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Week 1

What is Linguistics?

by Prof. Mark Aronoff (Stony Brook University)

Transcription of the invited lecture
Contribution: Ji Yea Kim

Linguistics, the science of language

What is linguistics? **Linguistics is the science of language**. What is science? When we think about science, we normally think about natural sciences, things like Physics, Biology, or Chemistry, but you could have a science of just about anything. For example, you could have a science of music. What would a science of music be? A science of music would be some attempt to understand objectively how music works. There already is a science of music. It is called Music Theory, and it deals with things like musical scales, harmony, different styles of music, and those sorts of things. Likewise, Linguistics is the science of language.

Language is a human behavior, and that is what makes linguistics what we call a behavioral science. What would it mean to be a behavioral science? A behavioral science is a science whose practitioners try to understand how human behavior works. How do humans behave? Humans behave in somewhat systematic ways. Their behavior is not completely random, and of all of the things that people do, it turns out that language is the most systematic. **When people talk, they talk in a very highly structured way**. Of course, not all people talk in the same way, and one of the things that makes linguistics interesting is that, although **all humans have language, different human groups have different languages**.

Just like any science, Linguistics can be divided up according to how you look at things: the level of detail and the direction from which you are looking at it. As a physicist, for example, you can be a nuclear physicist and look at very small units, or you can be an astrophysicist and look at the entire universe. You can be a molecular physicist and be looking at things from that particular angle. Also **in Linguistics, there are many ways of looking at language: Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, and Sociolinguistics**.

Phonetics

If you are looking at a spoken language, you can ask yourself about the sounds of those spoken languages. At a very basic level, we call that Phonetics. At the level of phonetics, it comes close to Physics because we need to know **what the acoustic properties of those sounds are and how they influence how we hear the sounds.**

Phonology

At another level, you can look at **the way the sounds relate to one another**, and that is the level of Phonology. For example, in English, I can say "act", which has three sounds to it: [æ], [k], [t]. I could take those same three sounds and put them together in a different way and give you "tac" [tæk], or I could say "cat" [kæt]. But not all possible

organizations are part of English. I cannot say "kta," "tka," or "atk." That is Phonology, dealing with **how the sounds are organized with respect to one another**. None of those things has anything to do with meaning. **Sounds are not meaningful**.

Morphology

What is meaningful? **The smallest meaningful units are what we call morphemes** and words. At that level, we are studying what linguists call Morphology. **Morphology has to do with how words are put together**. For example, I can say the word "reinstitutionalization" to you. You may never have heard that word. I hope you recognize, though, that the word has a meaning because you know the parts of that word. You know "re-," you know "institution," you know "-al," you know "-ize," you know "-ation," and you know how those parts are put together. All of this, of course, happens at a completely unconscious level, and they have to be put together in a particular way. You cannot say "ize-institution-al-re-ation." There is only one way that they make sense.

Syntax

The words themselves are organized into sentences, and Syntax is the term that we use to talk about **sentence structure**. The word comes from Greek and means literally "put together." **Different languages have different syntax, but every language has a syntax**. In English, if I say "Mary took a selfie," I cannot say "selfie a took Mary." That would not be English. By the same token, every language has its structure, so in English, the general structure and pattern is that first you have the subject, then the verb, then the object: "Mary" is the subject, "took" is the verb, and "a selfie" is the object. In Japanese or Korean, on the other hand, I would have to say "Mary a selfie took." Or if I were speaking standard Arabic, I would have to say "took Mary a selfie." Each language has a particular structure, but the overall patterns are similar. **Every language has subjects, verbs, and objects. They just organize those subjects, verbs, and objects differently**.

Semantics

Of course, we use language to talk to one another and understand each other. At that level, we are talking about **meaning**, which is what linguists call Semantics. We could talk about the semantics of individual words, like "selfie." "Selfie" is an interesting word because it is a brand new word. But we know what it means because it is a word that arose within our own culture. So, **individual words have meanings. Those meanings change all the time**.

At the level of a sentence, the sentence has meaning. And even beyond that. At that level when we start talking about Semantics, we are getting close to things like Logic and even Mathematics.

Spoken Language

The last thing that linguists believe about language is something that most people find very strange, and that is that language is spoken, not written. Written language is very recent. The oldest written language is only about 5,000 years old, whereas spoken language is, as far as we know, as old as humans and maybe even older than our species Homo sapiens. In fact, even to this day, not all languages have a written form. Maybe 10% of the world's languages, or even less, are written on a daily basis. Most languages are spoken.

Certainly, when we look at how people acquire a language, which is looking at how children acquire a language, children learn to speak or sign (if they do not have the capability of speaking). They do not learn to read and write, not in any natural way. The only way a child can learn to read and write is by going to school, and even a school is a very recent invention. It is only in the last couple of hundred years that most people in most advanced societies have gone to school.

For linguists, when they think about language, they think primarily about spoken language. That does not mean that written language does not exist or that it does not count, but it is really, for linguists, kind of a secondary area. Therefore, when we think about languages as primarily spoken, we have an entirely different attitude from thinking

about language as written. Take a language like English for example. English has more or less one written form. I can pretty much read anything that is written in English, no matter where in the world it has been written. But spoken English is not like that. **Spoken English varies greatly from one group to another**.

Sociolinguistics

Variation in spoken language is what we call Sociolinguistics. It is **the relationship between language and society**. This course, "Language in the USA," is a Sociolinguistics course. It addresses the question of how language is used in the United States, largely for social purposes. Some of the course will deal with English, some of it will deal with other languages besides English, but for the most part, this course is about spoken language in the United States.

Assumptions about Languages

Linguists make certain basic assumptions about all languages. The first is that **all and only humans have language**. There are no other creatures besides people that have language.

There are other creatures, of course, that have communication systems, and there is a whole area of study dealing with animal communication. However, animal communication systems are very different from human languages mostly because they are very limited in what they can communicate about. Bees, for example, can communicate about where honey is, and they can communicate about the source of honey in remarkable detail—the source at least of the nectar from which they get the honey. One bee can tell another exactly where that nectar is. But they cannot communicate about anything else. Most creatures can communicate about sex. But they do so in very different ways and in very narrowly prescribed ways.

Humans can communicate about anything. They can talk about nectar. They can talk about sex. They can talk about sports. **If there is something that humans can think about, they can talk about it**. That is what makes human language very different from any other form of communication.

Every single human group on Earth has a language. People used to believe hundreds of years ago that they would find some tribe in the depths of Patagonia that did not have a language. That never turned out to be true. Every human society has a way of communicating. So, **all humans have language, only humans have language, and all of these languages are equal**. There is no way that anyone has ever been able to find of saying in an objective way that one language is better than another language. Of course, we have all kinds of beliefs about that. We think that Italian is better for opera, or that German is better for being precise, or that Latin is better for talking about philosophy. However, no one has ever proven anything of that sort. It looks like every language has a way of talking about anything. In that sense, all languages are equal.

Week 5
New York English
by Prof. Kara Becker (Reed College)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Prepared by: Veronica Miatto

Introduction

My name is Kara Becker. I'm an associate professor of linguistics. I teach sociolinguistics at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, which probably seems really far away. But I did my graduate work in New York City at NYU, and my dissertation project was about New York City English. And I still do some work on New York City now, which I'll tell you about a little bit towards the end, but there's a lot of literature on New York City English, so it's a really well-studied dialect.

New York City English descriptions have been published since 1896. When I was thinking about doing my dissertation project, in 2005 circa, there was the feeling that even though we knew a lot about New York City English, we had not really checked in with it since a very famous study that was published in the 1960s by William Labov called **'The Social Stratification of English in New York City'.** That is one of our classic texts in sociolinguistics that not only describes New York City English but lays out a lot of important **patterns** that we focus on in sociolinguistics, like looking at variables and how variation works, and looking at **change in apparent time**.

In that text, Labov focused on what we might call the **three or four classic features of New York City English**. There are more features than that. There are features that were around earlier in the variety, and kind of have been lost over time. You might still hear them in the speech of elderly New Yorkers. So, things like pronouncing a word like *bird* as /boɪd/, so the diphthongization and loss of /r/ in the /ər/ context. That's basically been lost, but was a classic feature of New York City English.

The /r/ variable

What Labov looked at in his 1966 study is the big three variables of New York English. **The first is the variable /r/**, and this is the pronunciation of /r/ in the coda of a syllable, or you will also hear it described as post-vocalic, so after a vowel. Really, it's anytime /r/ is in the syllable coda. The option is for a speaker to pronounce the constricted /r/ or to pronounce it more like a vowel. So, for the word *car* we can get /kɑr/ or we can get /kɑ:/[1], or in the middle of a word, we can get /kɛrfəl/ careful or we can get /kɛ:fəl/ for the word *careful*.

This is a feature of New York City English that came from British English. It's **not restricted to New York** but found in different places across the eastern seaboard where British settlers brought this /r/

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[1] The symbol : stands for long sound.

vocalization feature with them, but it became really characteristic of New York City speech. In the 1960s, when Labov studied it, it was robust in New York City, so everyone was using it. But importantly, it was **stratified socially** within the city. For instance, socioeconomic status or class was a really important way in which /r/ was differentiated, so speakers of higher-class groups were using more of the constricted /r/. They were pronouncing more of their /r/s than speakers of lower-class groups. Women were pronouncing more of their /r/s than their male counterparts.

All of these, over time have become the classic indicators of a **change in apparent time**. So, when we see a feature, we look at a single point in time, we look at a group of speakers, and we see certain groups leading in a certain behavior. We have an indication that we're looking at change in apparent time. For /r/, it was clear that what used to be the norm in New York City English, which was to "drop your /r/s" or to have these non-rhotic productions, was going away. It was clear that speakers in New York were kind of aware that this was a stigmatized pronunciation, and they were bringing /r/ back in. So, there was **a change in progress towards rhoticity**, towards pronouncing more and more of the /r/s at the ends of words. Labov demonstrated this.

Fast-forward to today and what we see is that that **change is still in progress**. It is not yet complete. So, you will still hear a variable non-rhoticity. You will still hear speakers that do both; they will sometimes produce the /r/ at the end of the syllable, or they will produce a vowel-like element. But more and more speakers are producing the /r/, and in some of the speakers I looked at that were young, native New Yorkers, they were 100% r-full. They had basically completed the change towards bringing the /r/ back in. So, it's a really classic variable, a very important one to know about, and it is great to have been able to track its progress over the last 50 years or so. That is the first big feature of New York City English.

The "cawfee" vowel variable

The **second variable** is a vowel. I like to call it the **"cawfee" vowel**. It is a low, back, rounded vowel. If you use the Wells Lexical Sets, it would be the "thought" vowel. This vowel, in other varieties of American English, is merging with another vowel, the "lot" vowel. That is not happening in New York, but more so, the "thought" vowel is also raising in the vowel space. So, it is not just that it stays distinct from "lot," it is also raising up, and so we get these productions. They're not *coffee* but /kwɑfi/. That is a very distinctive New York City feature, and we call it "thought raising."

And like /r/, it was really first described in detail in Labov's 1966 text. At the time it was a change in progress as well, but not in the direction away from the classic feature like for /r/, but **towards increased usage**. So, again, we saw these indications that in the speech community, **young people and women were leading for this**, and that the expectation was that "thought raising" would continue to spread throughout New York City English.

And I think that it did for a bit, but actually, in my research, **what we found is a reversal of that change**. So, perhaps surprisingly, what looked like a change that would spread throughout the community and continue to grow, did so for a while and then changed course. And so, now what we see are, again, young, native, New Yorkers pulling back on that classic "cowffee" pronunciation, or at least the ones that live in the Lower East Side field site where I worked and where Labov worked. It is possible that speakers elsewhere, or speakers of different ethnic or racial backgrounds might be maintaining this usage.

The short a-split variable

The **third feature** that we associate with New York City English has to do with another **vowel and the way that it splits into two sets**. This is the trap-vowel or the /ae/-vowel in the vowel space. In New York City, we

have what's called a short-a split. So, /ae/ in certain contexts stays sort of low and front in the vowel space. In other contexts, it does what we call tense. So, it raises higher and it fronts.

And in New York City, the classic system is really complicated and it is conditioned by what comes after the vowel, except it's more complicated than that. But in New York City if your /ae/ is before a front nasal, so /n/ or /m/ or a voiceless fricative, so a sound like /s/, or a voiced stop, so a sound like /d/, it will sound tensed. So, classic New Yorkers would say things like /mæəd/ ('mad') or /bæəg/ ('bag'), but they will say words like /bæk/ ('back'). They have what they call a short-a split. So, they have these **tense productions in certain environments and lax productions in other environments**. And again, it is more complicated than that. There are lots of exceptions to that rule. For example, if your vowel is word-initial or if it is in an open syllable, it can ignore the rule I just laid out. So, you might get /mæən/ ('man'), but /mænər/ ('manner'). This is a complicated system that New Yorkers basically had to learn.

