Sociolinguistics

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LING 101 SSII
Overview

• Intro to Sociolinguistics
• Aspects of Sociolinguistics
• Sociolinguistic Factors
• (If there’s time) Pidgins and Creoles
Review

• Phonology
  – Developing contrast of phonemes

• Morphology
  – Overgeneralization
  – Productive use of Morphology

• Syntax
  – Stages of Acquisition
  – Questions
Semantics Homework
Sociolinguistics

• Sociolinguistic is the study of how society and language interact and influence each other.

• In particular, we talk about sociolinguistics as a synchronous approach to studying language.
  – The study of language at a particular point in time.
Language Beliefs and Attitudes

• There are different varieties of English, with different mental grammars
  – A form that is grammatical in another speech variety may be ungrammatical in yours, and vice versa
• You may have a more or less positive or negative association with a particular variety
• A particular variety may be more or less prestigious in your society
  – It may be a social advantage to speak/write a particular way to reach a particular goal
Language Beliefs and Attitudes

• **But:**
  
  – Any naturally occurring language variety is a systematic language system, with a full mental grammar
    • It cannot be said that a language variety “has no grammar”
    • Remember that children are not “taught” language, so being “less educated” does not mean that you speak “bad” English
    • The language variety that someone uses is not an indication of intelligence
Language Variation

• So far, we have learned about some of the key theoretical areas of linguistics that study the use of different units of language.
  – Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics

• It should not surprise us, then, that language varieties will differ based on these different aspects of language
  – How do you think that language variation can manifest in these different areas?
Aspects of Sociolinguistics

• **Phonology**
  – The different sound systems and phonological rules used by various dialects
    • Canadian /aw/ raising

• **Morphology**
  – Different ways of encoding morphological distinctions
    • e.g. Use of *y’all* for the 2\(^{nd}\) person pl. in some dialects of English

• **Syntax**
  – The use of different syntactic structures based on dialect
    • e.g. double negative, double modal structures

• **Semantics**
  – Different meanings for words depending on your dialect.
    • Barbecue, Soft Drinks, etc.
Aspects of Sociolinguistics

• **Phonological differences**

  – Test: Say the following sentences out loud. Do you produce different vowel sounds for the underlined words?

  • *I’ve caught a cold*
  • *This cot is cold*
  • *May I borrow your pen?*
  • *May I wear that pin?*
Aspects of Sociolinguistics

• **Phonological differences**
  
  – Maps of regional differences in phonology
    
    • The so-called “/o/ - /oh/” (IPA /ɑ/ - /ɔ/) merger: *cot vs. caught*
    
    • The so-called “/i/ - /e/” (IPA /ɪ/ - /ɛ/) merger before nasals: *pin vs. pen*
    
    • Warning: Some sociolinguistics use the above non-IPA transcription conventions for American English
  
  – Examples of social differences in phonology
Aspects of Sociolinguistics

- Morphological/syntactic/semantic differences
- Case study: The so-called “double negative” in various English varieties
  - What does this sentence mean, if a non-emphatic stress pattern is used?
    - *I didn’t see nobody*
  - Some prescriptivists claim, “This is illogical! Two negatives should make a positive.”
Aspects of Sociolinguistics

- **Morphological/syntactic/semantic differences**
- However, there are many languages with a **two-part negative construction** – illogical?
  - French: \( \text{Louis ne mange pas de boeuf.} \)
    ‘Louis doesn’t eat beef’
  - Spanish: \( \text{Ana no vio nada.} \)
    ‘Ana didn’t see anything’
- Now consider: How does *ever* function in standard English?
  - *I haven’t ever won a raffle.*
  - *I have ever won a raffle*
Aspects of Sociolinguistics

- **Morphological/syntactic/semantic differences**
- *Ever* is a special element that needs to occur with negation (or in other special semantic contexts, like questions and hypotheticals)

Now, to think about the so-called double negatives linguistically:

- How does the lexical entry for a word like *no* differ between Standard English and varieties with so-called “double negatives”?
  - The lexical entry for a word like *no* acts the same way *ever* does in Standard English in some varieties that use so-called “double negatives”
Sociolinguistic Factors

