Encouraging Linguistic Diversity in the Campus Community

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GOALS

• Understand how & why linguistic diversity exists
  • Provide examples of linguistic variation based on traits such as sex, gender, race, region, etc.
  • Understand that – linguistically – all ways of speaking are and should be considered “equal”

• Understand challenges faced by language minority students
  • Public attitudes about non-English languages and different ways of speaking
  • Linguistic discrimination

• Think about ways to encourage linguistic diversity on campus
  • Thinking about language differences not as a deficit but an addition to the campus community
“Language Minority”

- “Language Minority”
  - Regional/ethnic dialects – e.g. Southern American English, African American English
  - English as a Second/Foreign Language – e.g. International students
  - Bilinguals – e.g. students who speak English fluently, but a different language with their parents

- Also includes – to some extent – young women’s speech
HOW SPEECH “WORKS”

• We each have a set of linguistic rules partially dictated by *non*-linguistic characteristics, such as:
  - Native language
  - Sex/gender
  - Race
  - Region
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Age

• All of these rules are *learned* and can also change over time

• What is “Standard” English?
Native Language

Most obvious demonstration of differing language rules between populations.

Differences at all levels of language:

- Word selection
- Morphology
- Sentence structure
- Pronunciation rules

E.g.:

This is my sister’s cat. vs.

Das ist die Katze meiner Schwester.
Robert Melby, chairman of Florida English Campaign, called for eliminating 911 services in Spanish so that immigrants have an incentive to learn English.

Terry Robbins, leader of Dade Americans United to Protect the English Language: Hispanics must be “educated to the fact that the United States is not a mongrel nation.”

Larry Pratt, president of English First: “Tragically, many immigrants these days refuse to learn English! They never become productive members of American society. They remain stuck in a linguistic and economic ghetto.”
ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Washington state law WAC 392-160 sets up the Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program:

• Requires instruction in two languages
• Goal is to transition to English
• Teach concepts and skills in native language so student can grow academically while still learning English
  • Especially important for literacy development

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Malagon, McCold, & Hernandez 2011
DISCRIMINATION

- Foreign-language discrimination is present in all areas of society by virtue of English being the ‘default’ language of most spaces
  - Justice Department review of Maricopa County Sherriff’s Office under Sherriff Joe Arpaio found “discriminatory jail practices against Latino inmates with limited English proficiency by punishing them and denying them critical services” (CNN 2011)
  - Pregnant Spanish-speaking women in Washington State struggle to get interpreters; had to sign consent forms in English; report PTSD-like symptoms following childbirth without adequate interpretation; and many decide not to have more children based on the experience (Farber 2013)
GENDER

  - Jocks = middle-class values; school sports; focused on college prep
  - Burnouts = working class; “independent engagement”; vocational classes
  - Studied use of three regional phonetic (sound) variables

“Vernacular” speech

Burnouts, Women

Burnouts, Men

“Standard” speech

Jocks, Men

Jocks, Women
SEXISM & WOMEN’S SPEECH

Young women lead sociolinguistic change…

• “… [I]f you identify a sound change in progress, then young people will be leading old people, and women tend to be maybe half a generation ahead of males on average.” – Mark Liberman (Seattle Times 2012)

…and get blamed for it

• “Like” as a discursive filler
• Quotative “all”
• High rising terminals (“uptalk”) x
• Vocal fry
SEXISM & WOMEN’S SPEECH

Seattle Times comments:

• “Why not speak in a way that shows intelligence? Being smart is not a bad thing. Who cares if they're accepted by a bunch of lemmings who think they're distinguishing themselves by behaving and speaking the way everyone else does?”

• “…as Lincoln put it, I don't want to be a master or a slave. The world of teen girls is far too ridden with both masters and slaves to be a model for anything good in our society. And the excessive use of "like" is precisely what it sounds like. It indicates someone is so clueless about how to express themselves that they need to insert stall words into their speech to give their thinking--such as it is--time to catch up.”
**Regionality & Race**

Past-tense *be* leveling in Appalachia

- “We was…”
- “They was…”
- Used by African Americans, Native Americans, and European Americans, to varying degrees

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**Beech Bottom, NC**
- Levelling near-universal for all speakers
- (Wolfram & Mallinson 2002)

**Warren County, NC**
- AA level 50% of the time
- NA 20%
- EA 10%
- (Hazen 2000)

**Texana, NC**
- Young speakers use levelling more often
- (Childs & Mallinson 2004)
**Other Features of African American English**

**Copula deletion**

- Only where “Standard” English allows contraction (mostly)
  - She is a nurse $\rightarrow$ She’s a nurse $\rightarrow$ She a nurse
  - Be nice to your mother $\rightarrow$ Nice to your mother
  - You’re not going, are you? $\rightarrow$ You’re not going, you?

