1. Language and social attitudes

Value judgments about language should be recognized as socially based: isolate the social aspects from the purely linguistic ones. (prescriptivism vs. descriptivism).

Social factors play a very important role in how people actually speak. We examine these factors to understand how they underly linguistic variation.

Reminder: classifying "correctness":
Think of examples for each:

1. Established criteria of educated written language
2. Issues on which educated people differ (different usage in different genres, also different opinions)
3. Changes in the spoken language that some people resist
4. Pure inventions of self-appointed grammarians with no basis in linguistic structure or historical usage

Language varieties:
- dialect
- accent
- idiolect
- slang

Dialect variation and its evaluation

Language has a deep social function of defining group identity.

How?

George Bernard Shaw (1916 preface to his play Pygmalion):
"It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him."

In Shaw's England, to "spot" someone is a (usually negative or even hostile) evaluation.

Remember: shibboleth

People have been killed based on linguistic markers of regional or ethnic dialect: e.g., the Bible, in Judges 12: Jephthah and the Gileadites against Ephraimites;
Also: in the Dominican Republic in 1937 tens of thousands of Haitians were massacred on the basis of whether or not they could roll the /r/ in perejil, the Spanish word for "parsley."

American regional and class-based accents are also subject to sometimes harsh evaluation.
Sociolinguistic judgments

When you hear a speaker of American English (or any other language you know well), you might often ask yourself what kind of person is talking:

- what sex?
- what age?
- from what part of the country?
- what social class?
- what race or ethnicity?

Most people are very good at guessing sex and age and individual identity, and fair at guessing geographic region. We're especially sensitive to social class markers in dialect areas we are familiar with.

Some features that distinguish regional dialects of American English

William Labov and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania have used telephone survey techniques to construct a detailed Phonological Atlas of North America.

A couple of simple ways in which dialects of American English vary, from the Atlas:

1. Many speakers -- especially those in the northern and western parts of the country -- don't distinguish the vowels of cot / caught.
2. On the other hand, many southern speakers don't distinguish the vowel in words such as pin / pen or him / hem: these two lax vowels are merged before a nasal consonant (but not in other contexts, such as pit / pet).

"Matched guise" experiments

Evaluations of traits such as intelligence can be strongly influenced by social stereotypes associated with speech pattern. Similarly, African-American or Latino speech markers can make the difference between being shown a house/apartment & being told, it is no longer available.

Lexical distinctions between dialects

Aspects of language besides pronunciation ("accent") set speakers apart.

- Vocabulary: e.g. 1950s England (S. C. Ross) U and non-U vocab. -- arbitrariness
- Also: words for carbonated beverage in the U.S. http://popysoda.com.2998/images/bigdrawn.gif

Prestige dialects

"Grammatical" aspects of language use are common in discussions of "good" & "bad" language.

2. Social patterns in language

The study of variation in speech that depends on geography, identity, social and economic status is the domain of sociolinguistics -- variation in the form of language, especially as the result of social categories.

Social dialect: g-dropping in English

There are systematic analogical relationships among different social and registral dimensions. E.g., social class and formality: case study: g-dropping in English.
What is g-dropping?
The term comes from the orthography: ng for the velar nasal [ŋ]; n for the alveolar nasal [n], e.g. she's opening / openin' the door. In fact, there is no [g] sound involved at all.

Thus in "g-dropping" nothing is ever really dropped

What words are candidates for g-dropping?
English speakers do not have a general alternation between final velar and coronal nasals, e.g. boomerang does not become boomeran', and ring does not become rin. Only unstressed -ing at the ends of words.

In some dialects, only in the inflectional suffix -ing (trying), & not in nouns such (wedding):
*They were buildin' a house.* but not *They live in a huge buildin'.

For most, it's a matter of frequency: nouns can do it (as in mornin'), but verbs do so more often.

Where does g-dropping come from?
G-dropping a more conservative pattern.

