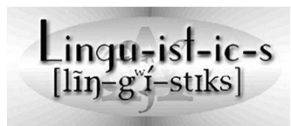


LNGT0101 Introduction to Linguistics



Lecture #17
Nov 12th, 2012

Announcements

- HW4 is posted on the class website. It is due a week from today (Nov 19th, in class, or by 5pm via e-mail).
- Reminders: On Wednesday we have Gusatvo Freire as a guest lecturer to talk about his work on first language acquisition. Please make sure you do the readings as given on the syllabus as background for his lecture.
- Also, on Wed we have screening of *The Linguists*.

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Announcements

- On Monday Nov 19, we're back in presentation mode. We'll decide on Myths and presenters on Wednesday. (Remember, you have to do at least one presentation).
- I'm still grading your midterm, and you should get it back later this week via e-mail or in my mailbox.

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Hopefully, good news!

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Transition from last class

- Speakers vary in their use of language.
- One factor that leads to variation is **region**.
- Regional varieties of a language are what is typically referred to as **dialects**.
- Dialectal variation can be phonological, morphological, syntactic, or lexical.

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Transition from last class

- Language attitudes towards a particular dialect are subjective, and typically reflect people's judgment of the speakers of that dialect, and not of the dialect itself.
- Linguistically, all dialects are legitimate rule-governed speech varieties. Socio-politically, however, some dialects may be perceived as 'less correct' or 'substandard.'

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Today's agenda

- Today we talk about another factor that relates to dialectal variation and engenders language attitudes: Ethnicity.
- We will do that with reference to **African American English** (AAE), talking about:
 - Its history
 - Its linguistic features
 - Attitudes towards AAE

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'Ethnic' dialects and linguistic profiling

- Certain ethnic groups can have an identifiable dialect which serves as a solidarity/ identification marker within the group.
- But such 'ethnic' dialects can also lead to negative consequences.
- John Baugh, a linguist from Stanford, studies linguistic profiling. This ad is based on his research. [Linguistic profiling: An ad](#)

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'Ethnic' dialects and linguistic profiling

- Two points from the ad:
 1. There can be a relation between speech and ethnicity.
 2. As we have seen with regional dialects, there are attitudes towards ethnic dialects and they can have social consequences.
- We discuss this today with reference to **African American English** (AAE).

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History of AAE

- A creole-based theory (pidgin, creole, decreolization). Evidence: similar features with West African languages (loss of interdental [θ] and [ð]; 'be' deletion; *Gullah*). **Watch Section 9 from DVD 'Do you Speak American? Up North.'**
- An L2-based theory. Evidence: similarities with Southern English in vowel lowering (*tin/ten; sing; thing*) and monophthongization (*'right, time, like'*).
- A unified theory.

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AAE today

- Today, AAE is spoken by a large number of African Americans as well as speakers from other ethnicities. Also, not all African Americans speak AAE.

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Attitudes towards AAE

- AAE has been stigmatized for two reasons:
 - First, because it's a 'dialect' or 'slang,' not a language.
 - Second, because it is 'incorrect,' 'improper,' or 'deficient' English.
- Both claims are linguistically false. Let's discuss how.

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Attitudes towards AAE

- The 'dialectal' objection to AAE is false for two reasons:
 - First, because everyone speaks a 'dialect.'
 - Second, because there is no clear 'linguistic' definition of what Standard American English (SAE) is.

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What's a language and what's a dialect?

- One common answer is that dialects are speech varieties that are **mutually intelligible**.
- Any particular problems with the mutual intelligibility criterion?

Problem 1: Non-linguistic factors

- Some mutually intelligible varieties of the same language are treated as separate languages; the '*Who do you think you are to speak **my** language?*' situation.
- When two mutually non-intelligible varieties are treated as dialects of the same language; the '***Your** language is **my** language; doesn't really matter if I don't understand a word you say*' situation.

Problem 2: The dialect continuum

- Variation among different dialects typically takes the form of a *continuum*, say, on a scale from 1 to 10, where closer points are more mutually intelligible than the farther ones:

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

- What would the status of points 5 and 6 be?

Language = D + A + N

- Max Weinreich is right:
"A language is a dialect with an army and a navy."

What is Standard American English?

- Some research studies show that a 'prescriptive' definition for what 'standard' is probably does not exist for American English.

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Do English professors know what SAE is?

Table 15.8 Sample results: survey of English professors

	Frequency (%) (as estimated by the English professors)				Acceptability (%)		
	Rare	Moderately frequent	Very frequent	Can't say	Yes	No	Can't say
Everyone volunteered but they all failed to appear. (agreement error)	0	25	62	13	19	81	0
Jane Austen now feels that it is necessary to partially clarify Frank Churchill's relationship to Jane. (split infinitive)	0	16	74	10	17	72	11
Considering how little satisfaction she obtained from it, it was just a waste. (dangling participle)	12	47	35	6	35	59	6

'Standards' vary across time and space

- Also, if 'standard' were defined in linguistic terms, how can a linguistic feature (/r/-lessness) be standard on one side of the Atlantic and nonstandard on the other side?
- And how can a negation marker (*ain't*) be standard a century ago, but nonstandard now?