What we are finding is similar to the "thought" vowel, where we saw in the 1960's that this was a really classic feature of New York City English, and it seemed like it was going to maintain or spread in the speech community. Instead, **we are seeing speakers move away from that classic system**, so that younger New Yorkers are probably adopting what we call the default short-a system in American English. This is a nasal system, so it is very simple. Before all nasals, you get that tense version, for example with *hang* and *man*. In all other environments, it is lax. Most speakers of American English have this short-a system, and New Yorkers are adopting it.

Changing features of NYC English
This is all really interesting in the sense that we have to take these features into account - the picture of change that we're seeing. What we have to do is place it into context and think about the fact that New York City

English, as a dialect of English, is probably **the most stigmatized dialect of American English**, maybe competing with Southern English for being the most stigmatized. And we know this from asking people to rate different dialects for correctness or pleasantness, or even just rank dialects. The New York City dialect unfortunately always ends up at the bottom. And this means that New Yorkers have become aware of the stigma that is associated with their variety and seem to be reacting to it.

The case of /r/, for instance, is a classic example of what we call a **change from above**, where an external norm prompts speakers from within a speech community to change course of what they are doing. So, the New Yorkers are realizing, "Oh, other people seem to look down on the way that we talk, and other Americans produce their /r/s in the syllable coda, and so we're going to do that as well. We're going to move towards this more general norm, and we're going to move away from these more stigmatized classic features of the New York City dialect". That is basically what we think is happening.

I get interviewed a lot about this research and mostly reporters want to talk about the fact that the **New York City dialect is disappearing,** and no matter what I tell them, the headline the next day is like, "Linguist Says New York City Accent Disappearing." I do not necessarily think that that is the case. I do think that for these **classic features**, they do all seem to be **in recession**. They're withdrawing. We are seeing less and less use of these features overall in the speech community. But I want to make two points about that.

The first is, I do think that there are **subgroups of speakers that are maintaining some of these features** and doing more local, socially meaningful work with them. I will give an example. In my research in the Lower East Side, I did not look just at the classic New York City English speakers who would be what I would call white ethnic of different white immigrant backgrounds - Irish, German, Italian, etcetera. I

sampled more widely in terms of the prominent ethnic groups in the neighborhood, and almost all the groups were reversing these changes. But there were some groups that were actually maintaining some of the features. **African American New Yorkers**, for instance, **maintained that raised "thought" vowel**, the "cawfee" pronunciation. And so, it might be the case that instead of saying we are losing the New York City accent, **we are seeing a reorganization** where the features that used to be associated with that classic white ethnic working-class New Yorker are being adopted by other groups. On the other hand, the younger folks - so, the grandchildren of the working-class Irish New Yorker - those speakers are pulling away from these features. They are moving into the future, but these features can then be adopted by other groups and maintained. That is one possibility that we want to watch for over time.

The other point is just because the three classic features that we have been studying, that we associate with New York City English are in withdrawal, that does not mean that New York City English is going away. Probably what it means is that **New Yorkers are in the process of bringing out new variants**, new features that allow them to index their relationship to the place where they are from. A general principle is that we all use language to index our place identity, to connect to the place where we are from. So, just because /r/ may no longer do that work for New Yorkers does not mean that New Yorkers will lose the ability to mark themselves as being New Yorkers.

In my experience, New Yorkers have a tremendous amount of **pride in being New Yorkers**, and that is connected to language as well despite a lot of the negative stigma. So, I think there is a lot to watch out for because it is quite possible that we are going to see new features that we have not yet studied or observed come up as being the features that do the work in New York City English.

Gender Neutral "They"

by Prof. Evan Bradley (Penn State Brandywine)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Contribution: Ji Yea Kim

Introduction

My name is Evan Bradley, and I'm an assistant professor of psychology at Penn State Brandywine. One of my research projects is currently looking into the use of gender-neutral pronouns in American English. This is an issue that has been around for a while, but it is recently gaining wider and wider attention as many people try to make language more inclusive and more sensitive to changes that are going on in societies. We wanted to know how people use these different variations and what causes people to change their language in certain ways because oftentimes, anytime a language changes, which it does constantly, there are speakers who promote and adopt that change, and there are people who resist that change. And there are many complex reasons for that.

English gender-neutral "they" and "ze"

In English, we have pronouns like "he" and "she" that we have used to refer to people, and we have pronouns that we use to refer to things like "it," and then we have pronouns that we use to refer to groups of things like "they."

The pronouns "he" and "she" are interesting because they are one of the places in English where we have gender. Unlike a lot of languages where there is gender all over the place on every word, English does not have it most places, but we still have it in these pronouns, which is okay most of the time, except sometimes we do not want to say whether someone is a he or she because we do not know. For example, "I saw my friend earlier today," and you want to ask me something about my friend. You do not know if my friend is a man or a woman, and you might say, "Oh, where are they from?" This is something that is going on in English where people are using different ways **to avoid saying the gender of someone that they are talking about**.

We might also want to do it **because there are people who are neither male nor female**. They are not men or women, so they do not want to be referred to as "he" or "she." So, some of them prefer to be referred to as "they."

Some use other pronouns that have been invented like "ze," and these are all things that are used in English, but they are not what we would call part of standard English. **Not every American English speaker knows how to use these words in this way, and not all of them do.** And sometimes this gets remarked upon. Sometimes people will say if you have ever turned in a paper, your professor—obviously, not a linguistics professor—might say, "Well, you can't use 'they' to refer to that person because 'they' is a plural pronoun. You can only refer to a group of people with that," which is interesting because if we go

back hundreds of years, we can see that English speakers have been using "they" to refer to individual people. Now often, they are using it **to refer to somebody they do not know anything about**, such as some generic person or someone they do not know about.

It is becoming more common, though, for English speakers to use it **to refer a specific person** as in "Hey, look at that person over there. I wonder where they're going." In my dialect and idiolect of English, that is natural to me, but not every English speaker says that. So, we wanted to know what causes the resistance to some of these innovations. **Is it a linguistic thing?** Are people sticklers for what they view as the correct version of the language, and they want to stick to that, **or is it something else going on like how they think about people and their gender?**

We began by doing a study where we looked at people's grammaticality ratings. We had them look at sentences and say, "Do I think that this is correct English or not?" And what we found is that by and large, almost every American English speaker who we looked at likes **singular "they"** when it is **used for a generic person** as in, "Oh, if you see one of the students, give them this book for me," they mostly like that.

However, they do not like at all when you refer to a person as "it," and they do not like it when you refer to a person with **a made-up pronoun like "ze"** although those are probably for different reasons. I think "ze" is not recognized as a word, and it is viewed as offensive to call a person an object or an animal. Or it does not compute in that way.

Where we found some interesting distinction was **the specific use of singular "they." When we talk about a particular person** as in, "When you see Chris, tell them that I want to see them," some people really like that. Other people really do not like it. We have to dig into this a little more.

Non-linguistic variables for gender-neutral "they"

It turns out that there are some non-linguistic variables that play a role in that. For example, **people's personality type plays a role** in that. If people are more extroverted, which means that they are more oriented toward attending to other people, they tend not to like that usage so much.

Their attitudes about gender also play a role. If they endorse more binary views of gender, which means that there are only two sexes and two genders, and those are the same thing, they tend not to like that usage, and also if they endorse more what are called benevolent sexism views. Benevolent sexism is a measure of attitudes about gender, mainly about women, which is distinguished from hostile sexism. Hostile sexism is an active dislike for someone, such as women or people of a certain gender. Benevolent sexism consists of ideas that are couched in good things and not ill intent, but they still reinforce power dynamics within gender, such as "Women should be cherished and protected by men." It expresses a positive attitude toward women, but it has been shown to have negative effects on women to state these views because it reinforces a power dynamic. So, speakers who endorse more of those views also do not like the use of specific "they."

Finally, if speakers endorse more prescriptivist views about language, which means that there is one correct way of speaking English or some ways of speaking are better than others (e.g., prohibition of double negatives), they also tend to reject this. It seems like there is a lot going on. **There is a role for linguistic factors and a role for social psychological factors.** So, they are both playing into it.

An ongoing change
What we are finding is that **this is an ongoing change.** There is not a consensus on how all speakers are doing this. And they all differ from one another. So, there is no one version of English in that regard. It is currently a fight that is going on.

I think understanding the reasons why speakers do or do not say certain things is informative. Even

though someone is not a linguistic prescriptivist and they do not speak standard English, they are still not willing to use these pronouns. It is not going to be convincing for them even if you appeal to them, saying "Oh, well, this is perfectly grammatical, and you can totally say this. It does not make you sound like a bad speaker of English." This is because really what is holding them back is **an understanding of gender**.

And on the flip side, if someone is trying to be inclusive and so on but has a problem with reconciling their idiolect with what other people are asking them to do, then you would take a different approach to that.

That is where we are headed with this research. We are trying to understand what gets people to use or not use certain things, and where we are trying to extend that research is to see how non-binary genders play a role in that. When English speakers hear words like singular "they," are they thinking about gender at all or not? Are they avoiding thinking about that, or are they thinking that it could be someone who is neither a man nor a woman? And when they hear a pronoun like "ze," what are they thinking? It seems like people who are aware of "ze" and other alternative pronouns, when they hear that, they treat it in a somewhat gender-neutral way or refer specifically to non-binary people, so this ongoing change is being negotiated in English.

I think there are definitely age-related effects. **Younger people are leading the change in this linguistic change**, and there are also different awareness campaigns going on that are educating them. For example, this past year [2018] was the first International Pronouns Day in October, and there will be a second one coming up in 2019, so it will be interesting to see what happens with this over the next few years.

Swedish third gender-neutral pronoun "hen"
A good comparison case is Swedish. In Swedish, they have recently had a push to introduce a third gender-neutral pronoun alongside the natural pronouns that are found in Swedish. **In Swedish, "han" is he, and "hon" is she, and they have introduced "hen,"** which is a parallel word. It sounds a lot like the other ones, and it is actually borrowed from a neighboring language, Finnish, which just has one personal pronoun. It does not have "he" and "she." It just has a word for any person. They have had more success with this than English has, and any other language that has tried to introduce it.

I think that has to do largely with awareness. There have been big campaigns, media companies, newspapers that have bought in and begun to use this. There have been some studies by colleagues in Sweden looking at the effect that this has on people who are using language and how people perceive it. Initially, even though there was a lot of awareness, people were very resistant to using it. It did not seem natural to them.

Over time, though, that has changed very rapidly, like in the past ten years. One interesting effect that has been demonstrated in a Swedish study was that **using "hen" causes people to think less about gender or make less biased decisions when they are deciding whether a person they are hearing about is a man or a woman**.

Week 7

Chicano English

by Prof. Carmen Fought (Pitzer College)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Contribution: Ji Yea Kim

Introduction
I am Carmen Fought. I am a Professor of Linguistics at Pitzer College in California, and my area of specialty is sociolinguistics.

Sociolinguistics and ethnicity
Sociolinguistics is the study of how language interacts with all of the things that you think about as being important in society. For example, people live in different places, and they may speak differently because of that. If they are older or younger, they may speak differently. One of the areas that sociolinguists have concentrated on studying is **how language reflects ethnicity and how language reflects who we are in terms of our cultural and ethnic background**.

Chicano English
Many of the people who live in California are Mexican American. The language they speak is known as Chicano English, and that is very important in California and in the United States in general. The first thing I should say about **Chicano English** is that it is **spoken in a lot of places, not just in California**, and people often wonder where it comes from.

If you meet someone who is Mexican American and they are speaking Chicano English, people wonder what exactly that is. Hopefully, you have learned by now a dialect, in general, is not a funny way of speaking or a way that someone else speaks. We all speak a dialect. I certainly speak a dialect. **Chicano English is a particular dialect that is spoken by people of Mexican American descent in a lot of different parts of the country.**

Where it comes from
Originally, there were a lot of people who spoke Spanish in the area and people who immigrated. There still are people who speak Spanish as their first language. There were also people who spoke English. So, in this community, there are a lot of people who speak Spanish as their first language, and they have learned some English but maybe not a lot of English. As people have been here longer, they might have learned more English.

As to where Chicano English came from, young kids grew up in this area with that kind of English, and the variety they were learning was related to this English that was spoken by people whose first language was Spanish. In other words, there are a lot of influences from Spanish on Chicano English, which you can hear in the phonology, the sound system, and in the grammar, word choice, and intonation.

Misconception 1

You can recognize Chicano English when you hear it, and I can give you some examples of that, but one of the most important things to remember is that there is **a misconception that Chicano English is something that is only spoken by people who do not speak English well and whose first language is Spanish**. That is not true.

For example, in the school where I work, one of the administrative assistants said to me "How come the kids who come here from Mexico don't learn English as fast as the kids from other places?" There is Jose, for example, and I know he has lived here his whole life. It was interesting because I knew this kid that she was talking about. I had spoken to him, and the variety that he speaks is Chicano English. I also knew that he did not speak Spanish. He was monolingual, and his only language was English. It was Chicano English.