• There are several different factors that influence the way you use language (i.e. your **variety** of language)
  – Place
    • Regional variation
  – Time
    • Generational Variation
  – Social Factors (even within one region or generation)
    • Class
    • Ethnicity
    • Gender
    • Situation
    • Social ‘Group’
Sociolinguistic Factors

• **Regional Variation**
  – What do you call a *carbonated beverage*?
  – What do you call when you *sell things on your porch, in your garage, or on your lawn*?
  – What do you call a *miniature lobster that you find in lakes and streams*?
  – *Isogloss*
Sociolinguistic Factors

• **Class and situation**
  
  – Data from Labov (1966) | Graphic from Eckert (2005)
Sociolinguistic Factors

• **Ethnic Variation**

• AA(V)E = African American (Vernacular) English
  – Also called Black English (Vernacular) (BEV), “Ebonics”
  – Not all AAE speakers are ethnically African-American
  – Not all African-Americans are AAE speakers
  – AAE is not just “slang” – “slang” is [lexical items](https://example.com) used in casual speech, but AAE is a [language variety](https://example.com) (or set of varieties) with phonological, syntactic, etc. characteristics
Sociolinguistic Factors

• **Ethnic Variation**

• Do these AAE sentences mean the same thing?
  
  • *The coffee be cold*
  
  • *The coffee cold.*

  – What’s the difference?

  (Note: if you don’t have a mental grammar for AAE, you *can’t know this* without asking speakers who do have the relevant mental grammar!)
Sociolinguistic Factors

- **Ethnic Variation**
  - I think those buses be blue
  - *He be sick this morning*
- The invariant be construction has a specific meaning: ‘to be habitually’
- Can you think of other languages where this kind of meaning distinction is made with respect to words meaning ‘to be’?
Sociolinguistic Factors

• **Gender Variation**
  – Some differences in men’s and women’s speech:
    • Women tend to speak closer to the standard dialect than men
    • Female teens tend to push language change
    • Perceived differences: Do women actually speak more than men?
  – Geography and social class make sense: you speak like the people around you
  – But what about gender?
  – To some extent, we “choose” how we speak to establish/announce our **social identities** (unconsciously)
Sociolinguistic Factors

• Should non-standard varieties be overtly discussed in schools, as part of teaching students a standard or academic variety?

• Some potential advantages:
  – Makes use of systematic differences between mental grammars in explanations
  – If you are learning a new dialect, would you rather be told that you were deficient, or that there are systematic differences between the variety that you speak and the one that you are learning?
Sociolinguistic Factors

• This question came up in the Oakland Ebonics controversy (1996 – 97)
  – Linguists and anthropologists discuss the Oakland “Ebonics” debate

• Whether or not to use AAE, or other varieties, in teaching academic English is a legitimate question
  – Whether or not AAE, or other varieties of English, consist of a systematic linguistic system is not a legitimate question, because the answer is very clearly yes
Links!

• Are regional dialects disappearing? Not according to William Labov
  – http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoJ1-ZGb1w
• Really nice overview of language varieties and attitudes from PBS
  – http://www.pbs.org/speak/
• More on prestige:
• Phonology of regional dialects:
Homeworks

• Writing Assignment 8
• Find one person from NC and one person from outside of NC and conduct the following survey:
  – Record the Age, Gender, and City/State where they grew up, and how long they have lived in NC.
  – Answer the following three questions for your participants:
    • Have your speakers read the following sentences and transcribe the vowels that they produce for pen, pin, cot, and caught.
      – I couldn’t do my homework, because I lost my pen.
      – There aren’t enough beds, so I had to sleep on a cot.
      – Attach the poster to the bulletin board with this pin
      – They wanted to sneak out at night, but they were afraid of getting caught.
    • Ask your participants if the following sentence is something they would ever say if they were talking casually with their friends.
      – I’m fixin’ to take my car in for an oil change.
    • Ask your participants to answer this question:
      – What do you call an event where people use an outdoor grill or cooker to cook a meal, often for a group of friends?
Have a good day!

PIN-PEN MERGER

UR DOIN IT RITE