

## LNGT0101 Introduction to Linguistics



Lecture #19  
Nov 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014

## Announcements

- Guidelines for research paper writing.
- Presentation on Wed Nov 19 of Myth 1: 'The meanings of words should not be allowed to vary or change.'
- Last night's movie?
- Any questions on HW4?

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## Midterm scores

- Average is 69/75. Median is 68.5/75.
- I gave 2 points of extra credit for everyone.
- I gave 1 point of extra credit for those who made reference to 'islands' in Exercise 7.

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## Summary and transition

- 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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## Summary and transition

- 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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## Language and ethnicity

- 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
  - Ways to address the issue

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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, as in [this ad](#) that we watched last time. Watch Section 9 of DYSA: Up North.

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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 African American English

- 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, e.g., in 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?

### Languages and dialects are sociopolitical entities

- 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.

### Language = D + A + N

- To quote Max Weinreich:  
*"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

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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.

### 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?

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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 [heit].

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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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## Presentations and discussion

- [Is there a DC dialect?](#)

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## Next class agenda

- Read Chapter 8, pp. 337-361. Some sections we already talked about earlier, so should be an easy read.

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