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'Standard' is the 'prestige' variety

- A standard dialect is thus better understood in socio-political terms: It's the dialect considered most prestigious by society, and it's the one used in education, news media, and other formal contexts.

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So, ...

- While it's true that AAE is a dialect, so are hundreds of speech varieties that exist in the US. Besides, there is no clear linguistic definition of what 'Standard American English' is.
- What makes AAE (and other nonstandard dialects) stigmatized is not that it is a dialect, but that it is not a prestige dialect, which has nothing to do with its linguistic features, but rather with a history of attitudes towards African Americans.

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And, most importantly, ...

AAE is rule-governed.

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AAE Phonology: r-deletion

- *r*-deletion is pretty common in AAE, so that the following words are homophonous:
guard-god
sore-saw
- But not '*great-gate*'. Why?
- Can we write a formal rule for this?

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AAE Phonology : l-deletion

- Some speakers also drop their [l] so that the following words are homophonous:

toll-toe

all-awe

help-hep

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AAE Phonology: Consonant Cluster simplification

- In SAE 'best kind,' but not in 'best arm.'
- In AAE, word-final consonant cluster simplification is more common, typically when both consonants share the same voicing feature:

test → [tɛs] *hand* → [hæn]

- The simplification can also take place even if the next word starts with a vowel:

messed up → [mɛs ʌp]

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AAE Phonology: Consonant Cluster simplification

- So, when an AAE speaker says
I 'pass' the test yesterday
they are not making a mistake in tense morphology. They're simply simplifying the consonant cluster.

passed [pæst] → [pæs]

- Evidence: "hated" is pronounced [heɪrəd] and does not become [heɪt].

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AAE Phonology: Interdental [θ] and [ð]

- Word-initially, [θ] and [ð] become stops [t] and [d]:
think [tɪŋk] Predict: *thin*
this [dɪs] Predict: *the man*
- Word medially and word-finally, [θ] is replaced by [f], and [ð] is replaced by [v]:
mouth [maʊf] Predict: *bath*
brother [brʌvə] Predict: *mother*

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AAE Morphosyntax

- Double (or multiple) negatives:
You don' know nothin'.
I don' never have no lunch.
- Use of stressed "bin" as an auxiliary:
She bin married.
I bin known him.

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AAE Morphosyntax

- Absence of possessive -s:
John hat; Byron car
- Absence of third person singular -s:
she talk; he sing
- Absence of plural -s after quantifiers:
three dog; some cat

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Copula deletion and habitual 'be'

- Copula "be" deletion:
He nice.
You crazy.
- Habitual "be":
The coffee be cold. (= always)
He be tired out. (habitually)

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AAE is just another English variety

- So, AAE differs from SAE in systematic ways, and in the same manner that any other dialect of English differs from SAE.
- In fact, AAE can enrich other dialects as well. In an article on Ebonics, the *New York Times* cited Richard Nixon's use of "right on!" "Rip-off," "chill out," and "dis" are other popular borrowings.
- Claims about the "deficiency," "incompleteness," and "illogicality" of AAE are totally non-scientific and have no linguistic basis whatsoever.

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So, why the negative attitude towards AAE?

- What are possible consequences for such negative attitudes?
- ***Dialect in Schooling, the 1979 Ann Arbor Decision***: Watch Section 10 from DVD 'Do you Speak American? Up North.'

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Solutions?

- The 1996 Oakland school board decision and reactions to it.
- ***Jeopardy with a new twist***: Watch Section 3 from DVD 'Do you Speak American? Out West.'

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Next class agenda

- Gustavo Freire's presentation on his research on language acquisition by children.
- Please read Chapter 8, pp. 324-350. Some sections we already talked about earlier, so should be an easy read.

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A take-home phonology problem from AAE

AAVE	Standard English	gloss
watʃɪn	watʃɪŋ	'watching'
dʊn	dʊɪŋ	'doing'
raɪn	raɪɪŋ	'riding'
raɪnɪn	raɪɪŋ	'running'
nʌθɪn	nʌθɪŋ	'nothing'
sʌmθɪn	sʌmθɪŋ	'something'

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A take-home phonology problem from AAE

Table (2)		
<i>AAVE</i>	<i>Standard English</i>	<i>gloss</i>
θɪŋk	θɪŋk	'think'
pɪŋk	pɪŋk	'pink'
pʌŋk	pʌŋk	'punk'
θæŋk	θæŋk	'thank'
sæŋk	sæŋk	'sank'
sɪŋə	sɪŋər	'singer'
fɪŋgə	fɪŋgər	'finger'

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A take-home phonology problem from AAE

Table (3)		
<i>AAVE</i>	<i>Standard English</i>	<i>gloss</i>
θɪŋ	θɪŋ	'thing'
sɪŋ	sɪŋ	'sing'
səŋ	səŋ	'song'
laŋ	laŋ	'long'

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