Sociolinguistic Variation
LSA 068

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Course Website:
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Purpose of the Course

- General Introduction to the Field of Sociolinguistic Variation
  - General Patterns of Social Stratification
  - Role of Variation in Change
  - Research Methods

- Closer Focus on
  - The Use of Variation in Stylistic Practice
  - The Construction of Social Meaning in and with Variation
Introductory stuff

- The big picture
  - Class 1: Macro-sociological Patterns of Variation
    LSA069 The sociolinguistics of language change. (Tagliamonte)
    032 An introduction to Dialectology (Preston)

- At the opposite extreme - variation viewed up close
  - Class 2: Style and Indexicality

- How do you gather and analyze variation data?
  - Class 3: Researching Variation
    LSA035 – Introduction to probability and information theory. (Malouf)
    LSA 037 – An Introduction to sociophonetics (DiPaolo and Yaeger-Dror)
Focusing on Meaning

- What is the relation between local practice and macro-sociological patterns?
  - Class 4: Indexicality, Social Practice and Social Reproduction
    
    LSA 042 Language and race (Chun)
    LSA 043 Language and sexuality (Barrett)
    LSA 048 Language, gender, and sexuality in the material world (Bucholtz and Hall)
    LSA 066 Situated approaches to language variation (Mendoza-Denton and Meyerhoff)

- How is meaning constructed in variation?
  - Class 5: Stylistic Practice and Enregisterment
    
    LSA 047 – Language variation and the mass media (Queen)
Some Basic Issues

- **How automatic is variation?**
  - **Class 6: Issues of Agency**
    LSA 067 Sociolinguistic cognition (Campbell-Kibler)

- **How arbitrary are variables?**
  - **Class 7: Iconization and Affect**

- **How do we do close-up analysis of variation?**
  - **Class 8: An analysis of two narratives**

A suggestion: Work on the final assignment throughout the course.
Today’s Class

- The First Wave of Variation Studies
  - Results of survey studies in variation
    - Class, Style, Gender and Age Correlations
  - The relation between variation and (the spread of) linguistic change
  - Implications of large-scale correlations

- The Second Wave of Variation Studies
  - The place of ethnography in variation research.
Three Waves of Variation Study

- **First Wave:**
  - The Survey Era. Plotting the big picture

- **Second Wave:**
  - The Ethnographic Era. Viewing variation locally

- **Third Wave:**
  - The Stylistic Era. Focusing on meaning
The First Wave: Some Urban Studies

- CEDERGREN, HENRIETTA. 1973. The interplay of social and linguistic factors in Panama, Linguistics, Cornell University: PhD.
- MODARESSI, YAHYAH. 1978. A sociolinguistic analysis of modern Persian, University of Kansas: PhD.
Introducing the First Wave: a Stable Variable

% apical -ing in New York

Another Stable Variable

dh-stopping in New York City
A Change from Below
New York City /æh/

A Change from Above

/r/ insertion in New York City
Age as Apparent Time


Figure 3. Individual percentages of $[R]/([R]+[r])$ for the 32 Panel speakers for 1971 and 1992. Trajectories plotted for all speakers who showed a significant difference between the two years.
gender /aeh/ raising in New York
/dh/ in Philadelphia gender

Gender: dh-stopping in Philadelphia

- Men casual
- Men careful
- Women casual
- Women careful
(ing) in Norwich by social class, style and gender

Source: Trudgill 1974
One finds all kinds of interesting gender differences across large populations. The question is what do they mean?

These are from the DARPA TIMIT corpus of read speech, containing 10 sentences read by each of 630 speakers from 8 major dialect regions of the United States.
First Wave: 
Developing the big picture

- Large survey studies of geographically defined communities
- The socioeconomic hierarchy as a map of social space
- Variables as markers of primary social categories and carrying class-based prestige/stigma
- Style as attention paid to speech, and controlled by orientation to prestige/stigma
The Big Questions

What do these large-scale correlations relate to on the ground – in our everyday lives?

Why do working class people speak like working class people, and middle class people like middle class people?

How do we account for the gender patterns we see?

...
The Standard Language Market
(Bourdieu 1977)

Class as defined locally

% use of acrolectal variants in singular pronouns

Relation between variation and density, multiplexity of social networks

Second Wave: Developing the local picture

- Ethnographic studies of geographically defined communities
- Variables as indexing locally-defined categories
- Local categories as reproducing macrosiological categories
- Style as acts of affiliation

(to be continued)
The nature of linguistic practice

Speakers use language not simply to comment on the world, but to change the world.

Speakers use variation not simply to reflect or reassert their pre-ordained place in the social map, but to mess with their place and with the map itself.