Wrap-up

(dribs ‘n drabs)
Sociolinguistics: a study of meaning

• What is social meaning?
  – What isn’t social meaning?

• What is the range of meanings that get associated with linguistic variables?

• What is the range of linguistic resources that function as sociolinguistic variables?
What is a slx variable?

- An alternation of form becomes a variable when the alternation displays a pattern.  
- It becomes a sociolinguistic variable when social context is part of that pattern.  
- At that point, the variable takes on meaning, becoming a sign.

An emergent sign
• Is variation part of pragmatics?
  – From ye olde Wickedpedia: Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics and semiotics that studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning.
    • propositional meaning?
    • where does denotation leave off and connotation begin?
What’s the difference?

(1) a. Americans need to pay off their debts.
    b. The Americans need to pay off their debts.

(2) a. Americans drink fluoridated water.
    b. The Americans drink fluoridated water.

“Americans are cravin’ that straight talk.”

(42) [. . . ] it was John McCain who pushed so hard with the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac reform measures. He sounded that warning bell.


A construction

We used to **uh** put on **like these skits for the cla-**
**uh** me and her we won first prize in this talent contest cuz
we **uh** dressed up as sardines, you know.

Calder and Popova

We we got arrested before
For **uh** possession of alcohol

D’Onofrio, Hilton and Pratt creak + **uh** p=0.01

And **uh** me and Jill we went in the john you know
we had our first our first cigarette
Is *uh* a filler?

4/19 occurrences of *um/uh* precede pauses of over a second.

- 2 occurrences of *um*.
- 2 occurrences of *uh* with no creak.
  - before syntactic restart
  - before long pause
The role of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation

In cases of language contact, adults will bring substrate influences into the target language, but it is their kids who, as native speakers of that target language, will (or won’t) select substrate features to index aspects of the second generation immigrant experience.

Local or ethnic identity is never simply an association with a generic locale or ethnicity, but with a particular construction of that locale or ethnicity as distinct from some other.
Indexical Order (th) stopping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Order</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Cajun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n+1</td>
<td>gang affiliate</td>
<td>tough guy</td>
<td>hard worker</td>
<td>entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• How recognizeable are styles beyond their local context?
Two girls at the local social extremes:

Judy and Melody
Do Judy and Melody’s styles have meaning?

• Question 1:
  – version a. what social group or clique do you think this person belongs to?
  – version b. how well do you think this person does in school?
  – version c. what do you think this person does for fun?

• Question 2:
  – What do you think this person is like?

4 from the Northern Cities region

- **Judy**
  - how well do you think this person does in school?
    - I think the person is probably a very poor student
    - not very well
    - badly, delinquent
  - what do you think this person is like?
    - obviously doesn’t know how to speak correctly
    - likes to have a good time, not very serious
    - Probably a trouble maker, doesn’t do her school work

- **Melody**
  - what do you think this person does for fun?
    - They socialize with their many friends, go on dates, play sports, and are active in their school's extra curricular activities
  - what do you think this person is like?
    - Friendly, sociable, easily distracted, slightly melodramatic, active, and assertive.
what social group or clique do you think this person belongs to?

- Judy: geeks, gamers (0.4), athlete (0.3), smart (0.1), gangsta, partiers (0.2)
- Melody: popular, cheerleaders, preps (1.0), vague (0.3)
What do you think this person is like?

- **Judy**: 
  - Friendly, outgoing, energetic
  - Parties
  - Trouble

- **Melody**: 
  - Low class
  - Middle class
what do you think this person does for fun?

- Judy
  - shopping: 12
  - trouble: 2
  - school activities: 2
  - go to parties: 2
  - games, outdoor activities: 2

- Melody
  - shopping: 4
  - trouble: 8
  - school activities: 2
  - go to parties: 1
  - games, outdoor activities: 3
how well do you think this person does in school?

