

Day 2: Sociolinguistics and Orthography

Lecture 1

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Lecture Outline

1. Definitions and Paradoxes
2. Sociolinguistic Dogmas
3. The Dialectalization Process
4. Variationist Sociolinguistics
5. Variable Rules
6. Orthography as Language Planning

Definitions of Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics


- Sociolinguistics is the branch of linguistics that studies:
 1. The correlations between linguistic structures and social structures
 2. Language use in society
 3. Language planning

Paradoxes about Language and Society

Paradoxes about Language-1

- **Paradoxes:** A paradox is defined as the putting together ideas whose truth conditions are contradictory by nature.
 1. Language is **constant** and **variable**.
 2. Language is **collective**/communal and **private**.

Paradoxes about Language-1

3. Language is **rule-governed** and **flexibility**.
 -  These internal contradictions preclude the possibility of a “perfect” orthography because orthographies are by nature hardly variable, they are communal, and normative.

Written Language vs. Spoken Language


| NO. | Features | Written Language | Spoken Language |
|------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Constance | + | - |
| 2. | Social dialect | - | + |
| 3. | Regional dialect | - | + |
| 4. | Standardized | + | - |
| 5. | Innate | - | + |
| 6. | Time-sensitive | - | + |
| 7. | Idiosyncratic | - | + |

Sociolinguistic Dogma Relevant in Designing Orthographies

Sociolinguistic and Dialect Equality


- Contemporary linguists believe in :
 1. **Structural Equality:** All languages are equally complex in their phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics.
 2. **Communicative Equality:** Every language serves the communicative needs of its speakers.

Equality vs. Prestige

- **Caveat:** “Equality” here is a linguistic and legal concept. “Prestige” is a socio-economic system of evaluation. All dialects / languages are equal but all languages / dialects **do NOT** have the same prestige.
-  Orthographic decisions must be based on the prestige forms.

Contributing Factors to Prestige

- **Contributing Factors:**

1. Royalty
 2. Urbanization
 3. Centers of higher learning
 4. Religion
 5. Size of speakers
-  The combination of one or more of these factors lead to prestige.

The Dialectalization Process

The Normalcy of Dialectalization-1

- **Dialectalization** means that a language varies:
 1. Over time
 2. In space
 3. Among individuals
 4. In groups.

The Normalcy of Dialectalization-2

- **A Fact of Sociolinguistic Life:** All languages, no matter how small or how large have variations (dialects). The larger the language, the more dialects it (will) has.

Variations over Time

Ehret (2000:288)

Glottochronology-1

| # | Years of Separation | Percentage of Core Vocabulary |
|----|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. | 1000 | 74% |
| 2. | 2000 | 55% |
| 3. | 3000 | 40% |
| 4. | 4000 | 30% |
| 5. | 5000 | 22% |
| 6. | 6000 | 16% |

Glottochronology-1

| # | Years of Separation | Percentage of Core Vocab |
|-----|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 7. | 7000 | 12% |
| 8. | 8000 | 9% |
| 9. | 9000 | 7% |
| 10. | 10000 | 5% |

Variation in Space and among Individuals

Dialect Geography

- Dialect Geography studies dialectal variations caused by:
 1. **Physical Geography:** mountain ranges, rivers, desert, etc.
 2. **Human Geography:** urban vs. rural areas

Social Dialectology

- Social dialectology studies dialectal variations brought about by social factors such as:
 1. Age
 2. Gender
 3. Education
 4. Socioeconomic status
 5. Ethnicity
 6. Class

Variationist Sociolinguistics

The Labovian Approach

Variationist Sociolinguistics

- **William Labov:** William Labov's approach to sociolinguistics is known as **“variationist”** because it focuses on the correlations between social variables and linguistic variables.

Definition and Correlations-1

- **Definition of Linguistic Variable:**
Wardhaugh (2006: 21,140) defines it as “a linguistic item in the structure of a language that has alternate realizations, ... a specific set of linguistic items” or “human speech patterns (presumably, sounds, words, grammatical features, etc.) ...

Definition and Correlations-2

- ... which can be uniquely associate with some external factors (presumably, a geographical area or social group.”
1. Linguistic variations are **regular** and **predictable**.
 2. Languages change internally for purely linguistic reasons.

Social Evaluations of Variations

Variables as Indicators

- 1. Linguistic Variable as a Social Indicator:** « **An indicator** is a linguistic variable to which little or no social import is attached. Only a linguistically trained observer is aware of indicators, » Wardhaugh (2006:145)

Variables as Markers

- 2. Linguistic Variable as a Social Marker:** « **A marker** does carry with it social significance. In fact, markers may be potent carriers of social information. People are aware of markers, and the distribution of markers is clearly related to social groupings and to styles of speaking, » Wardhaugh (2006:145)


Variables as Stereotypes

- 2. Linguistic Variables and Social Stereotypes:** « **A stereotype** is a popular and, therefore conscious characterization of the speech of a particular social group, » Wardhaugh (2006:145)

Linguistic Variability Hierarchy-1

- **Structural Variation Hierarchy:**
Phonetics/Phonology > Semantics
/Lexical > Regular Morphology > Syntax
> Irregular Morphology > Suppletion
- “>” to be interpreted as “variation in X is more common than Y.”