Just in the same way, if I had been born in Australia instead, I would have learned Australian English. If I had been born in Central Tennessee, my English would sound very different. I would sound like other people in Central Tennessee. If you were born in a Mexican American community where Chicano English is the variety that people speak, that is the variety that you learn. You learn it as your native language, and you learn it perfectly.

Likewise, people who speak Chicano English speak a variety of English. It is not the same as the one I am using now, but they speak it natively and perfectly. They have spoken it since they were babies, and they use all the grammar and all the sounds in exactly the same way as other people who speak Chicano English because **it is a patterned system**.

One of the most important things to remember is that even though historically Chicano English was influenced by contact with Spanish and by people who were bilingual, **it does not represent that someone has not learned English completely or that their first language is Spanish**. That is probably the most important thing to know about Chicano English. Its speakers grow up in this environment where Spanish is now not spoken only by people who know Spanish.

Phonology
What does Chicano English sound like? You may have heard it if you ever hear the comedy routine of George Lopez, for example. He uses Chicano English quite a bit.

It has a different sound system, and a lot of the sounds are more like the sounds of Spanish. For example, if someone who speaks Chicano English says the number "two," they might say it more like with the Spanish [u]. Also, they might use it as if it were in the first syllable. For example, there is almost nothing there if I say "b[ɪ]cause", but they might say "b[i]cause." So, there are little differences like that in the vowels that maybe come originally from Spanish, but now they are part of a system that includes Spanish and English sounds.

Syntax
In terms of grammar, one of the things that you might hear in Chicano English is **multiple negation**, which is something you hear also in African American varieties of English, and some white varieties of English use it as well, as in "He didn't do nothing," or "He didn't say nothing." Those are the kind of things that you hear.

Semantics
Some other features of Chicano English might be the different use of semantic features, which means that is based on the meanings of words. People use **the word "tell" to mean "ask."** For example, if you want someone to go with you to the party, you can say, "I'll tell him what time is he going," which means that "I'll ask him what time he is going".

Chicano English is a young and vibrant dialect that is spoken by a lot of people and is still changing and growing, as compared with Latin, which nobody really speaks now.

There is a feature that a lot of people will recognize, and George Lopez makes fun of it, which is the use of **the word "barely" to mean something**

happened just recently. When I was interviewing some people who spoke Chicano English, a guy in high school told me something bad had happened. Maybe he had been sick or something. I said, "That's terrible," and he said, "I just barely broke my leg." What that means is I had recently broken my leg. In my dialect, when I say "barely," it means something did not quite happen. I cannot say "I barely broke my leg." I can say it, but it does not mean that I just recently broke my leg. Another example is, "These jackets were expensive when they barely came out." That is another way that you can use it. Like any other dialect, Chicano English has its own new things that mark it as special and distinctive.

Misconception 2

One of the myths that we have discussed about Chicano English is it is only spoken by people who speak Spanish. **Another myth about Chicano English** when people hear it or even hear the term Chicano English is **they mix it up with what linguists call code-switching** or you may have heard the term Spanglish, a mixing of Spanish and English within a single sentence where you start a sentence in English.

There is a famous article in our field called, *Sometimes I'll Start a Sentence in Spanish y termino en español*. You switch in the middle, and there could be a mix. For example, you can say, "She's going to fiesta." When you hear something like that, that **sounds like Spanish and English mixed together**. That is something separate. **That is not Chicano English. It is what linguists call code-switching.**

There are a lot of myths about code-switching, too, that it is something bad or that it shows a person does not speak either language well. Those things are absolutely wrong. If you think about it, you can only do code-switching if you know both languages. Let us say, if you are a speaker of English, and if I ask you to code-switch between English and Chinese—mix English and Chinese together—you are not going to be able to do that unless you know

Chinese. If you do not know Chinese, that is not going to go well at all.

In order to do code-switching, you have to know both languages, be able to use them skillfully, and know the patterns of both languages so you can mix them together in a way that makes sense because there are rules for code-switching, just like there are so many other ways that we speak. There are always rules, not rules like you learned in your book but real rules that we the native speakers of languages know. And for code-switching, there are ways to do it wrong. There are places in the sentence where you could switch from one language to another, and to native speakers, it sounds funny. They say, "No, I wouldn't switch there." They might not be able to tell you why, but inside they have a rule that shows them how to do that, so an important key to take away from this is to keep in mind that **Chicano English is not the same thing as code-switching**.

Different varieties of speech and identity

Chicano English and code-switching are both varieties that you can hear in the Mexican American communities. When you start to go through the lists, Mexican American communities contain, and really all Latinx communities contain a real wide variety of styles and a lot of linguistic resources to draw on because someone can speak Spanish, but they may speak different varieties of Spanish. There might be people who speak Guatemalan Spanish or Puerto Rican Spanish. Some people speak a more formal variety of Spanish, while others more informal variety.

People speak **different varieties of English**. People who might speak a kind of mainstream U.S. dialect of English also speak Chicano English. That is important to know, too. People can switch between those two varieties sometimes. Then you have code-switching mixing Spanish and English into one patterned system, but think about it if there are different varieties of Spanish and different varieties of English, which also makes for a lot of combinations in terms of what you are switching.

There are also people who speak something as a non-native language who just know a little bit of Spanish or a little bit of English, and their Spanish is going to be different. For this reason, there are a lot of resources in Latino communities for speaking in different ways. That is important because, as you probably know by now, **speech is such an important part of our identity. We speak to show who we are**. We speak in a way that makes us sound like the other people we want to be like, and that is very important. That is another thing to remember about Chicano English and code-switching. These are ways of showing identity—in this case of showing ethnic identity. When someone is speaking Chicano English, they are speaking like the people around them, they are showing that they are Mexican American, and they are proud of it. They speak a particular variety of English that is the one from their community, the one that they know, and that is a very important and valuable thing. Even if you think Chicano English does not sound as good as some other variety, you should not go around telling people not to speak that way because it is part of their identity.

Week 11

American Sign Language

by Dr. Lynn Hou (UC Santa Barbara) and Dr. Ryan Lepic (University of Chicago)

Transcription of the invited lecture
Contribution: Ji Yea Kim

Introduction and history of ASL

ASL is short for American Sign Language. That is the natural language of Deaf people in the United States and Canada. There are different sources that we believe ASL has come from. One of them was a small island off of Massachusetts, by the name of Martha's Vineyard. On that island, there was a community with a very high percentage of deaf people. They decided to create their own sign language, which we know as **Martha's Vineyard Sign Language**. There were also deaf people in the United States who were more spread out and less incident.

The first Deaf[1] school for the United States was in Connecticut, and it started in the early 19th century. There were many Deaf people here in the United States on the mainland, plus in Martha's Vineyard, who came together at that Deaf school. There was also a Deaf man from France, whose name was Laurent Clerc. He came to the United States to help establish that Deaf school and brought with him what we call old French sign language. At the time, that language was used to teach Deaf children at that school. **We consider American Sign Language as being a confluence of Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, communication systems that were used in the homes of Deaf children around the United States, and old French sign language, coming together to become the language that we have today.**

Sign language emergence is the result of a community of Deaf people coming together, either because there is a high incidence of Deaf's in the community, or because there is a school for the Deaf. We typically say that sign language is established with that community. However, even though we have multiple Deaf schools in the United States, the reason that ASL is the language that is used across the United States has to do with the movement of teachers from that first Deaf school, westwards towards California. **You could imagine that we have multiple different versions of ASL with each of those schools, but we have one national language, ASL**.

Black ASL

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[1] We capitalize Deaf from here on, to acknowledge the community of deaf people who share a common language.

At the same time, Deaf schools in the southern parts of the United States historically were segregated. There was one Deaf school for the white students, and one Deaf school for the black students. Both of those schools used ASL, but we started to realize that this was a government decision that students in the white school would be using more English than sign language. So, they expelled most of the Deaf teachers in those schools, in favor of hearing teachers to teach English.

The students in the black Deaf schools were left alone by this policy. Therefore, they had many more Deaf teachers. In consequence, **the Deaf teachers and the students developed their own variety of sign language, which we call Black ASL**. This is quite interesting because it includes a lot of African American English features in a sign language. We see the emergence of those slightly different varieties of ASL among white and black students, during the period of segregation in our nation's history.

We should mention that there are researchers at the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) conference working on Black ASL. For example, Joseph Hill presented at the LSA meeting this year, about comparing properties of white ASL with Black ASL.

We are also looking at the differences between older signers and younger signers. As there are a lot of questions that we can ask about variation between varieties of spoken languages, we can also look at different dialects of sign languages in terms of writings as well.

ASL and Deaf community

Today, the number of Deaf schools all over the United States has diminished. The use of ASL in the Deaf community has changed as well. It used to be that Deaf people would get together at what we would call Deaf clubs, locations that were not at Deaf schools but became social gathering places for Deaf people to eat, drink, and perform shows. That was a place where Deaf people would learn ASL if they had not gone to a Deaf school in their youths.

As of about 20 or 30 years ago, Deaf students would be sent mostly to hearing schools rather than Deaf schools. Because of that, the Deaf schools in the United States have begun to shrink in size and closed down altogether. Those students would have interpreters in the classroom because they would be in a hearing environment and be the only Deaf students who needed access to sign language. Because of that, we see a reduction in the number of students enrolling in Deaf schools.

We also see a reduction in the number of Deaf clubs as well. But of course, with the Internet, we have a way for Deaf people to gather online through forums, websites, and other means, in order to pass down that heritage of American Sign Language. That has turned into other more spontaneous events like gatherings at coffee shops or other places. As these show, **ASL and the Deaf community are, of course, intrinsically tied to each other. The heart of the Deaf community is their language. It is part of their identity**. The use of ASL on a regular basis is very important to the community as a whole. That includes teaching others not only the language, but also about things like drama and poetry.

Early on, there were some doubts about whether or not ASL even constituted a language. We had these assumptions about what languages should look like, which were often based on speech. However, research on sign languages like ASL, starting in the 1960s, demonstrated that any of these properties that we can identify as being needed for speech also show up in sign languages as well.

Sign language as a real language and its learnability

One of the early pushes in research on sign language was to demonstrate that these are not real languages. However, we have been able to branch more into the idea of what is the relationship between the language and its community. For example, something that people are pushing for is to allow Deaf people to have access to sign language early in life because we know that that is

essential for establishing social and cognitive foundations that are important later in life.

Current research is showing that Deaf children can learn English, either spoken or written, through reading, and learn sign language at the same time. At least 90% of Deaf children in America are born into hearing families where sign language is not used and where their parents have had no exposure to that language. Therefore, it is very important for these Deaf children to have access to environments in which signing is used so that they can have a foundation to grow into adulthood. That is in tandem with speaking a language that is spoken at home, such as English, or now increasingly more Spanish and other languages here in the United States. For those children who are not born into a naturally signing home, a Deaf school is a great location for them to learn the language they are exposed to.

Research also shows that it is possible to learn both of those languages at the same time and that one is not a hindrance to another. For example, depending on their abilities, they can speak English or at least read and write that language just like we see hearing children becoming bilingual in English and Spanish.

**Difference and similarity
between sign languages and spoken languages**
Spoken languages require the use of the vocal tract to produce them and the ears to hear the message. On the contrary, with sign language, we are using the body, the face, and the hands to produce the language, and the eyes to perceive it. Therefore, there is a difference in modality.

However, at the same time, linguistics research is showing that there is a lot of overlap between the function of these two types of languages and that the way that people express content is very similar. One of the themes that often comes up in comparing speech with sign is that the spoken stream is very fast and linear. It unfolds over time, and you listen to the changes in how the phonemes interact with one another.

However, with sign, you get more of a complete picture all at once. If you see an individual sign, there is still a linear component, but signs have a much fuller form. When you are speaking quickly in spoken language, you can only be speaking linearly, whereas when you are signing, you are using your arms which are much heavier articulators than the tongue is. This slows down the rates of your hands moving.

Luckily, we do have other things that contribute to meaning in the language. Both sign and spoken languages can contribute equivalent meanings in the same amount of time because of the different use of articulators and the different way to get the message across. In other words, while the sequence of the language may look a little different holistically, the message comes out at about the same amount of time.

We see reflexes of that throughout the language. In a language like English where we typically think of adding pieces to words, if we think about the example of the song "Unbreak my heart," you have the word "break" and "un" in front of it, or you can say "It was unbroken." You change the part at the end. Also, in English, people use words like "on," "in," or "under" to describe how things have relationships with space. For example, we can say "The cup is on the table." And that would be a sequence of words in time.

In a language like ASL, instead of adding pieces at the beginning or the end of the word, you instead change what the sign looks like to add those pieces of meaning. Because we have two hands, we can say this at the same time, and "The cup is on the table." looks like this.

The sentence "The cup is on the table." in ASL

The word "tree" in ASL

In other words, instead of signing words in order, we can do them simultaneously.

