



# Sociolinguistics

Amy Reynolds

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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 **synchronic** 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<sup>nd</sup> 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: *Louis **ne** mange **pas** de boeuf.*  
'Louis doesn't eat beef'
  - Spanish: *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

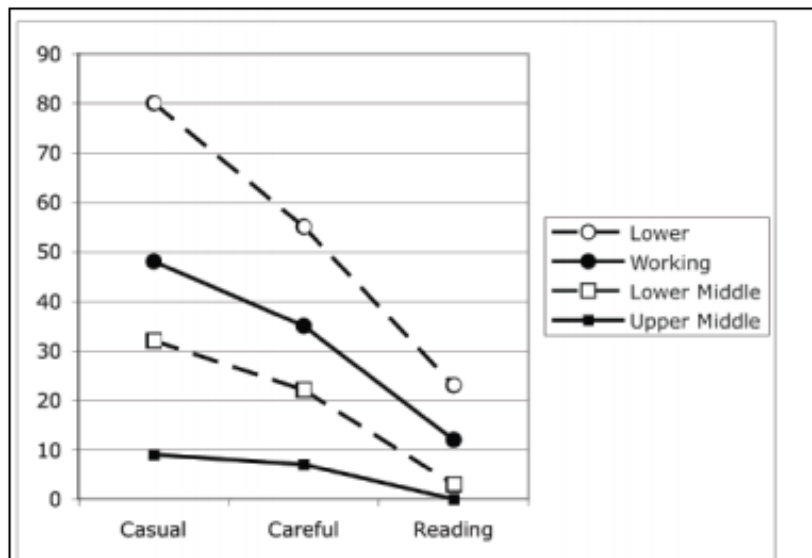
- What do you call a carbonated beverage?
- What do you call when you sell things on your porch, in your garage, or on your lawn?
- What do you call a miniature lobster that you find in lakes and streams?
- **Isogloss**



# Sociolinguistic Factors

- Class and situation

- Data from Labov (1966) | Graphic from [Eckert \(2005\)](#)



(% 'ing' as [ɪŋ])

Figure 1. % Reduced -ing. from (Labov, 1966) in three styles and four socioeconomic strata.

# 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** used in casual speech, but AAE is a **language variety** (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
- More AAE *be* examples from Lisa Green (1998), “Aspect and predicate phrases in AAVE”
  - *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:
  - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prestige\\_\(sociolinguistics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prestige_(sociolinguistics))
- Phonology of regional dialects:
  - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North\\_American\\_English\\_regional\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_American_English_regional_phonology)



# 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!