Variability Hierarchy and Accentedness

- “Since **sounds** are **the basis of all higher** linguistic elements, **phonological differences** can signal differences at **several levels** of language,” Pennington (2007:2)
-  **Orthography Planning and Variation:** Rigorous phonological analysis is indispensable for orthography planning.

Constraints on Variation

Constraints on Variation-1

- **Constraints on Variation:** Since language is a collective property, society, especially those who hold power, do not want it to change too much if such changes do not serve the interest of the wider community. Individuals are allowed to vary certain aspects of language within reason, and up to a certain limit.

Constraints on Variation-2

- **Dialect Leveling:** Pressures of all kinds are put in place to retard as much as possible the dialectalization process. The retarding factors include:
 1. Centralization of power
 3. Urbanization
 4. Mass transit (where available)
 5. Mass media (where available)
 6. Public education (where available)

Sociophonology and Orthography

Phonological Processes-1

- “A phonological process is a **systematic** sound change that affects **classes** of sounds or sound sequences and results in a **simplification of production.**” In other words, a phonological process occurs when a phoneme changes one or more of its **key phonetic features** or takes on additional phonetic features by virtue of being in the vicinity of another phoneme. ...

Phonological Processes-2

- ... In the stream of speech, the sounds that precede and those that follow influence each other. As a result, the manner of articulation or place of articulation of contiguous sounds may change slightly or radically. Assimilatory processes are by far the most important phonological process in English (*and other languages*). Lowe (1996:xii)

Summary of Main Operations-1

- An orthography designer must keep an eye on the following operations:

1. Assimilatory operations.

Data Set 1

<lengthen>

<length>

Summary of Main Operations-2

- **Data Set 2**

<fasten>

<listen>

<moisten>

<soften>

<often>

Summary of Main Operations-3

- **Data Set 3**

<ice>

<bike>

<kite>

<might>

<fight>

Summary of Main Operations-4


- An orthography designer must keep an eye on the following operations:
 2. Deletion operations
 3. Metathesis operations
 4. Epenthesis operations

Common Phonological Processes (in English)


Common Processes-1

- The following processes are common and to be expected:
 1. Aspiration rules: <til**t**>
 2. Palatalization rules: <fut**u**re>
 3. Glottalization rules: <kitt**t**en>
 4. Flapping rules: <bett**er**>, <lit**tl**e>, <tot**al**>
 5. Nasalization rules: <wint**er**>

Common Processes-2

6. Substitution rules: <ask> > <aks>
7. Cluster simplification by deletion:
<wounds>, <prints>
8. Cluster simplification by epenthesis:
<nuclear>  * <nucular>

Common Processes-3

6. Neutralization: /t/ vs. /d/ <tie> vs. <die>
but <lat**tt**er> vs. <lad**dd**er>
7. Vowel raising, fronting, rounding, harmony, etc. <pin> vs. <pen>, <bag> vs. <ba**ck**>
-  Vowels are unstable in English and many other languages. They are often responsible for **regional variations**.

Orthography as Language Planning


Status Planning

- **The Ubiquitous Role of Orthography:** Orthography permeates all three aspects of language planning:
 1. **Status planning:** the written version a the language imposes sooner or later the version of the language that will be considered as the standard dialect.

Corpus Planning

- 2. Corpus planning:** It includes graphization, standardization, modernization, codification, and elaboration. **Graphization** is primary because Without an orthography, a language cannot be equipped with dictionaries, grammar books, literacy materials. Without an orthography, corpus planning is not possible.

Acquisition Planning

- 3. Acquisition planning:** Learning to read can be greatly facilitated or hindered by the type of orthography that a language uses.
-  The sociolinguistic relevance of orthography cannot be underestimated.

Acquisition Planning and Dialectal Variation-1

- **Mismatch and understanding:** “Any mismatch on the printed page between the readers’ grammatical knowledge and the letters to be read can only delay the process of understanding what is written ... It is generally agreed that success in reading is the critical first step in the acquisition of basic skills, and all programs must be weighed against this priority,” Labov (1998:379, 381)

Acquisition Planning and Dialectal Variation-1

- **Dialectalized Spelling:** Before Samuel Johnson standardized English orthography, **people spelled more or less as they pleased, trying to capture the sounds of language as they heard them.** Spelling was more or less phonetic, and changes in spelling give clues to changes in pronunciation,” Pinker (1999:48-9) *Words and Rules*.

Sociolinguistics and Types of Orthographies

The Hegemonic Orthographies-1

- **Dialectal Orthography**

*“In developing a written system, it is important **to choose one** of the several dialects as ‘reference dialect,’ the norm to be written. The speech variety chosen for this usually has some kind of prestige because many people speak it, because it is used in church, or in administrative...*

The Hegemonic Orthographies-2

... functions, because it is spoken in the city or because an important person speaks it. Another reason why a special speech is chosen might be its intercomprehension with other dialects.”