**Invariant/habitual *be***

- Used to show that an action is common, usual, etc – different meaning, NOT a speech error
  - She is always reading her books $\rightarrow$ She be reading her books
OAKLAND EBONICS
CONTROVERSY

• School board proposal that teachers be educated on African American English grammar so that they can better teach students Standard English
  • An extremely conservative approach to AAE in the classroom – but still better than most approaches
• “The reaction of most people across the country … was overwhelmingly negative. … Ebonics was variously described as "lazy English," "bastardized English," "poor grammar," and "fractured slang."” (Rickford 1997)
“Ebonic Olympic Games”

- **Opening Ceremonies**
  - The Torching of the Olympic City
  - Gang Colors Parade

- **Track and Field**
  - Rob, Shoot & Run
  - 9MM Pistol Toss
  - Molotov Cocktail Throw
  - Barbed Wire Roll
  - Chain Link Fence Climb
  - People Chase
  - Monkey Bar Race

- **Miscellaneous Events**
  - Bitch Slapping (Bruises inflicted on wife/girlfriend in three one-minute rounds)
  - Graffiti Wall Painting
  - Name Your Father (Canceled, Considered Too Difficult)
  - Lying to Police (Canceled, Considered too Easy)
  - Welfare Fraud (Canceled, Considered a Lifestyle, Not an Event)

Quoted in Rickford 2000
HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Linguistic profiling in the San Francisco Bay Area

- Tri-dialectal speaker John Baugh called landlords in five communities in the SFBA
- “White” accent succeeded more than Black, Chicano accents in White/wealthy areas
- National Fair Housing Alliance recognizes “accents” as playing a significant role in housing discrimination

Purnell, Isardi, & Baugh 1999
**Linguistic Diversity on Campus**

- All spoken language is systematic and rule-based
- *Linguistically*, all spoken language is equal
- How we speak says a lot about us (age, race, gender, identity) and how we speak *about* how we speak says a lot about cultural norms and oppression
- You can get away with saying things about language that you can’t get away with saying about gender, race, etc.
- The burden should not be on language minority students to learn Standard English to accommodate to “our” speech style
Linguistic Insecurity

- William Labov used the term “linguistic insecurity” in the 1960s to describe New Yorkers who were self-conscious of their NY accents.
- Speakers of stigmatized speech styles are aware of their stigma and experience insecurity as a result.
- Especially true for students in the classroom.
- “The students, as all speakers do, see their language as intimately connected to who they are. If their language is not good enough for society, then the logical connection to be drawn is that neither are they.” – H. Samy Alim
CREATING SPACE FOR LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS

• To create a welcoming space on campus or linguistic diversity, we have to be able to answer the “deficit” conception of students’ speech

• Best programs for elementary-aged students: Dual-language immersion; bilingualism as goal for all students (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2003)
  • Allow both groups to learn about new cultures while being allowed to retain their own identities (Alanís & Rodríguez, 2008)
  • Excellent academic results for both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers (Thomas & Collier, 2002 and 2003).
  • We can use this paradigm to brainstorm ideas about how to encourage students to appreciate and contribute their language
CREATING SPACES FOR LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

- Construct programs that explicitly welcome linguistic diversity and view it as a meaningful contribution to the community
  - Creative writing in native language/dialect
  - Public performances in native language/dialect
- Encourage students to work as TAs/tutors teaching their native language
- Use music, movies, etc. at events that have authentic, non-stereotypic representations of linguistic diversity
COMMUNITY SERVICE USING NATIVE LANGUAGE/DIALECT

- Students learn to read most successfully when they learn in their native language
- The same principle probably applies to native dialect
  - Students make more gains in reading achievement levels when using dialect readers as opposed to conventional reading materials (Rickford & Rickford 1995)
  - Encourage university-level students to tutor elementary students who speak the same language
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH/CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS

• “Critical Language Awareness” programs have been used by H Samy Alim in working class, racially diverse schools

• CLA encourages students to identify and question linguistic norms

• “CLA views educational institutions as designed to teach citizens about the current sociolinguistic order of things, without challenging that order, which is based largely on the ideology of the dominating group and their desire to maintain social control.”

• “Research in this area attempts to make the invisible visible by examining the ways in which well-meaning educators attempt to silence diverse languages in White public space by” by encouraging “White ways of speaking.”
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH/CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS

• Goal is to educate linguistically marginalized students about how language is used, and how it is used against them

• How can language be used to maintain, reinforce, and perpetuate existing power relations?

• Conversely, how can language be used to resist, redefine, and possibly reverse these relations?

• Encourage students to participate in research on their own communication
  • Students are at the forefront of language change and are most intimately connected to the type of speech linguists want to study
  • Students should write and talk about their research authentically
We might ask: **By what processes are we all involved in the construction and maintenance of the notion of a ‘standard dialect’, and further, that the ‘standard’ is somehow better, more intelligent, more appropriate, more important, etc., than other varieties?**

In other words, **how, when, and why are we all implicated in the elevation of one particular variety over all others, even when all of our linguistic knowledge and theories tell us that ‘all languages are equal in linguistic terms’?**

Why does this continue when linguists know that ‘standard’ simply means that this is the language variety that **those in authority have constructed as the variety needed to gain access to resources?**  -H. Samy Alim
QUESTIONS?

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