Language and Social Class

Linguistics 220: "Language and Society"

15 April 2003

Readings

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- Required
  - Mesthrie et al. (2000), Chapter 3

- Other
  - Trudgill (2001), Chapter 2
  - Wardaugh (1992), Chapter 2, 6, 7
  - Labov (1972)

Main Points
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• Important Term(s)
  – linguistic insecurity

• Sociolinguistic investigation centers on variation in one (or more) linguistic feature which varies with respect to social groups

Business
Business

- Don’t forget to give me any experiment/talk tickets

Need replies from DoKyung Kim, Rebecca Nelson

Lecture
What is the difference between the speech of the following characters?

- Robin Leach
  - British accent
  - standard variable use of 'to be'
- "Cletus" from "The Simpsons"
  - Southern US accent
  - "ain't"
  - invariant use of 'to be' (you's, he's, we's)

How to investigate sociolinguistic variation (one method)

1. Identify linguistic variation in a community
2. Gather data from sample of people
3. Analyze data with respect to relevant language feature
4. Ascertain correlations between linguistic variation and social groups
Commonly investigated sociolinguistic variables

- in -ing
- nonprevocalic /r/
- backing of vowels
- verbal -s

Fischer (1958): -in/-ing

- linguistic feature: use of fishin’ vs. fishing
- observations
  - Girls use fishing more than boys
  - ‘Model’ boys us fishing more than other boys
- Conclusion: -in and -ing variation related to sex, class, personality, mood, and formality of setting
Labov (1972): NY department store

- Linguistic feature: nonprevocalic /r/
- Methodology
  - Three department stores: Saks, Macy’s, S. Klein
  - Established social ranking of stores
    * Advertising in NY Times vs. Daily News
    * Price of advertised goods
  - Elicit “fourth floor” twice (casual, emphatic styles)

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- Results
  - Overall, higher status uses more nonprevocalic /r/
  - In emphatic style, lower status tends toward higher status
Linguistic Insecurity
- speaker of a lower-prestige variety 'corrects' to a higher-prestige variety
- motivated by speaker’s aspirations, etc.

Other social class variation
- Eckert (1989): Burnouts use backed vowels
- Norwich & Detroit: lower-class speakers do not use verbal -s
- "She like him very much."
- "He don’t know a lot, do he?"
- "It go ever so fast."

Projects
- Project groups
- Project proposals by May $1^{st}$ (earlier is better!)
  - linguistic feature(s)
  - subjects
  - elicitation procedure and instrument
- Collect data by mid-May
- Analyze data
- Write paper individually
- Submit paper on May $29^{th}$
References