Early Middle English:
Present participle inflectional suffix was -inde or -ende.
Derivational suffix -ung turned nouns out of verbs (like present-day "building")
In German this distinction is preserved: senk- "sink, lower"
*senk-end"*(to be) lowering" (*Steuer senkende Massnahmen*, "tax lowering measures")
*Senk-ung"lowering" (*Steuersenkung"tax cut")

In English, the -ende suffix lost its -de ending, and the -ung suffix was weakened to -ing.
This led to a confusion of the two suffixes, and eventually, in some dialects, including the written standard, they merged into the modern -ing suffix.

One result is that it's hard to classify -ing as inflectional or derivational.
they were saying (inflected verb) a famous saying (a derived noun)

19th- & early 20th-century England:
G-dropping (really "non-g-adding") marked the rural aristocracy as well as the lower classes.
The velar pronunciation, a middle-class innovation about 200 years ago, was as much anti-rural as pro-upper-class. It has become the norm for most educated speakers.

Note: for most speakers, the two suffixes never completely merged.

How does g-dropping work today?
Nearly all English speakers drop g's sometimes, but in a given speech community, the proportion varies systematically with class.
In a 1969 study in NYC, Labov found, in casual conversation, g-dropping varied w/ social class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS -&gt;</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Lower middle</th>
<th>Upper middle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of g-dropping</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words, as class status "rises," percentage of g-dropping falls.
Formality also matters: within a social stratum, more g-dropping in less formal speech.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For lower class</th>
<th>Casual speech</th>
<th>Careful speech</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of g-dropping</td>
<td>80</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 1969 NYC study, this pattern was maintained across the full interaction of social class and degree of formality.

A similar pattern was found in percentage of g-dropping from a study done in Norwich, England:

(See Language Files, page 440, exercise 26 for some of the results of the Norwich study).

The general pattern: double dependence on social status and formality is maintained.

Systematic analogy between social class and formality.

Gender is also relevant. Male speakers (other things equal) tend to use more informal/lower-class patterns than females.

G-dropping, LA, males and females of similar socio-economic status:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Joking</th>
<th>Arguing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Overt vs covert prestige

Two kinds of language change, partly based on personal identity, in somewhat opposite ways.

In the pronunciation of [r] in New York City, a trend was found toward the overt prestige.

Overt prestige pattern is ________________________________
In the pronunciation of [ai] and [au] on Martha's Vineyard, a trend was found toward the **covert prestige**.

Covert prestige pattern is ______________________________________________________

**R-fulness in New York**

Social categories marked by pronunciation: **status of [r] in English**, when that sound is not followed by a vowel (i.e. when it's in the *coda* of a syllable).

- **r-ful** ("rhotic") pronunciation: New York  General American (or "Midwestern") prestige pattern
- **r-less** ("non-rhotic") pronunciation: New Y*awk*  more local (New England) prestige pattern

Some background: When the English colonies were founded in America, the prestige pattern in England was to pronounce all r's. In the 18th century, the prestige form in England developed the r-lessness that is still standard there today. (Many regional dialects in England still pronounce all the r's.) On the Atlantic seaboard, in continual contact with England, this form was widely adopted as well, so that port cities such as Boston, New York, and Savannah developed an r-less prestige pattern, as did British colonies settled later than the Americas (South Africa, Australia. Philadelphia never developed this pattern, and maintained the r-ful pronunciation all along.) As the inland population moved westward, the non-coastal r-ful dialect became the General American pattern, which is displacing the r-less varieties. Important exception: Southern dialect area, r-less is a regional prestige pattern.

In the 1960's, William Labov, NYC: Three **department stores** catering to different social classes.

- **Saks 5th Avenue** (high prestige)  
- **Macy's** (middle prestige)  
- **S. Klein** (low prestige)

Labov asked a clerk for the location of some pre-selected item, e.g. shoes, that (he knew) was on the **fourth floor**.

1*try*: Where are shoes?  
2*try*: Excuse me?  
- note presence/absence of [r] in both

Out of sight, he **jotted down** the pronunciations & basic details about the clerk (sex,age,race,job).