The idea of whether or not words look like what they mean is something that people have been interested in for a long time. In a sign language like ASL, there is this perception that sometimes when you are told what the meaning of the sign is, and you see the form of the sign, then you understand the relationship between them. A famous example is the sign "tree." It represents the trunk and the branches of the tree.

When I tell you that this form means a tree, you can understand the mapping between meaning and form.

There has been some question about whether or not ethnicity is a property of language, or whether it is something that we overlook in language. It is also in large part due to research on sign language that people have started to look for these sorts of patterns in speech as well. There is a big group of people, especially in Europe, looking at the role of these motivated mappings between the form of a word and its meaning. That is one benefit for linguistics from the research of sign languages.

Week 9

Reclaiming Native American Languages
by Prof. Wesley Leonard (UC Riverside)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Contribution: Dr. Paola Cépeda & Emily Salazar (LIN 200 student, Fall 2018) & Ji Yea Kim

Introduction

eemamyaamia – I am Miami, specifically a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. My ancestors come from our ancestral homelands (Ohio and Indiana), and that is about roughly where I grew up.

Effects of Colonization

Right away, we see there is a situation of **shift that is caused by colonization**. In this case, my tribe is politically centered in Oklahoma but originally comes from Indiana and Ohio. It is just one of the many ways in which colonization, imperialism, and various other related issues by the United States have affected Native American communities.

What happened with my tribe is that I understand that, back in the 19th century, people still spoke Myaamiatawenki (Miami), also the name of our language, as a first language. I heard somewhere that as of 1910, there were four monolingual Miami speakers recorded in some census.

But when I was growing up in the 1980s (and I am not that old: I am 40), I did not hear a tribal language. When I was at tribal functions, everything was in English. The exception is that some people had Miami names and certainly some awareness of our language, but it was not in active use. My grandfather, late Chief Floyd Leonard, was the Chief of our tribe and he knew a little bit.

This situation is common, and **it is problematic because it comes from trauma**. My work is about addressing that trauma, **the underlying causes of language shift**, which are social. They are not

grammatical, they have nothing to do with the language as a grammatical unit—they have everything to do with situations of people. So, a lot of my work then is in **reclaiming languages**, **restoring languages to their appropriate use**, and **dealing with the related attitudes and communities**, and this is very much a social phenomenon.

Language Revitalization

What happened then is that, when I was getting into linguistics, which I discovered in an introductory course much like yours, I started looking up a tribal language and I knew of **language reclamation efforts** that were beginning in my community around this time. And one of the things that kept happening is that in these important scientific classifications of sorts, official-looking documents, a tribal language is called "extinct".

Now we call that the "e word." Of course, we can say "extinct", and that is not that we cannot say it. It is not that I do not recognize that certain things in the world are irretrievably lost. Myaamia language is not one of them. For that matter, **many indigenous languages that are called "extinct" are not**. They exist in documentation, they are claimed by living peoples and contemporary indigenous peoples who can learn those languages from the documentation, bring them back into everyday use, or use them however they deem appropriate to start addressing that colonial trauma.

Over the years, we Miamis have been challenging that "e word"; instead, claiming that **our language**

was sleeping for a period of time (roughly, thirty years) in which nobody knew it fluently and **now of course it is an awakened language (so maybe, "formerly sleeping language")**. Nevertheless, in linguistic science, in broader society, any time a Native American language has undergone a complete break in transmission, even when it started again, **broader social attitudes would deem that language to belong in the past** (so "that people who used to live here", "the language that used to be spoken here" and so on), when **in fact we are very much around today and our languages are important**.

I am proud of my community in doing what other people have deemed impossible, but it is not. Languages, if they exist in documentation, if people want to learn them, they can do so. And they have many times.

Sometimes my students—you know, I am a professor of Ethnic Studies but my Ph.D. is in Linguistics and I have taught Linguistics over many years—sometimes my own students have posed questions to the effect of "Oh, gee! Language reclamation must be so hard. They have this—they do not call it an "extinct" language, at least not in front of me—they have this language that people do not actively know and everybody in the community already speaks English—and that, by the way, is true for Miamis, as far as I know, we all speak English as a first language. So **why are people working so hard to bring their languages back?**

And I like to turn that question around and say: "People are working very hard to reclaim their languages. **What does that tell you about the importance of language to those communities?**"

Language, Community, and Identity
I think it is very important for everybody but especially for people in linguistics, to actively interrogate, to actively ask what language is, to ask all sorts of people. In linguistic science, **language is often defined in terms of structural** units: sounds and words and clauses, and so on. Or **it is thought about as a cognitive mechanism** and indeed, of course, there is a lot of cognition underlying language and interesting things to be discovered and understood about that.

But in the interview that I did, the film *Miami person*, Myaamiatawenki (Miami language) is **defined as, not just described, but "defined" as a way that our community connects to each other, how we know each other**. Many other Native American people I have spoken to from a wide variety of languages, they say things to the effect of "language is power", "language is us", "language is the wisdom that comes from our ancestors, and that also moves us forward because, keep in mind, we are not locked in the past, we are looking toward the future, and our language belongs in that."

So, with all of those things said, it is not at all surprising to me that **people care about their languages because they need them**. **Language reclamation is a type of healing. It is a way of dealing with colonial trauma that is still imposed** but it is not in any way inherent.

There are Native peoples around, Native languages (that is capital "N" in Native, meaning Native American indigenous and Native languages) are around. At least 300 or so in the present-day United States and Canada, but counting individual languages or say: "How many speakers are these?", "How many languages are there?", "How many are "extinct"?"—I would not say that. **All of those things are typically problematic because they are considering languages as objects**, as objects of study, objects that can be named, objects that can be sort of cleanly demarcated in ways that do not pan out among actual people. I bet my message is coming through here, which is that **language reclamation is important because language is important**.

But let me share another insight that I have developed over the years, which is that **language reclamation must be grounded in community needs and values**, including values about language, definitions of language. If a person defines "language" as themselves such that their

sense of personal identity or community identity and linguistic identity are kind of the same thing, the implications of working with language, of teaching language, of analyzing language, of describing language, of language shift, whether it goes away from a language or back toward a language, the implications of all of those things are likewise going to be very high, and it becomes very important. We are at the situation right now where indigenous communities are **reclaiming their languages focusing the question on vitality and on the future**, not on the past, or not on sort of resurrecting the past or something like that. **Language reclamation, again, is healing. It is a political statement. It is a social movement, and it is here to stay**.

Effects of the Socio-political Context

I found that linguistic science, particularly its tools for reconstructing languages or for understanding, discerning patterns, and being able to apply those for people who are learning a language, to be tremendously helpful, particularly from my own tribal language, which had to be brought back into use from archival documentation. It takes quite a bit of linguistic science to figure out those patterns.

But that said, **language shift (when a community moves away from a given language or back toward a given language) is not about language in a narrowly defined sense**. It is not about grammar, and it is not about research on the language. It takes all of those things, and those are all important, but that is not what is really going on. **Communities move away from a given language because of socio-political, economic, and similar pressures**.

Native Americans who do not actively speak Native languages are in that situation **because of colonization, and because of settler colonialism**. That is to say, colonization in the United States and many other places has never ended. There are people who sort of have settled into the land and so redefined it as their own, in many ways **erasing the Native populations or relegating them to the past with terms like "extinct" or "people who used to live here"**, as opposed to "the people of

this land who still live here and have special responsibilities to the place."

Many of the language situations that we see today here in the United States and in many other places are very significantly affected by policies of colonizing governments such as that of the United States. It is in the 1870s that the United States started a policy of **federal boarding schools**, where Native Americans-American Indian children from multiple tribes were brought into educational institutions, boarding schools, not sort of in their homelands, but rather a place where people of multiple nations would be brought together to be "civilized", to be socialized into Euro-American norms at the expense of long intellectual traditions, cultural norms and languages, that they already had. In fact, **many of these students were not allowed to speak their Native American languages and were punished for doing so**. Within my own family, probably about four generations back now, there were accounts of saying "well, you know, they used to wash our mouths out with soap or beat us or, you know, otherwise prevent people from speaking their languages."

These are policies about **erasing indigenous cultures and indigenous peoples** and these policies, or rather the effects of those policies, live on from one generation to the next. We can call this, think about this, as **"intergenerational trauma"**. It is something I see a lot in my own work among various Native American communities. It is not the situation that when the language goes out of use, bim-bam-boom, it is done, but rather that **the trauma under which that occurred gets transmitted from one generation to the next to the next and so on** until something intervenes, until people make things right and reclaim their own values, their connection to land and to each other, their spirituality, all of the above and especially their languages.

Language reclamation, because it is really responding to these things, has to take all of those things into account. That is why even though my immediate academic training is in

linguistics, I am relatively broad in my work and I bring in multiple fields: Native American Studies (where I am currently located), and also some of Anthropology, Sociology, History, Economics, you can go down the list. Because languages do not exist and are not transmitted or not used in socio-political vacuums but language use or non-use always occurs in associated political contexts, I think it is incredibly important that we always keep that in mind, because otherwise I am just left with grammar, which is kind of interesting: I admit, I studied it after many years. But, in the context of Native American language reclamation, that is the tool that needs to sort of be applied to something else, which is much larger.

Week 7

African American English

by Prof. John McWhorter (Columbia University)

Transcription of the invited lecture
Contribution: Dr. Paola Cépeda & Aaron Ohm (LIN 200 student, Spring 2019) & Ji Yea Kim

Introduction

"African American English sounds so lazy.": You can admit it. It is tough to hear non-standard English and not think of it as somehow lesser than what we are taught is the real language. For example, African American Vernacular English, that is what academics call it, but I am not going to call it that. I am going to call it **Black English**, because that is what I grew up with. It was fine then, and I think it makes it sound a little less exotic than calling it "African American Vernacular English" or AAVE, which I find a rather clumsy acronym. So, you can choose, but I am going to call it Black English.

What I want to get across is that it is **not broken language**, and that is a very hard thing to process because we are taught that there is something called "good grammar" and "bad grammar." And the grammar that you hear in Black English seems like it is bad grammar.

AAE: Systematicity

There are two things about Black English that are important to realize, despite how tempting it is to think of Black English as lesser language. For one thing, this is the only lesson that I want to get across because alone it is not enough. **Black English has rules**. It is not just people letting English fall out of their mouths in unsystematic ways. People do not know that it has rules, just like you and I could not say what determines whether we use "a" or "the" in a sentence like "I thought about buying a new piece of soap and then I saw the turtle." Think about "a" and "the" and the subtlety there, and imagine being

Russian and having to master how we use those words. In the same way, Black English speakers do not know that they are using a grammar, but they are.

For example, let us try this. "She ain't be walking there on Tuesdays." Is that Black English? It sounds like it, but it is not. "She don't be walking there on Tuesdays." If you are **using "be"** in that particular usage (that is **habitual**, as in something that she does on Tuesdays), then **the way that you negate it** (yes, we can be that formal about it) **is with "don't" but not "ain't."** No Black person knows this consciously, except for the very few who occur to study Black English from a linguistic perspective. Nevertheless, you can listen to any Black person. It is not "She *ain't* be." Any Black person who said that would be on Mars. There are no Black people there, so you would never hear it.

Here is another one: "She my sister." It sounds like you are just leaving out the verb "to be" because you just cannot be bothered. Okay. "I your father"? No! No Black person would say "I your father." It is "I am your father." And so, **the verb "to be" can be left out, but it is in a very systematic way**. Believe it or not, sane people have devoted whole Ph.D. dissertations and books to the issue of exactly when you can drop the verb "to be" in Black English and when you cannot. And this was serious work. Now, as you can imagine, I did not just give you the only two examples: I could give you another ninety-eight more. So Black English is systematic, in other words,

just like Italian, Estonian, or Greek. It is grammar. **It is grammar like any other kind of language**.

AAE: Complexity

However, you justifiably may be thinking "Plenty of things are systemic that are still no good", "So, okay, it has rules, but still they are the *wrong* rules: It is systematically bad", "There is good language and that is the language of the Wall Street Journal", and then "You can get very good at being bad", "The Mafia is systematic; nobody likes it", "Viruses are awesomely systematic; you do not want a cold", "I would not know how to construct a toy piano; I would not want to play Chopin on it; I would not want to hear Chopin on it." Systematicity alone, I know, does not make the case. But there is more. **Black English is not only systematic; it is complicated**, in ways that are very hard to hear, because we tend to think that if it is not the language of the Wall Street Journal, then it is just slang, it is something passing, it is something vulgar, there could not be anything sophisticated in it.