Wisemann (1987:17-8)

Supradialectal Orthographies-1

- **Supradialectal Orthography**

“Although dialectal pronunciations differ, the common spellings indicate the intended word. It is necessary for the written language to transcend local dialects.”

Fromkin et al. (2010:560)

Supradialectal Orthographies-2

- **Supradialectal Orthography**

“Differences in phonological rules are irrelevant, since orthography corresponds to a deeper level of representation than (broad) phonetic.”

Chomsky (1970:282)

Principles of an Optimal Orthography-1

- Supradialectal Orthographies = **optimal orthographies** because they transcend dialectal differences. Here are some key steps towards a suprasegmental orthography:
 1. All the phonemes of the language
 2. Adhering to the canonical syllable structure of the language

Principles of an Optimal Orthography-2

4. Representing few allophonic variations, i.e., only those that are widespread.
5. Adhering to the **Lexical Principle**:
“Each lexical item must have a unique spelling.” Chomsky (1970:282)


Principles of an Optimal Orthography-3

- **Exception:** *When two pronunciations of a word enjoy a wide currency and appear to have equal claims to representation in the orthography, it may be found advisable to admit the two spellings. Jones (1967:230)*

Principles of an Optimal Orthography-4

5. Avoiding Script Pluralism, i.e., using more than one script to write a language:
 - Cherokee has 4 scripts: 1) syllabary, the standard phonetics, the easy phonetics, and the international phonetics, Bender (2002:101)
 - Irish had 2 scripts, Cooper (1996:123)

Principles of an Optimal Orthography-5

- Luganda has 2 scripts: Catholic and Protestant, Dewees (1977:124)
- Kabye and Ditammari have 2 scripts.
-  Script pluralism is an obstacle to literacy acquisition, Bender (2002).

Codification and Language Standardization

Definition-1

- **Codification and Stabilization:** “The codification of the *orthography*, that is to say, of a stabilized manner of writing, deals on one hand with an orthographic system, on the other hand with its implementation in detail (that is, for individual words). Ideally, a spelling system should represent the phonological system of the language ...


Definition-2

- ... rather than its phonetic realization. The application of the system to individual words **must be carefully worked out** and as **simple, clear-cut** and **consistent** as possible it should be.”
Garvin (1972:421). *General Principles for the Cultivation of Good Language.*

The Standardized Orthography

- **Standardized Orthography:** “For all the people for all time,” Cooper (1996:131).
- **Expectations:** It is expected to fulfill all the literacy functions in the language: 1) Reference grammars, 2) Dictionaries, and 3) all written materials are to be written in the standardized orthography.

The Standardization of English Orthography-1

-  Spelling standardization takes time, even centuries!
- English was reduced to writing in the 7th century A.D. The spelling was not standardized until Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) published his *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755, that is, **11 centuries later!**

The Standardization of English Orthography-2

- **Dialectalized Spelling:** Before Samuel Johnson standardized English orthography, **people spelled more or less as they pleased, trying to capture the sounds of language as they heard them.** Spelling was more or less phonetic, and changes in spelling give clues to changes in pronunciation,” Pinker (1999:48-9) *Words and Rules*.

Orthographies and Social Realities

Orthography & Controversy-1

- “Systematic soundness, precision and economy, however important they may seem to the orthography maker, are known to determine the success of a proposed orthography only to a quite limited extent at best; for there are no systematic choices that are sociolinguistically neutral for those concerned. As the most visible items ...

Orthography & Controversy-2

- ... of a language, scripts and orthographies are ‘emotionally loaded’, indicating as they do group loyalties and identities. Rather than mere instruments of a practical nature, they are symbolic systems of great social significance ... They may, moreover, have profound effects on the social structure of a speech community,” Coulmas (1989:226)

Compromise?

Compromise-1?

- “Thus, unless the orthography makers are going to be content with what otherwise may prove to have been a purely academic exercise, they must be prepared to compromise their analytic principles for the sake of acceptance, however irrational the requirements may be that force them to deviate from a ...

Compromise-2?

- ...systematically motivated representation of the language. Language attitudes such as the desire to have an orthography which makes the language in question graphically similar to another or, conversely, makes the language dissimilar to another, may be irrational but they are social facts which often strongly influence the success of a proposed system,” Coulmas (1989:227)

Normal Expectations

- Orthographies are controversial. No matter how sound the linguistic analysis is, an orthography will always be challenged for a variety of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic reasons.
- 📣 One must always expect a backlash. However, one must do one's best to provide the best possible orthography!

Homework

Exercise 1

- **Dialect Survey:**

1. How many dialect areas are there in the language(s) that you work with?
2. How many people speak the language(s)?
3. Which dialect is the majority?
4. What are the main towns in each area?
5. How many churches are found in your language group?

Exercise 2

- **Phonetic/Phonological Variants:**
 1. List three main phonological variants in the language(s) that you work with?
 2. How are these variants dealt with in the orthography?
 3. Who designed the orthography used to write the language(s)
 4. Is the orthography of your language(s) accepted by all?

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