects.
- Speakers of these nonstandard varieties are told that their dialects are wrong and inferior and that they have to learn the standard variety in school to become successful.

Standard = Success

- That makes children who come from homes where nonstandard varieties are spoken at a disadvantage in school, because they need to make adjustments from the language they speak to the standard varieties they learn in class (an adjustment unnecessary for children who come from homes where standard varieties are spoken).

Standard = Success

- Some make these adjustments and they become *bidialectal* speakers. Others become more or less fluent in the standard, but they retain their nonstandard dialect still. And yet some others master the standard dialect and reject the nonstandard altogether.
- Which adjustments are made depends on a number of factors, one of which is *prestige*.

Prestige: Overt

- In sociolinguistics, a distinction is often made between overt prestige and covert prestige in the use of language varieties.
- Overt prestige is the one attached to a particular variety by the society-at-large, which defines how people should speak in order to be successful and gain status in society.

Prestige: Covert

- Covert prestige, on the other hand, is what makes speakers of nonstandard varieties retain their dialects as a means to maintain their “belonging” to a particular community.
- Nonstandard varieties, despite being stigmatized, still persist, because their speakers use them as a marker of *group identification*.

Further aspects of sociolinguistic diversity

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. There’s no such thing as Spanglish or TexMex.
- 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.

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*.
- 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, allophone, 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 ("*****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

- 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

- 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)
(= “lift it”)

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 of.

Nichols (1983)

- Nichols studies 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 *fu*, used to mean ‘to’, e.g., *I come fu* 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.

Next class agenda

- Pidgins and Creoles

Acknowledgment

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