But there are all sorts of things that are. For example, "What had happened was that I had run down into the woods, and then I had climbed a tree, and then I had seen her, and I went 'oh'." That is the way you might hear a Black child tell a story. That is the way you might hear a Black 65-year old tell a story. And what you hear is that they are using "had" too much. But that "had" is very systematic. That "had" is used when telling stories. A fancier way of putting it is that it is a **narrative use of "had"**, and it is **not the pluperfect at all**. It uses that same word, but you can use words in many different ways, and many different kinds of language, and many different situations. "Had" in Black English is not an overused pluperfect. What it is is that **Black English has a particular narrative past tense**. Now, naturally, you are thinking "He's bending over backwards to say that, partly because of certain aspects of his own physiognomy." No, please, trust me. I would never do that. Narrative past tenses are very common in languages around the world. English, rather dull as often if you are talking about the standard, is deprived in not having a narrative

past. We just do without it, and life continues. Black English *has* a narrative kind of past tense that is different from the past tense that you might use in more generic situations. So, what you hear as a mistake so hard not to is *actually a complication*.

Or, for example, listen to the way somebody using Black English would use the word "up" and notice how very often nothing is vertical. So "All the things that are happening up in here," somebody will say. You can listen to somebody saying that and notice that they are on the ground, that their house is on the ground. Somebody will say "Let's get some food up in here" in a basement! I have seen it. So, what is "up"? Well, it is a very different use of the word "up." It refers to intimacy. You use that **"up" to indicate that you are somewhere where you are comfortable**, where **there is a certain social intimacy involved**. You would never say "I was up at the dentist's and the phone rang." You are not comfortable at the dentist and so, unless the dentist was up a hill (which they generally are not), you would never say "I was up at the dentist's." But, if you say "I was up at Jill's and…", then that indicates that Jill is either a relative, a close friend, or somebody who you are sleeping with. And, that is because **"up" is a marker of intimacy**. You would never know it and, of course, no Black English speaker knows it, except for a few people who specialized in Linguistics. But that does not mean that it is not very subtle. After all, most people do not understand how neutrons work and yet they allow us to live.

Grammar Simplification

Old English to Modern English (and we are talking about Modern English as standard and elaborate as an editorial in the New York Times) involved a **massive** amount of grammatical simplification. If we could take an Anglo-Saxon speaker and introduce them to the way we are using their language now, what they would see was lame-brained slack-jawed catastrophe. They would be appalled at how much we have gotten rid of. The pathway from Standard English to Black English involves a **moderate** amount of simplification. It is about as much as one of those, you know, those

little glasses that, if you ask for Bailey's (Bailey's liqueur) at generally a lesser quality bar, they will give you a tiny little glass of Bailey's enough that, if you spilled it on your leg, you would barely need to wipe it off. That amount. That is about how much Black English has lost from Modern English. So, yeah, there is some simplification, but it is still systematic and there are complexities in Black English as well.

AAE vs. Standard English
So, with all of that said, we have to re-examine the sense that Black English is just wrong. Now, I know what you are thinking. You are thinking "Well, still, you have to learn the Standard." Yes, that is true. There are very, very few people who think that people who speak Black English should not also learn the Standard dialect for use to be taken seriously in any kind of modern society. Now, of course, the Black person who really has no command whatsoever of Standard English is rare and, second, we have to understand that learning Standard English will not mean that Black English goes away.

It is an American notion that, if you learn the Standard, then you will not speak the non-standard dialect anymore, or that speaking the non-standard dialect means that you cannot speak the Standard. That is because in America, linguistically speaking, we are a very vanilla country. (And I do not mean to offend, but vanilla is boring. I am sorry if you are one of those people who likes vanilla better than chocolate. But I am just giving you my true self, because we live in an authentic era.) And we are a very vanilla country in terms of how English varies here. And so, we often think that a person's either going to speak one thing or the other. Not true! We have to be more cosmopolitan. Nobody is running around in Sicily thinking that a person who speaks Sicilian and Standard Italian is some sort of freak. No, you speak two things. Just like we have bilingualism, there is something that sounds less exciting but is actually more common and it is called **bidialectalism**. And so, what we see is for Black people to be bidialectal—frankly, most of them already are, and to the extent they are not,

everybody should learn the Standard. But we should avoid the sense that their learning the Standard will get rid of that "scourge" that they learned to speak on mommy's knee called Black English, because (as I just explained, for the reasons I just explained and let us review that) the language is **systematic** and it is **complex** and the fact is that **its simplicity compared to Standard English is not significant**. For those reasons, there is no reason for them not to use their Black English.

More to the point, Black English is indexed to the lives that they lead, to the intimate, to the real, to the close, to the warm. That is what you speak to your intimates. That is Black English and it is okay. Now, what do you speak in a job interview? It is not black English; it is Standard English. But an ordinary person can do both. If you speak to an Egyptian, that person is speaking to you in English but then their Arabic (although they often do not think of it this way) is two things: Standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic are like Latin and Italian. They do not think of it that way, but that does not mean it is not that way. Black Americans can be like Arabs (that is the first time that sentence has probably ever been uttered, so let us savor it), but that is what Black English is.

The Ebonics Controversy
Do you remember that controversy? Do you remember that bit about whether or not Ebonics should be used in the classroom: The Oakland controversy that started in December of 1996? That was interesting, because what many people thought was that Black English was garbage and had no place in a classroom or really in life at all. I hope I have gotten us at least somewhat beyond that view of the matter. Then, some people felt that Black people do not need to be taught Black English —but, of course, the idea was not that anybody was going to be taught a dialect that they already spoke. The idea was that maybe people who grow up speaking Black English and using that at home are confused by Standard English in school because standard English is different from the home dialect and that makes it difficult for such people to learn how to read. Now, you know, I am giving you

authenticity. I never thought that that held up. I frankly think that the problems that Black children were having in the classroom in Oakland were due to much larger things than the difference between "ain't" and "isn't". However, the people who felt otherwise were not so crazy as to think that the students needed to be taught Black English. But then, the idea that they were wrong to even bring up Black English and education in the same breath, that was not true, because **Black English is not wrong**. It is **not bad English**. It is just, for the reasons that I have tried to get across and I hope I have made my case, **different English**.

AAE and Modern American Culture

There is also an extent to which, in talking about Black English here, I am being a little bit 1993, because another thing about Black English is that it is increasingly becoming to an extent America's youth lingua franca. And that is not to say that all people under a certain age are walking around speaking the dialect in its gorgeous and full-blown self. But, because in particular of the mainstreaming of rap music, and that begins officially in about 1996, so it is at the point where a generation of adults has grown up with their favorite music being a music performed in deep and rich Black English. It is at the point where Black English cannot be seen as exotic, especially since aspects of it are affecting the speech in various ways of people beyond the Black community.

And so, Black English, had one talked about it say 30 years ago, was this way of speaking typical of certain youth of dusky hue, and so you talked about it as this rather distant subject. But today, I am talking about a dialect that is used by people who purvey a music that is now respected by most people as a legitimate art form and, however you feel about it, is very much as mainstream as say rock'n'roll was now generations ago. And, even in the sense of people's general evaluation of the Black sound, something that has crept in very gradually into American popular culture is that voiceovers are increasingly done by identifiably Black people (anonymous Black voiceover artists), but to the extent that today you will see a

commercial for Burger King or a bank or some weight loss product where the people on the screen are white or non-Black, and yet the announcer is Black. That was not the case in 1985. That was not the case in 1995. That is increasingly popular now. The Black voice has a different reception than it used to.

And this is not to say that in other contexts the Black voice is not discriminated against. For example, the linguist John Baugh has documented that having an identifiably Black voice can make you less likely to be shown desirable real estate or it can make you less likely to be asked in for a job interview. These are very real things. And I want you to resist something natural to the educated American and I want you to really think about this. Yes, **there is a Black voice**. We are trained to think that it is a bit racist to suppose but there is an identifying Black way of talking. That is a reasonable view. However, it is been conclusively proven by a great many studies that to be an American is to be able to tell whether a person on the phone saying something quite race-neutral is White or Black, generally over 95% of the time. In other words, it is what any American would intuit. It is because Black English is not only grammar. It is also a sound system. It is an intonational system. There is some research indicating that it has something to do with aspects of how you produce sound in an acoustic matter. It is very much there. And so that is why, although you might feel guilty to admit it, you can hear in that bank commercial that the announcer is a Black man or a Black woman and you know it like "this". What is interesting is that Madison Avenue is now choosing that. But, on the other hand, because you can know it like "this", it can make a person (through nothing they can control) unable to get a job interview with a particular company or unable to be shown the desirable apartment. So, it cuts both ways. Black English now has in a way a more complicated place in the American culture than it did 50 years ago.

Creole Languages
by Prof. John McWhorter (Columbia University)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Contribution: Tina La, LIN 200 student (Fall 2018) and Veronica Miatto

General introduction

Suppose you are in a situation where you have to learn another language very quickly. There is essentially no such thing as reading or writing in the circle, so we are not talking about learning through a Rosetta Stone or Babbel. You are just picking it up in the air, people are sitting around throwing words at you. And let's imagine that you are an adult and so your ability to learn languages is not what it was before you were about 15 or 16 years old. And, nevertheless, let's imagine that you are in so bizarre a situation that this makeshift version of this new language is something that you are going to have to communicate in and be a human being in for the rest of your life, for better or for worse, so you are going to work at this. It is going to be more than a makeshift variety, because to really communicate as a person, you need more than just a few hundred words and a rudimentary grammar. In other words, you need more than what is called a **pidgin**. You need something real.

If you are going to use this pidgin, for better or for worse, for the rest of your life, then, after a while, this pidgin is going to expand. You are going to make it so that you can express any thought, especially if this is a situation where children are born. Children can apply the plasticity of their brains to this thing that originally started as a pidgin. Then, after a while, it is going to become a real language that never existed before, and it will join the six or seven thousand other languages that have arisen in the world under normal conditions.

What I just described to you is the way what you could call some of the world's newest languages emerge. Those languages are often called **creole languages**. A creole language can be argued to be a new language that forms starting when adults have to learn a new language very quickly, and they start with something that is **not a language**: that is just some hundreds of words (maybe a couple thousand) and enough grammar that people can communicate (but not grammar in the sense that we know is so difficult to learn in other languages and even to comprehend in our own). When it develops through vocabulary expanding (through creative uses of that 2,000 or 500-word vocabulary), and grammar expanding

(through practice and some other features), that is what a creole language is.

Notice: by creole, **I do not mean any one language**. It is easy to think that creole refers especially to either something having to do with Louisiana or to Haitian Creole. But Haitian is a creole language; there was a very similar language that emerged in Louisiana. Those were examples of what happens when, for example, Africans had to learn French very quickly and create a new language. They created a creole based on French, so they are **French Creoles**.

But there are also **English Creoles**, for example, what is often known as Jamaican Patois, which makes it sound like it is just something that people are breaking or some collection of slang. Jamaican Patois is the result of what happens when you creolize (so it can be a verb, *creolize*) English. Many of you might have heard of the Gullah language, that is spoken especially on islands off of the coast of South Carolina. Gullah is a creole. The language that Hawaiians called Pidgin English, that actually is a full language: it is a Creole English spoken in Hawaii. That same sort of thing has happened, for example, to Portuguese. That is the Cape Verdean that you may have heard about. They are speaking a Creole kind of Portuguese. There are many **Creole Portugueses** around the world.

Creolization is a process and it creates what is called a creole language. These languages are often despised even by their speakers, because they tend to be –like most languages in the world– mostly only spoken. Many of them have been committed to paper, especially by anthropologists, missionaries, and linguists, and

to an extent other people (there are efforts to use creoles in educational contexts more). But, for the most part, in the world, only about a hundred and change languages are used in writing to the extent that you would say that there is a literature.

There are 7,000 languages, and creoles tend strongly to be among the languages that are not written languages. So, they are often despised, often thought not to be languages even by their speakers. So, for example, in Nigeria, there is a kind of English that is often called Broken. You can speak to many Nigerians who have been given no way of knowing that the English that they think of is just a slangy broken thing is a creole language. Specifically, a form of Jamaican Creole was brought to Africa after the Revolutionary War. Many slaves were relocated to Africa by British people as a reward for the slaves who chose to fight for them. And so that form of Jamaican Creole, adapted in many ways according to various local contextual factors, is now the Nigerian Broken. It is a creole language; There is a description of it written by a linguist that is 300 pages long, but you would never know. Something very similar is spoken in Ghana, in Cameroon, and in Sierra Leone.

Creole languages are spoken all over the world. Depending on how you count, there are about 75 creole languages. There are ones based on English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch. There is one based on German. There are several based on Arabic. Depending on what you call a creole, there are a great many creoles based on Indonesian.

How do creole languages develop?

There are many creoles in the world and they have arisen most often in the context of colonialism and plantation slavery enforced by a certain few European powers in the middle of the last millennium. And so, we almost (in a savage kind of way) get used to the conception of this because it is so familiar historically. But Africans that were speaking many extremely different languages were taken to plantations and worked there for the rest of their lives. And a question that you usually do not find yourself asking is "What did they speak?" So, if one slave speaks Japanese, and the other slave speaks Finnish, and the other slave speaks Indonesian, and then there are a couple of others who speak Portuguese, and they wind up on a plantation, what do they speak? Well, it is not going to be Finnish or Portuguese or any of the languages they originally spoke, because no one person has the social power to enforce that. **They are going to speak the language of the new place**. But, what they are there for is to work, not to learn a language, so the question is: "What kind of, say, French are they going to learn?" And certainly it is not going to be the whole language, but then that is all they have got to use. And so, to communicate, they are going to develop it into a new language.