Explicit volunteered judgments of intelligence (what is this person like?)
How do we “acquire” sociolinguistic “competence”?
Interpellation from the start

adults watching a film of a crying infant were more likely to hear the cry as angry if they believed the infant was a boy, and as plaintive or fearful if they believed the infant was a girl.


adults judged a 24-hour-old baby as bigger if they believed it to be a boy, and finer-featured if they believed it to be a girl


Parents use more diminutives (*kitty, doggie*) when speaking to girls than to boys

People use more inner state words (*happy, sad*) when speaking to girls than to boys.


Adults use more direct prohibitives (*don’t do that!* ) and more emphatic prohibitives (*no! no! no!* ) to boys than to girls, regardless of the actual nature of the children’s activity.


A study of thirteen-month-old children in day care (Fagot et al 1985) showed that teachers responded to girls when they talked, babbled, or gestured, while they responded to boys when they whined, screamed, or demanded physical attention. Nine to eleven months later, the same girls talked more than the boys, and the boys whined, screamed and demanded attention more than the girls.

The developmental imperative
Collaborative socialization

- *Growing up* is central to kids’ lives.
- Adults stress it (primarily in the insistence on behavior “improvement”)
- Nobody wants to be a "baby".
- Older kids have more status. They know stuff, they have more liberties.
- The unknown is exciting.
Kids know what they’re doing

Child society is a basic part of the social order; not unfinished business.

Kids are important agents of social – and linguistic – change. They are not just people who make interesting mistakes, but people who, in the reproduction of language and society, make intelligent changes.
Linguistically …

• Kids learn early on the relation between linguistic variability and social life.
• They interpret variability in adult speech:
  - Social roles
  - Social types
  - Affective displays
• They embrace language as a free and portable resource for social action.
3 1/2 year olds doing ‘father’

- lowered pitch, decreased pitch variability, increased amplitude
- often backed and lowered vowels in a manner that produced an almost sinister ‘accent’:
  - yes [jʌs]
  - bad [ba:d]

Affect

• Kids first learn the meaning of variation through its affective use.
• Affect is social by virtue of the association of emotional proclivities with social groups.
• Eventually affect becomes separable from social groupings.
Affect and Iconicity

Language as Bodily Hexis

Language is a body technique, and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one’s whole relation to the social world, and one’s wholly social informed relation to the world, are expressed. [...] The most frequent articulatory position is an element in an overall way of using the mouth (in talking but also in eating, drinking, laughing etc.) [...] in the case of the lower classes, articulatory style is quite clearly part of a relation to the body that is dominated by the refusal of ‘airs and graces’ [...] Bourgeois dispositions [esp. petit bourgeois] convey in their physical postures of tension and exertion … the bodily indices of quite general dispositions towards the world and other people, such as haughtiness and disdain.

Frequency Code
Association of high frequencies in f0, f2, and in consonant turbulence with smallness; low frequencies with largeness.


- intimate; dear vs. distanced; off-putting
- desirable vs. to-be-shunned
- personal vs impersonal
- pleasing; satisfying vs. gross; disgusting

- instability, unreliability, uncoordinated movement, diversity, excessive energy, noisiness, lack of elegance, cheapness
Colette

One that I really know is Josh and we - we give him rides after school

We got in this mad because of Josh or something and um the next day ‘cause she was spending the night I’m all “wait a minute why should we get mad over a stupid boy”
Colette’s (ay)
F1 $p<.025$ F2 $p<.001$
Colette’s (o)
F1 p < .001 F2 p < .025
Rachel’s (ow)

Like everybody usually goes on Joanna's and um Vanessa's side so I usually have like nobody but Chrissy.

