

Fundamentals of Sociolinguistics; Language Variation and Change

Linguistics 220: "Language and Society"

3 April 2003

Readings

Slide 1

Readings

- Required
 - Mesthrie et al. (2000),
Chapters 1,4
- Other
 - Wardaugh (1992),
Chapters 1,8

Main Points

Slide 2

Main Points

- Important Terms
 - language, dialect, accent, variety
 - mutual intelligibility
 - descriptivism and prescriptivism
- Speakers of a language have knowledge of both linguistic and social structure and integrate this knowledge systematically in communication.
- Sociolinguists investigate this

Slide 3

integration of linguistic and social knowledge in spoken language.

Business

Slide 4

Business

- Any problems with Blackboard?
- Presentations - check the schedule on Blackboard
- L & C talk on Monday, April 14th.

Lecture

Basic linguistic concepts

Slide 5

Basic linguistic concepts

- What is a language?
- What constitutes linguistic structure?
- Are linguists descriptivists or prescriptivists?

Slide 6

What is a language?

- "... a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication" (Wardhaugh, 1978)
 - systematic
 - symbolic
 - arbitrary
 - communicative
 - human

Slide 7

Problems with distinguishing languages

- Borderlines gray
 - Dutch-German border
 - North India
- Social, political, historical factors
 - Norwegian & Dutch - structurally the same, labelled different
 - Chinese languages - same label, structurally distinct
- Neutral label: *variety*

Slide 8

What is a dialect?

- Useful concept: *mutual intelligibility*
- A dialect is a structurally uniform variety
- One or more mutually intelligible dialects comprise a language

Slide 9

What is an accent?

- a structurally uniform sound variety
- everyone has one

Elicit some languages, dialects, and accents:

Languages English, French, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Swahili, ...

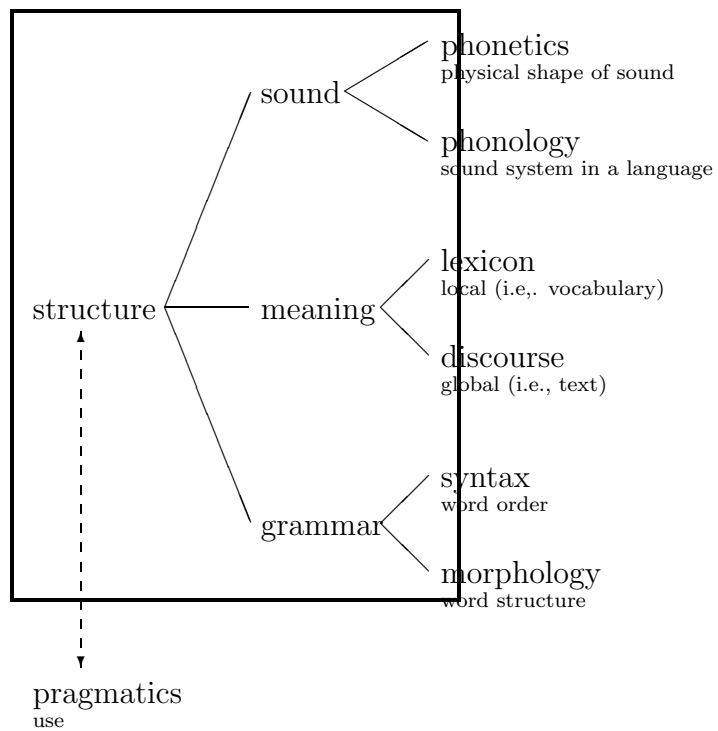
Dialects (of English) North American, British, Australian, AAVE

Accents (of English) RP, New York, Boston, Chicago, Midwest, South, Texas ...

Slide 10

What is the structure of language?

Slide 11



Be sure to discuss the vowel space and refer to Mesthrie et al. (2000), p. xxiv.

Slide 12

Two approaches to the study of language

- Descriptivism - linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists
- Prescriptivism - editors, language teachers, language mavens
- Which is correct?
 - Prescriptivism often relies on nonrelevant authority
 - Descriptivism may be inadequate for some societal needs

Elicit some descriptive and prescriptive statements.

Note that hygiene like cleaning up is used here metaphorically, but facetiously—Cameron knows full well that language is not actually 'improved' by such hygienic efforts.

Slide 13

Central tenets of linguistics

- Primacy of speech
 - The central object of linguistic study is spoken language
 - Writing is an abstraction of the spoken language and is therefore dependent on it.
- Equality of languages
 - All languages are fundamentally equal.
 - Every language can express any idea that any other language can (or can adapt

Slide 14

the ability to do so).

The study of linguistic competence is typically regarded as the study of the structure of language (show structural hierarchy slide again). It is an asocial view of language.

Activity What might cause a speaker to say each of the following? When would each be quite inappropriate?

1. Do you think it's cold in here?
2. The airport, as fast as you can.
3. I do.
4. I leave my house to my son George.
5. Do you love me?
6. How strange?
7. Can we have some silence at the back?
8. What a beautiful dress!
9. Cheers!
10. Will you marry me?
11. Do you come here often?
12. Keep to the right, please?
13. Damn!
14. You don't love me anymore.

What kind of knowledge did you rely on to do this activity? Pragmatic and social knowledge. Hence, competence must be more than merely structural competence. We also have a sociolinguistic competence which is equally systematic and not the result of performance errors.

Basic sociological concepts

In order to examine this sociolinguistic competence more deeply we need to establish some basic notions of social structure.

Slide 15

Views of Society

- Functionalism
- Marxism
- Interactionism

Slide 16

Functionalism

- Each part of society are defined in relation to the whole and the function it performs for the good of the whole.
- Values consensus maintains order within society
- Functionalists examine such concepts as *culture*, *socialization*, *norms and values*, and *status and role*
- Dominant paradigm in sociolinguistics

Slide 17

Marxism

- Society is perpetuated by conflict of interest among classes
- View often taken in studies of Language planning and power

Slide 18

Interactionism

- Society is built on the interactions between individuals
- Useful paradigm in studies of conversation

Slide 19

Goals of Sociolinguistics

- Investigate language with respect to social structure
- Investigate social structure with respect to language

The study of Language and Society involves realizing what you already know.

Slide 20

References

Mesthrie, R., Swann, J., Deumert, A., and Leap, W., editors (2000). *Sociolinguistics*. John Benjamins Publishing.

Wardaugh, R. (1992). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Second Edition*. Blackwell, Oxford, UK.