So, how do you develop a brand-new language if what you have is **some hundreds or a couple of thousand words** and you have not been given most of the grammar of the language (the structure of the language, what makes the language the language)? Well, there are various things that you do. One, as you might imagine, is that you are going to **transfer some of the things from your native language into this new language**. So, for example, in Suriname (in

South America), there are creoles that were created because the English got there as colonials first and they brought slaves there. And the slaves developed a creole language in Suriname, which, if we listen to it or look at it on paper today, is vastly oversimplified (but this is the impression one gets, and it is not based on nothing). **It is English words with basically an African grammatical system**.

There are all sorts of things that you can do with these English words in a creole like Suriname, Ndyuka, or Saramaccan that are completely foreign to any English that you would hear anywhere else. And that is because in taking about 650 English words and making it into a language that you can be a person in, a lot of what the creators did was lose their native language constructions (which, because they were African, were quite different from any Indo-European ones) and **create a brand new language**.

Are creoles "real" languages?

So, the question naturally is: "Can you tell that a creole language is a creole language? Is it a type of language?" It is very important to realize that **creole languages are not "baby languages" in any way**. And so, as I mentioned, this Nigerian Creole that is often called Broken is described in a very sophisticated 300-page book and the person is not stretching; there is that much to describe. We in English have a verb *to be*, and we think it is sophisticated because we have *am*, *are*, *is*, *been*, and *was*. That is nice, but if you look at the way the verb *to be* is used in Saramaccan Creole, the creole spoken in Suriname that I mentioned briefly before, it is much more complicated than anything that anyone would

expect from a European language. "Being" as in *being somebody's father* is different from "being" as in *being on somebody's lawn*. And which one of those *be* verbs that you use, and in what context, and in which cases you can leave them out (which is very quirky), is very complicated. There are all sorts of things that you could describe like that in any creole language.

Nevertheless, the truth is, if you build a language up from a pidgin or something that is much less structured than any real languages and then you make it into a real language (and that is something that only happened a few hundred years ago), then the simple truth is that **the language is not going to be as needlessly complicated as ancient languages are**. It can be almost counterintuitive to realize how very much of anything we think of as a "normal language" is not necessary and just accreted to the language in the way that rust does. And a lot of that rust can be very interesting.

For example, if any of you have tackled German, then you may remember that a spoon is masculine, and a fork is feminine, and a knife is neuter. Why? There is no reason at all. It has nothing to do with how Germans think. It is something that happened by accident and here we go with that. If you have dealt with French or Spanish or Italian from English, you know that, for some reason, you have to put your direct object pronoun before the verb, and so "he it hit." From English, that is insane. Well, that is just the way that a Romance language works. There is no reason why you have to have pronouns occurring in different places, it is just something that happens because life is hard and life is random.

Well, with creole languages, that sort of thing has not had time to creep in as much. And so, for example, languages that were born in the way that I just described tend to have very few of the kinds of suffixes that make it hard to learn other languages from, for example, English. A creole language is not going to have something like Spanish's "I speak", "you speak", "he/she/it speaks": *hablo*, *hablas*, *habla*, *hablamos*, *hablais*, *hablan*. None of that. **That is the sort of thing that happens in a language over time**. Those suffixes start out as separate words and then words glue together and that is when you know you have that kind of scholastic nightmare. Creoles have not existed long enough for that sort of thing to happen yet.

If you have ever tried to learn an Asian language, an East Asian language or a Southeast Asian language, think about the tones. So, for example in Mandarin, the textbook example is that you take "ma". [ma] in Mandarin means nothing at all by itself. Well, actually it does: that is how you make something a question, but suppose you are not asking a question. "Ma" (said like this: [mǎ]) means 'horse', [mà]: that means 'scold', [mā]: that means 'mother,' for example. That sort of thing happens in these languages and you just have to know. It happens gradually over time, through a process that I do not have time to describe. But all you need to know is it takes time. And **because creoles developed recently from languages that were very basic because they were not languages yet, you do not have that**. So, creole languages definitely make use of tone, but not in such a way that you have to utter a tone on every syllable or even every other syllable of a word or be incomprehensible. That kind of tone takes time.

So, a creole language is dramatically more streamlined than a language that has existed for a very long time, because **it began as something other than a full language**.

How creoles emerge: controversies

Now there is a certain amount of controversy over exactly how creole languages emerge. Some people who specialize in the languages would say the **creole languages emerge from pidgins**. Other people would say that the source was nothing as reduced as a pidgin and that **creoles are more just a matter of mixing**, say for example English and African languages, than beginning from something else. It would be dishonest of me not to say that I firmly believe that the pidgin analysis is closer to the truth. However, politeness requires me to acknowledge the other side. You will hear that sort of thing said and you should listen, briefly.

Summary: Importance of creoles

Pidgins and creoles are interesting because some languages are newer than others. You might say: "Well, which language is older? Finnish or English?" Well, it is a hard question to answer because whatever English is, it has been spoken in some form since the very dawn of human language. It was not always called English, but it was there. Same thing with Finnish, and to the extent that we are asking which language is older —Unless we mean: "Which language was written down earliest?" (and that is a rather trivial question to ask), or if we are asking: "Which language was called what it is called now earliest?" (and I do not think that is what anybody means). **All languages are the same age**. They are all old as dirt because they all began with the

first language, **except odd conditions** in human geopolitical doings sometimes have a way of actually creating brand new languages. And **creoles** can be seen and **some of the world's very newest languages** along with, for example, the world's sign languages, which have generally thought to be 200 or at the most 300 years old in terms of the ones that exist today.

So, **pidgins are not languages at all**. Pidgins are what happens when you get helicoptered into a small village in Hungary and you have to stay there for a month. Your Hungarian would be a pidgin. However, if you and ten other people were stuck in that Hungarian village, and for some reason, required to move in a cave and always speak to one another in that kind of Hungarian, and you were all from different places. Then let you out of the cave in ten years and you will all be speaking a creole language that would allow you to talk about everything you would have wanted to talk about in the cave, with the nuances of desperation that that would entail. It would be **a brand-new language: that is what a creole language is**. And that is why many people find creole languages interesting.

Week X

History of English

by Prof. John McWhorter (Columbia University)

Transcription of the invited lecture
Prepared by: Dr. Paola Cepeda and Veronica Miatto

Old English

The history of the English language is more interesting in many ways than the history of many languages over the same period of time. And that is because the pathway from Old English to the English that we speak today is one of an almost counterintuitively **massive transformation**. The fact is that, if you command today's Modern English and you encounter Old English or Anglo-Saxon, the languages are all but unrecognizable. And the reason it is all but unrecognizable is not because of any quirk of spelling or anything like that, but because the vast majority of the vocabulary of what that language was is now no longer part of English.

Old English was, essentially from a modern perspective, what we would think of is a variation on German. **English is a Germanic language**. Germanic, depending on how you count it, refers to about a dozen, realistically more like 18 languages that are living today. English is of that family. And Old English was very much the direct ancestor of what I am speaking right now, but its vocabulary is so very different that we can barely process it as such. And that is because one major part of the transformation that made Old English into Modern English is that Old English was assaulted, essentially, with **vocabulary from other languages** to the point that, in laymen's terms, it became another language altogether if we think our vocabulary as being what makes a language

itself (which is not true, but none of us can completely shake that sense). And so, that is why Old English seems so different.

So, for example, you have the **earliest attestations** of what we now know as English in the middle of the **400s AD**, and we can assume that the language was brought to the island that England is now on. And I do not know if I should be telling you this, but likely English was spoken for several centuries on the island before that. That is not sure though yet: officially, I am supposed to tell you that when the Angles and the Saxons and the Jutes came to that island, they brought English with them and that was the first encounter on that island with English. Nevertheless, after just a few centuries, in the **late 700s AD**, Scandinavian Vikings (basically Norwegians and Danes, but Norwegians ahead), invaded England in rather large numbers. They were mostly men and they married women who were English speakers. And the result was a massive incursion of **Norse vocabulary into English**. Even today, there are doublets such as that you can wear a *shirt* or a *skirt*. They are kind of the same thing because *skirt* came from Norse. Even very basic words like *get* and *happy*, *window*, and *fellow*, come originally from Norse. So, that takes the language away from Anglo-Saxon that is right there.

Middle English: New vocabulary

Not long after those incursions, starting **in 1066 with the Battle of Hastings**, you have this massive incursion of **French words** (which are not more different from English words than Norse words were) into this old English language. And what that means is that there are so many words from French after a while that, if you construct a sentence properly, you could almost think (from Modern English) that this is actually some kind of French that just happens to have a lot of English words scattered in to unite them. What happened was especially that **French took over most of the formal aspect of the Old English vocabulary**, to the extent that, if there is any air of the refined or the special or the beyond-the-meat-and-potatoes-every-day in a word, very often is from French. And so, *art*, that is from French. *Soldier* is not an Old English word; that is from French. You have a *pig*, that is the animal, that is from Old English. If you eat it, you call it *pork*, and you can call eating it somewhat more refined than riding it or killing it, and that is because *pork* is a French word. *Beef* is a French word. And so, words of that kind came in, because French people were ruling England. And as far as we know, these words started out being used in writing, and then, through channels that are not exactly clear even to this day, these words percolated into even very ordinary speech.

So, you have the Viking and the French incursions. And not much longer after that, give it about four centuries, you have a **massive incursion of Latin and then later some Greek words** into the language. Again, mostly through the printed page, this happens especially after the Renaissance, when there is a sense that Latin and the things that were written in Latin were the best and brightest that had ever been written or thought. And so, a lot of our vocabulary comes from Latin as well. This means that we have a language where you can *help*, or you can *aid*, or you can *assist*. So, *help*, that is English; *aid*, that is French; *assist*, that is Latin. What is important is that neither *aid* nor *assist* are words that anybody speaking Old English would have recognized. And so, that massive transformation means the vocabulary that I am using now has ominously little to

do (beyond ordinary words like and *brother*, *sister*, *big*) with the language that this language was just one thousand years ago.

So, you end up with stages. You have **Old English**, which would be the language that was brought to England until roughly (people differ on this) the French invasion in 1066. It is clear that, once the language starts being written again (and that took a while, because, for a while, it was French that was written), it is something so different (especially after a couple of hundred years of that writing tradition) that you no longer call it Old English. That is called **Middle English**.

Middle English: Changes in grammar

Middle English is roughly the English that somebody who speaks this language thinks of as the quaint form. You cannot make fun of older forms of English by speaking Old English unless you speak German, as nobody would understand you. But to speak in the only fashioned way, whether people know it or not, often they are imitating something that is based on aspects of Middle English. With Middle English, of course, this French vocabulary was coming in and establishing itself very quickly (the Latin vocabulary was going to come later). But there was something else happening that makes **Middle English something quite different** from the basically German that English used to be. And that is that, with Middle English, we can hack our way through it with effort, generally not understanding as much as we think. It is kind of what the Canterbury Tales were, especially after the first 16 lines: you are not really dealing with any kind of English that you are familiar with, but you can pretend. It is partly because the vocabulary has come around to be something like what we are used to, but **the grammar has also changed significantly**.

And the main thing that has happened to the grammar by the time Middle English comes out is that no longer is English a language where you have an extensive **set of case endings to mark what role a noun plays in a sentence**. So nominative, that is just vanilla. Genitive is

a way of saying essentially possessive, and so, not *William* but *William's book*. Now we certainly think of adding an -*s*, because we do not think of English as having case endings, but really that was an -*s* that you added as one of a whole series of those sorts of endings. If you talked about William, there was an ending for that. Depending on which words you used, there was an ending to indicated that you were doing something that affected William, such as *hurting William*. So, case endings.

And then, something that is very familiar to any of us who tried to learn any European language for the most part. There are **conjugational endings** and lots of them. In English, we say *I speak*, *you speak*, *he/she/it speaks*, and that is all there is, and then *we speak*, *you all speak*, *they speak*. English is actually, by some counts, the only language in the world where, in the present tense there is only one ending and that one ending is in the third person singular. That is a very odd way to be, despite how normal it feels to us. A normal European language has endings in all the persons and numbers, as we know from suffering through, for example, French and Spanish. Old English (because it was normal) was that kind.