**This technique is called a rapid and anonymous survey.**

The clerks pronounced [r] more often when they worked in a higher-prestige store.

For Macy's, even stronger pattern across **three different occupational groups** (job-prestige):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saks</th>
<th>Macy's</th>
<th>S. Klein</th>
<th>Floorwalkers</th>
<th>Sales clerks</th>
<th>Stock clerks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Chart" /></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In careful pronunciation: the lower the prestige, the greater the increase in use of [r].

The r-less pronunciation used to be the prestige form. During 20th century, the more general American r-ful pattern came to be perceived as the standard.

By age, in each store:

The striking difference:
the older workers at Saks use [r] less,
while the older workers at Macy's use it more.
(There's not much difference at Klein's.)

What is going on?

The older Saks workers: r-less pronunciation previously prestige in NYC. Linguistically secure.
The younger Saks workers: grew up as r-ful prestige form was being established, and so have adopted it in greater numbers.
The older Macy's workers: upwardly mobile, linguistically insecure. Adopted the newer prestige form, using it more than same-aged workers at Saks. This is called hypercorrection.
The younger Macy's workers: less experience with (and less upwardly mobile interest in) the broader prestige pattern, and are only slowly adopting it.
The Klein's workers are sufficiently distant in social class from the Saks standard that they are much less likely to adopt it.

Hypercorrection by the lower middle class (result of linguistic insecurity) confirmed in a more detailed study by Labov: interviews with speakers living on the Lower East Side. Similar results – not only for "r" but also for the sounds such as "th" (the), "aw" (awful), and "a" (bad).
Relatively careful speech (tape-recorded interviews) approximate overall percentage of r’s.

The view of language use by age gives us a snapshot of change in progress:
Assuming younger Saks workers maintain their r-fulness as they age,
in the next generation we expect older workers with increased use of [r].
This is confirmed by the current situation in NYC, where r-fulness maintains its status as a prestige pronunciation.

For the Macy's workers, the story told here implies that the younger workers, as their attitudes and experience change, will increase their use of [r].

Diphthong centralization on Martha's Vineyard

In a separate study also in the 1960's, Labov found what might be considered the opposite of the New York situation on the island of Martha's Vineyard, in Massachusetts.

Pronunciation of the diphthongs [ai] and [au] in words like lied and loud:
among Vineyarders, these can be pronounced everywhere with the centralized value [əi] or [əu]
(only before voiceless sound in other dialects, light & lout)

The following chart shows that, while centralization is not very common among the older islanders, it's very common in some younger age groups, but less so in the youngest category.

(These figures are not percentages, but rather a "centralization index" derived from acoustic measurements of the diphthongs; higher numbers mean more overall centralization.)
What accounts for this jump in centralization in the 31-60 age range? People who decided to stay on the island while providing for their families, despite economic pressures against it.

Strong correlation between

positive attitudes toward life on the island

and

degree of centralization:

A similar distinction can be found between two regions of the island:

- **up-island**: rural; some fishing survives (SW)
- **down-island**: small towns, many summer homes (NE)

Residents who remain in the more traditional way of life (up-island) show much stronger centralization:

Also: difference between teenagers who plan to come back after college & those who want to leave.

Centralization = a marker of solidarity with the island and its traditional ways, in opposition to the mainland and the new service economy.

The appeal of the non-standard form is called covert prestige -- based on group identity.

A person proud of the local tradition, and remaining in that location, will tend to keep or even enhance the local dialect practices despite much exposure to the standard variety through the media and through personal contacts.

Groups can diverge in their linguistic practices despite the trends of the larger society. Exposure to outside norms represents the overt, but does not affect covert prestige.

Other topics: language & gender, language & culture, pidgins & creoles, among others.

As we turn to next several weeks’ topic – language acquisition and development, keep in mind the related issues introduced by sociolinguistics:

1. As children are trying to learn their first language, it changes – how do they cope?
2. Children learn not only the linguistic system, but also the social interpretations.
3. Children are the active movers of language change in progress.