“I apologize” She says “oh well, I mean that was really rude and our friendship is over” I said and I got so mad when she says that so I said “Fine. Our friendship’s over.”
Rachel’s (ow)
Rachel’s (ay)

I wanna be nice and sweet like other teachers. And I don’t wanna be yelling at my kids all my life you know - if I have any kids

I felt like I wanna cry

He lies to me

Don’t lie
Phonological prodess as a variable: Some hypoarticulations

He’s a jackass and everything

Cuz they said it was fucked up it wasn’t really fucked up she didn’t even fight back I don’t even know if she beat me up or nothing I think she did kick me I don’t know I didn’t feel it though you know

Cuz we kinda got other people to dance cuz then you know - it doesn't matter if you dance stupid
The glottal stop appears in many unrelated languages, figuring neither as phoneme nor as contextual variant, but as an expression of anger, hatred, or a firm attitude. Tomographic traces show that a strong glottal constriction accompanies the expression of hatred.

The biological functions of glottal occlusion, and the transfer of the anal libido to the glottal level seems associated with the “hard attack” of anger and hatred.

Key properties of sociolinguistic variables

- **Implicitness.** Conveying something stylistically is less of a commitment, less face-threatening than putting it in the content of an utterance, and it allows both speaker and interlocutor to leave things “unsaid”. This also allows the speaker to make small indexical moves, to try out the waters with less risk to face.

- **Underspecification.** Underspecification is a design feature of language more generally. It allows a small number of forms to serve a large number of purposes, it binds language to social action, and it lies at the core of language’s capacity for flexibility, nuance, creativity and change. In this sense, sociolinguistic variables are like other linguistic signs, as their specific meanings emerge only in context.

- **Combinativeness.** Variables do not occur alone, and are not interpreted on their own, but as components of linguistic styles. Styles are what connect to social meaning through their relation to types, personae, or characterological figures (Agha 2003). The underspecification of variables allows them to bring meaning to styles, but only through a process of vivification as they contribute to the construction of these figures. The deployment of individual variables across styles expands their indexical range.
Key properties of sociolinguistic variables

• **Implicitness.** Conveying something stylistically is less of a commitment, less face-threatening than putting it in the content of an utterance, and it allows both speaker and interlocutor to leave things “unsaid”. This also allows the speaker to make small indexical moves, to try out the waters with less risk to face.

• **Underspecification.** Underspecification is a design feature of language more generally. It allows a small number of forms to serve a large number of purposes, it binds language to social action, and it lies at the core of language’s capacity for flexibility, nuance, creativity and change. In this sense, sociolinguistic variables are like other linguistic signs, as their specific meanings emerge only in context.

• **Combinativeness.** Variables do not occur alone, and are not interpreted on their own, but as components of holistic styles. Styles are what connect to social meaning through their relation to types, personae, or characterological figures (Agha 2003). The underspecification of variables allows them to bring meaning to styles, but only through a process of vivification as they contribute to the construction of these figures. The deployment of individual variables across styles expands their indexical range.
Key properties of variables

- **Implicitness.** Conveying something stylistically is less of a commitment, less face-threatening than putting it in the content of an utterance, and it allows both speaker and interlocutor to leave things “unsaid”. This also allows the speaker to make small indexical moves, to try out the waters with less risk to face.

- **Underspecification.** Underspecification is a design feature of language more generally. It allows a small number of forms to serve a large number of purposes, it binds language to social action, and it lies at the core of language’s capacity for flexibility, nuance, creativity and change. In this sense, sociolinguistic variables are like other linguistic signs, as their specific meanings emerge only in context.

- **Combinativeness.** Variables do not occur alone, and are not interpreted on their own, but as components of styles. Styles connect to social meaning through their relation to stances, social types, or personae. The underspecification of variables allows them to bring meaning to styles, but only through a process of vivification as they contribute to the construction of personae. The deployment of individual variables across styles expands their indexical range.
Positivism vs. constructivism
... the traditional relationship between structure and action, in which action is treated as a reflection of a prior structure, is rejected in favor of one in which structure emerges through situated action.

Dialogism
Locating language, culture, and agency in the interstices between people, rather than within individuals themselves.
... meanings emerge in conversations .... as meanings are coconstructed, social reality is also constructed.... language does not merely reflect an already existing social reality; it also helps to create that reality.

Structure, constraint, power

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And “Power,” insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement.

Aspects of a theory of syntax.
Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
Thanks for coming!

Have a good trip home.