So, you had endings for the first, second and third persons in the singular; and, then, in the plural, often they were all the same, but, nevertheless, you had an ending for *we*, *you all*, and *they*. From Old English to Middle English, one of the most transformative processes is that **almost all of those endings dropped away**. Forget there being different conjugational classes also, like in Spanish, in which you have your -*ar*, -*er*, and -*ir* verbs. No more of that. Instead, you get down to having just this business of an ending in the third person singular. It is -θ for a long time, then it changes to -*s*, and nobody knows exactly why. Nevertheless, you end up having just that one. That happens as you go from Old late to late Middle English. So, it is no longer a language where word order can be relatively flexible, because you have so many signs of what role a word is playing in a sentence,

especially the nouns. Instead, you have a language which, for a European language, is oddly **short on the sorts of suffixes** that can make learning other languages in Europe so hard for an English speaker, because we lost most of what makes out Indo-European language (Indo-European is the largest family that English belongs to) an Indo-European language.

That happens from Old English into late Middle English. The vocabulary is completely different, and the grammar becomes one that requires **more attention to word order** than to the things on the ends of the words that can show you what the word is doing regardless of that order it goes into. As a result, English becomes a language where, for the most part, you go Subject, and Verb, and then Object: **SVO**. That is not the way a language like Old English or, for example, Russian (which still has all of the things an Indo-European language is supposed to have) pattern, as strictly as English has to. And that is because you have to pay attention to your word order and make it more rigid if you have less of the bells and whistles that allow you to pay attention to other things. So, you can have all of those things that are turning the language upside down.

Early Modern English
As Middle English becomes **Early Modern English** (many people would date it from 1450; that year is as arbitrary as it sounds, but let's just stick with it) and then Modern English, something else happens. It is controversial exactly when it began, certainly underway in the 1400s. And that is something called the **Great Vowel Shift**, which made it even harder for us if we could time-travel to actually understand what anybody was saying. Even in Middle English, we could get our claws dug in, to an extent. And that is because the vowels in English have changed so very much. What is interesting about the Great Vowel Shift is that it goes a long way (over 50%) to making clear **how English is spelled,** which is different from how English

is spoken; the spelling is just the way it happens to be scratched down on the paper.

Nevertheless, we cannot help thinking about why English spelling is such a mess. For example, suppose we're talking about *made* as in '*I made soufflé*'. So, m-a-d-e, *made*. Now, you learn that, if there's a silent *e*, then you have to pronounce the *a* sound, quote and quote, "long". And so, it's [meɪd]. You have learned that; you get used to it. But think about how insane that really is. Would anybody choose to do it that way? Did anybody sit down and say "We're gonna have a silent *e*"? No. When something makes that little sense, you know that it is based on a situation that has morphed from one that made more sense. Just because people were medieval, it does not mean that they were stupid. Actually, *made* began pronounced as [ma:də]. We can be quite sure that it did. There was an [ə] pronounced and you had [ma:də]. Now why is it pronounced [meɪd] today? It is because vowels are not stable.

Vowels in any language are always moving around, faster in some languages than others. And the Great Vowel Shift was not really as seismic as vowel changes go, though that is how it is often described. It is just something you can see happening on paper in a language that a lot of people speak. But, nevertheless, it was interesting, because it meant that, if you can see where [a] is in your mouth (as opposed to however you are taught vowels in school), there are different places that that [a] can go. So, suppose that [ɑ] gradually becomes more like [a], and then becomes [æ]. Now, we are [æ], okay. Now, look at what is above [æ]: [æ], [ɛ]. [æ] and [ɛ] are not that different. And what is above [ɛ]? [ɛ], [e]. So, suppose that gradually over the years, nobody ever perceives this. But suppose gradually you go from **[ɑ] > [a] > [æ] > [ɛ] > [e]**. **Perfectly natural process!** That is what happened in English.

But the **spelling does not have to change**. We like things to stay the way they are. These things happen bit by bit by bit. And, especially if it is fed to you early enough, you can get used to the idea that m-a-d-e

spells [meɪd]. Think about how it does not. Think about how that would not make sense in any other language. But, if you are an English speaker, that looks as natural as the sky is blue. By the time you realize it sucks, you are grown-up and you are busy. And so, the spelling system stays the way it is, and that explains a lot of why spelling is bad in English, and it also takes our language as we speak it now even further away from Old English than we might expect.

The way to Modern English

So, **the vocabulary turns upside down, we have a completely different grammar, the Great Vowel Shift creates a completely different sound**. You go from basically German to a language that grammatically is really nothing like German at all, that has only shreds of what the Germanic vocabulary was and has a sound system that is completely different in its vowels from anything that an Anglo-Saxon speaker would recognize. And, more to the point, all of this happened very slowly. Nobody woke up and found the language different. There is no one generation that started speaking Middle English while their parents were walking around still speaking Old English. Nobody was aware of any of these things. And yet, here we are. So, from Beowulf to Time magazine is a gradual process. And that is the nature of the history of English.

Language and Social Justice
by Prof. John R. Rickford (Stanford University)

Transcription of the invited lecture
Prepared by: Veronica Miatto

My story

I will begin by giving a sense of how I got into sociolinguistics. Labov has a very famous article called **'How I got into linguistics and what I got out of it'**, which a lot of undergrads find very interesting. He was a chemist who stumbled into linguistics, and then went on to become one of the major figures of the 20th century in linguistics and created sociolinguistics.

I am originally from Guyana, South America; I got a US scholarship and looked at different places, Berkeley, in particular. I came to UC Santa Cruz, and I started as somebody in literature; I loved English. And then, probably my first year, I met an anthropologist, Raja Key Singh, who told me about Solomon Islands pidgin English, which was a lot like Guyanese Creole in some ways, and I became fascinated by that. I then read an article by R. B. LePage, a British sociolinguist, titled **'Problems to be faced in the use of English as a medium of education in for West Indian territories'**, including what was then British Guyana and later became Guyana. And one of the points he made is that **students** in these areas, such as Barbados, Trinidad, Belize, Guyana, were doing **very badly in their exams**, partly because teachers did not realize that the language they spoke, the Creole variety of English that we spoke, was systematic and regular, and that you could actually use the contrast between the Creole and the standard to help them do better in school.

That was very exciting to me. Santa Cruz was kind of an experimental place, and so, I took his article in one hand, I took the bulletin in the other hand, and I designed my own **major in sociolinguistics**. I began to read work by Labov, Ferguson, Hymes, and Fishman and so on. I created my own major, maybe still the only major in sociolinguistics as such.

From the beginning, this degree had a potential practical application. But what I think happened over the years after I got my degree is that I became so much more theoretical. I became more interested in the theoretical issues. I got a Dunford fellowship, went to the University of Pennsylvania, worked with Labov and Hymes, in particular. And it was really the **Ebonics issue** in 1996-97 that brought me back and reminded me that what got me first interested was the idea that you might use your understanding of linguistics and language to improve the teaching of English. I had written some things about this over the years, but the Ebonics issue - when everybody was talking about the issue of possibly **taking African American English into account** in teaching Standard English, and in teaching kids other subjects - got me really excited. And it really got me excited because most of what everybody was saying **in the media was just nonsense**. Most people thought that they wanted to teach kids Ebonics, or African American English, which

was not necessary. Kids already spoke it very fluently. The idea was to somehow build on that knowledge to help them master an additional dialect and also other diversity schoolwork. That brought me back a little more into the plight issues.

The Zimmerman trial

But it was following the case of the trial of **George Zimmerman in 2013**, for the 2012 murder of **Trayvon Martin**, who was just 16 at the time, that I became interested in another part of sociolinguistics; the way in which sociolinguistics could make a difference in the world. And in particular, it was following the testimony of Rachel Jeantel, who was Trayvon's close friend.

She was on the phone with him when he was killed. He was in Sanford, at his father's and his stepmother's home. And he went to buy some Skittles and some drinks. While coming back into the complex, this guy Zimmerman, who was not a policeman, he was just a neighborhood watch captain, found him suspicious. Well, he was African American, there were not many African Americans around there. He was wearing a hoodie, but so does every student on university campuses. Zimmerman called the police and says: 'This guy looks suspicious and these punks, they always get away'. And police told him not to have anything to do with the guy. 'Do not follow him or anything'. But in fact, Zimmerman followed him and Trayvon soon noticed that.

Jeantel's parents are from Haiti, but she was born in the U.S. She was on the phone throughout this encounter. He was telling her what was happening. He said that this older guy was following him. Zimmerman was 28 at the time, so from the point of view of a 16-year-old, he was an older guy. He said: 'This older guy is following me', and she would tell him: 'But why?', 'You know, he's very suspicious. I don't know what he's up to. He never identified himself'. She was not an actual eyewitness, but **she was an ear-witness**; these days all the kids have mobile phones. So, she's listening to everything. And she was with him up until the point that in fact, Zimmerman attacks him. The headphone is knocked off, he is tussled to the ground, and then Zimmerman shoots him.

Trayvon Martin is of course, unfortunately dead. Of all the witnesses in Zimmerman's trial a year later, she had the most important story to tell. Because she was the closest thing to Trayvon himself being in the courtroom. Because she could tell it from his point of view. For instance, the **defense alleged that Trayvon was lying in wait and chasing Zimmerman**. And in fact, she said that **what actually happened was the complete opposite**. He was trying to run. 'I kept telling him to run, but he couldn't get away from this guy. And every time he thought he lost him; the guy was right there'. So, her testimony was crucial. She was a potential star witness for the trial. But **she spoke in very deep African American English**. And largely because of that, and a couple of other factors, which we talked about in work we've done on it, **her testimony**, a crucial testimony, **was disregarded**.

There is a recent book by Lisa Bloom, called 'Suspicion Nation', that is entirely about this trial. And she has an entire chapter on Rachel Jeantel's testimony. Lisa Bloom said, 'I think the jury deliberated for more than 16 hours. And **not a minute, a second, was spent on the testimony of Rachel Jeantel'**; which is really striking. She was on the stand longer than anybody else, she was on the stand for six hours over two days. Plus, she had countless hours of deposition testimony beforehand. Some of the other witnesses were people who, after the shooting, they opened the window, etc., so it seemed very little in the backdrop to what happened.

Race and linguistic biases

There were **two things that are crucial** [in determining why her testimony was disregarded]. I worked together with Sharese King, an African American Graduate student in linguistics, who is just

finishing a Ph.D. in Linguistics here now. And we analyzed her speech. We had 10-12 or more hours of speech. We looked at it, we compared it to every study of African American English, and Rachel Jeantel's percentages of the use of the key features [of African American Vernacular English], such as multiple negation or copula absence was higher, or certainly as high as anybody else in the literature. So, **she was definitely a marked vernacular speaker**.

And what we found in the end, going beyond how she was speaking, when we tried to figure out **why she was ignored**, is that there seemed to be two crucial reasons. One was **intelligibility**. There were only six jurors in this Florida system, and five of them were white. I think they were all women. One was Puerto Rican. She was the most sympathetic, you can read about her in Lisa Bloom's book. One juror, B37, was on TV and she said: 'We couldn't understand her'. Some of it had to do with the vocabularies, people who are not linguists often point that. But, in fact, what was really crucial was a lot of the **grammar and the phonology**.

So, there was intelligibility, and then something that we have known from other work in sociolinguistics over the years. That is, people often tend to think that **people who speak in some marked, nonstandard, or vernacular manner, are somehow less credible**, less upstanding. And a lot of what happens in trials has to do with how much you believe the character of the person, not just the facts of the case. *Does that person look like an upstanding person?* Which is why you are always very careful because you can be misled by somebody in a three-piece suit and a tie, who's actually a rabid killer, but he knows to present himself very well. And there is a whole other side of literature that we discovered and worked on, that has to do with credibility and believability and what people think of it.

Nevertheless, in the end, **her crucial testimony was disregarded**. In a recent book that was written by Trayvon Martin's parents called 'Rest in Power', they said that in the trial, instead of Zimmerman himself being on trial, **Trayvon and Jeantel were the ones who were put on trial.** Because they were young, they were black, and because of how they spoke. They were misrepresented as being evil or dangerous people. And Zimmerman, who was the real killer, was, of course, exonerated and set free.

Language and criminal justice

The outcome of the trial turned out to be very important, because Zimmerman's not guilty verdict is what **sparked the Black Lives Matter movement**. Most people do not realize that, but that was the spark that lit it. And that has gone on to be a very influential matter. Overall, what it helped me to see was that **language can play a very crucial role in criminal justice**. I already knew that in terms of social justice, in terms of people getting jobs, in terms of people getting a good education, even in terms of people being taken seriously in doctor's visits and so on. But this awakened my sensitivity and sensibility to the fact that you might have many people, whether as defendants, or whether as witnesses, whose **crucial testimony is not being understood, or is being ignored, or is being disparaged, just because of the way they speak**. And I do not think sociolinguistics has paid enough attention to that issue. There are people who have been involved in this area for a number of years. Roger Shuy is one, and he does all kinds of cases. I do not think people are generally aware of how much this happens.

One of the things we did in preparing to write that paper was to look for cases where there were misunderstandings and mis-transcriptions. I remember one of the most striking ones was this case of a Jamaican speaker in England, who was at the scene of a shooting. And he said: 'When me hear the bap, bap', the sound of the gunshots, 'Me drop a ground, and then me run'. So, what he is saying is: 'When I heard these shots, I dropped to the ground (you know, for my safety) and then I ran'. And it was transcribed as 'When I heard the shots, I dropped the gun and then I

ran'. He was just an innocent bystander. He had nothing to do with it. He was not shooting.

Since then, I have been involved in looking at transcripts from some other cases. I see several cases where people do not understand what is going on. One of the things that we called for in that paper is some way of **checking transcripts having native speakers or linguists who work on different vernacular varieties**. Check transcripts to make sure that you have the right record, because if there is an appeal later on, it is not what you actually say, it is what is transcribed as what you said that really matters. The other thing that was really striking to us, is that the jurors do not even see the transcripts in many states. And that was true in Florida. The transcripts are only held in case of an appeal later on.

This awakened my general interest in ways in which linguistics, but in particular **sociolinguistics, can make a positive difference in the world** and contribute to society. I think we have accumulated a lot of knowledge over the years about language, social meaning, and social variation. And it is time to put it to use. I mentioned to you that I was so impressed by Dan Jurafsky, and Jennifer Eberhardt's book. Some students here at Stanford are looking at police body cameras and noticing the ways in which they show different relative respect to black and white motorists. In that case, it was just traffic stops. But you can see the way in which prejudices and preconceptions, even from black officers dealing with black motorists play out. And you can use these to retrain officers to be more sensitive to these issues.

Versatility as the counterpart of variation
The last thing I would talk about is my own work and some work my wife and I have been doing. We have been trying to **develop the notion of versatility as the applied counterpart of variation**. As sociolinguists, we study variation in language. And on the one hand, we want society to be more sensitive to variation, and recognize that having this **variation is an important part of making your whole community** and your whole society more versatile. And on the other hand, we want to be able to **extend that versatility to speakers of all types.** So that speakers develop versatility in different genres, speaking and reading.

In recent months over the last year, my wife and I have actually met Rachel Jeantel, and we Skype with her about once a week, working to develop her own reading ability. As it turns out, a lot of students at this school are very poor readers. We are also working to give them access, to the extent that they are interested, in other varieties of English, which is sometimes a controversial move among linguists. So that they have command over two or three different dialects, or multi-dialectal flexibility.

Traditionally, **sociolinguists have been very idealistic** and puristic and said that **society must change**. And we certainly agree with that. And we are trying to change society, change courts, change workplaces, change systems by which landlords rent to people. John Baugh's work shows that when people call up and they speak in African American English, the apartment is not available anymore, because they use that as a cue to race, and they can then be racist. Let's absolutely change this idea while we can. But also, to the extent that speakers themselves want to be versatile. And we have a lot of evidence over the years **that speakers want to increase versatility**. That we should be able also to help them with that, to the extent we can.

British and American English
by Prof. Devyani Sharma (Queen Mary University of London)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Prepared by: Veronica Miatto

American English vs British English

My name is Devyani Sharma. I'm a professor of sociolinguistics at the Queen Mary University of London. One thing that I work on is differences that develop over time between different dialects of English in very different social situations. An example of that is American and British English, and how they have become different over time. American English and British English are a good example of it because many people are familiar with very well-known differences between them. But they show us a number of **different factors that affect language change over a long period**.

Passage of time

One reason that dialects become very different from each other is just the **passage of time**. You can see this within America actually, within the United States. If you look at the traditional dialect atlases of America, you see lots more differences in the Eastern side of the United States than in the West. And as people know, the **frontier** in the United States **moved over time westward**. So, English speakers settled in the West much later than in the East, and you see many more dialect differences in the latter, because there has been more time for those to develop.

If you look back at **Britain** which has had English obviously for longer than any other area, you see that there are **village to village differences** because there has just been enough time for those differences to develop. So, one factor is just how long you have been independent or separate from other Englishes.

Founder effect

Another factor is what is sometimes called the founder effect. The **founding population can have a big impact on the dialect** in a particular region of the world. In the United States, something that we associate as **American is pronouncing /r/** in a word like *park* or a *car*. And British people often say: "Oh, that's so American. We don't speak like that." But actually, **that is how British people used to speak** and that is why America has those /r/s. It is not that they developed it to be American and different. They had it because Early Modern English had that pronunciation.

The same applies to a lot of **other lexical features, even grammatical features**, that we think are special to Americans but are actually all British features. For example, when Americans get 'mad' as in 'angry' and British people do not like it. If British people say 'mad', they say, "Oh, that's so American." It was actually British English, it is the British who lost it. So, in a way the **Americans are retaining old British language**. Also saying 'fall' for the season autumn is an old British usage. Or 'gotten' rather than 'got'; *he's gotten really*

old rather than *he's got old*. All of these, which are heard now as very American, are older British features. That is a founder effect where **whoever founded English in America had these features** and they have lasted and lasted for centuries.

Identity

A third more controversial and very interesting factor is identity. Often, when we hear dialect differences we think, "Oh, that's them being American, they want to be so American", or, "They're being British", or, "They want to be Australian." Actually, **a lot of the differences** we see are not strictly identity. They are often actually **how much you have interacted with someone**. Sometimes it is unconscious. You just adopt the features of people you talk to without trying to.

Whether identity is the reason for dialect differences is something sociolinguists work on a lot and it is quite tricky to distinguish identity as a factor from things like the passage of time or founder effects. But there are some good **examples of identity affecting language change**. One is the **pronunciation of /r/ in America**. Until the Second World War, although there was a lot of /r/ pronunciation in a word like *park*, the prestige form was actually to not pronounce it, like British people at the time were not pronouncing their /r/s anymore. So, **the prestige style of speaking was quite influenced by Britain**. And **after the Second World War** is when we saw **a real shift** in standard American English becoming very separate from British English. You could argue that there might have been a post-war shift in American identity, a greater confidence in using your own American features, and not really looking outside for prestige.

When we look at other new Englishes around the world, like Indian English, Singapore English, or Australian English, you see this development of a distinct identity sometimes influencing how much you want to sound like the founder dialects, often British English. Scotland is a good example of that. The **higher prestige version of Scottish English** has **resembled British English to different degrees over history.** And it depends on the relationship to Britain. Right now, you really get in trouble if you sound completely British when you are in Scotland. The higher-end needs to sound quite Scottish because they really do not want to be associated with Britain. But in the past, there have been times when you could sound quite British as a Scottish person because there was a closer relationship and more respect for the original variety of English.

These are some of the factors that affect why dialects develop differently. How long you have been separated from another group, how much you interact with them, who your founders were, who brought English to that region. We see a lot of Early Modern English British features in Australian English as well, just because they were brought there originally. And then finally identity, which is this quite complicated and interesting additional dynamic to why people become different.

Differences between American and British English

There are quite a few differences between American and British English. In a sense, when you compare world Englishes, American and British English are not all that different. For example, speakers do not usually have difficulty understanding each other, which you can have with some Englishes. The differences are sometimes subtle but they are at every level.

You have **differences in pronunciation**, what we would call phonetic differences. Americans generally **pronounce /r/s** and British people generally do not. But in both places, you have regions where the opposite is true. So, there are parts of America where you do not pronounce the /r/, parts of Britain where you do. Americans have a pronunciation of the **"a" vowel** in a word like *can't* /kænt/ or *dance* /dæns/ where British English used to have that pronunciation. It is British English that changed, and the standard now says *can't* /kɑnt/ and *dance* /dɑns/. So, there is a split

in how that is pronounced in British English that is not present in American English. But again, there are dialects of British English that say *can't* /kænt/ and *dance* /dæns/; in the North that's the default. So, we have differences in vowels, and differences in consonants.

There are some **differences in intonation**. In British English when you ask **yes/no questions**, you have a drop in your intonation at the end. You might say something like, "Shall we leave now?" in British English. But that sounds very British to Americans who would say, "Shall we leave now?", in which they would keep raising their intonation in the question. These are quite stable differences at every level of pronunciation between the two.

You have **lexical differences**, of course. One of the things people notice most is differences in **words**. And that is because with phonetic differences or pronunciation differences you can still understand each other. Your brain just copes with it. But if you are using different words and you mean something different, it gets quite tense sometimes because if you say *cookie* or if you say *biscuit* in Britain or in the United States, you might be meaning a different kind of baked item. And both sides can be quite sensitive about lexical differences, that is, differences in words.

An interesting thing that is happening is that **British people complain about Americanization** of British English, the use of words like *cookie* for what the British traditionally call *biscuits*, the use of *apartment* for *flat*, *elevator* for *lift*. There are many pairings of words like this where you see the American form coming into British English. But **Americans are adopting British forms too**, which is quite interesting. So, my impression is that *apartment* which is the American version of what British people call *flat* is increasingly used in Britain as well. But *flat* is apparently used sometimes in the United States. And something very interesting is when people, in this case, English speakers, have two words for the same thing, sometimes they give slightly different meanings to the

two words. It can be useful to actually have another word because you want to make some kind of distinction. It may be the case that Americans use *flat* to mean a more sophisticated bigger kind of space to live in. And it might be that British people use *apartment* to mean something sophisticated and fancy and exotic. So, **the other person's word comes to mean something better or something more fancy**. The reality is more complicated than just American English is taking over the world which is how British people sometimes talk about it. It goes both ways. And nowadays, with globalization and much more communication between countries, you see a lot of this borrowing in both directions.

There are also **differences in grammar**. Those can be quite subtle. One example is that the **past perfect construction** in English where you do not just use a simple past tense like *I saw the movie*, you might say, *I have seen the movie*. That construction in English has been around since Old English and it means a completed kind of action but with relevance to the present moment. That is in decline in American English. Americans will say, *Did you see that film yet?* rather than, *Have you seen that film yet?*. It is quite subtle but it shows a restructuring of the grammar where it becomes less and less useful to have this different way of referring to the past. But British speakers still use it. There are also very slight **differences in the use of the word "the"**. Whether you say *in hospital* or *in the hospital* can vary between American and British English. These are just a few examples of how, although Americans and British speakers can understand each other and they are used to each other, over the centuries they have retained differences in how they pronounce things, what words they use, even what grammar they use.

Week X

Teen English
by Prof. Sali Tagliamonte (University of Toronto)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Prepared by: Veronica Miatto

Introduction

My name is Sali Tagliamonte, and I am Canadian. I grew up in Northern Ontario, and I have been studying all kinds of different dialects of English for my whole career. And I've been in Linguistics my whole career. There came a point in my life when I had a bunch of teenagers at my kitchen table, and when I listened to the way they talked, I was fascinated. I thought: "Something really interesting is going on at my kitchen table." In the earlier part of my career, I had spent a lot of time doing community-based research on older people; the people that are on mountaintops, or islands, or peripheral places. And they have a very interesting way of talking, but there at my kitchen table were my children, and they had a very interesting way of talking too. So, I spent a lot of time eavesdropping and hearing a lot of different words, phrases, and constructions. And I thought: "I want to study this while I can, because it is right here in front of me."

And so my first choice was to get my kids to talk to me, but that was not a very good idea, because when you are a middle-aged academic, you really do not have access to what teenagers are really saying amongst each other, unless you are carefully not talking to them, so that they do not think you are listening. So, I came up with this great plan. **As university professors who teach linguistics, we have this great laboratory in our classes**, so I designed a course where I had young

first-year students going and interviewing their younger brothers and sisters. This way, over quite a few years, I was able to amass a corpus of youth language from kids from about the age of 9-10 to late teens-early 20s. And then I started the **Funky Feature Project**, as I called it. One by one, I went through these materials and started looking at the funky features that I thought were intriguing, or that people reported to me, or that I read about in the newspaper. 'All these young people, they were using so much of X word'. And I would say: 'Then I want to go study it', and so I did. Out of that came so many different studies of prominent features of teen language, that I could say something about language change, and I could say something about how teenagers use language.

Teen language features

Back in 1995, when I first started thinking about this, the **Quotative 'be like'** was just beginning. I had the really good fortune of doing a little project with my undergraduate students, in which they got their friends and acquaintances to tell them a story. They collected the stories, and we did a study of Quotative Verbs. At that time **in 1995, Quotative 'be like' represented about 10% of the quotative system**, so that became one of the big linguistic features I started pursuing over the years. That Quotative 'be like', as you probably know, has skyrocketed since 1995, to the point where now teenagers in Toronto hardly use anything but

Quotative 'be like'. That was one of the features that I was able to catch as it was expanding, diffusing, and entering teenage language. And that has become a very fruitful area of investigation.

So that was one. Then I started noticing other words, and I noticed teenagers who were saying things like, "And all that kind of thing. And all that stuff. And stuff, and thing, and stuff." And I thought, "Well, what's going on? Why do they keep putting these things at the ends of sentences?" So, we embarked on a big study of what we call **general extenders**, among the teenagers. In doing that work we discovered that there was this incredible **shift of lexical replacement going on across the generations** in the data I have, and that the **young people were saying things like "and stuff, and stuff, and stuff,"** and the **older people were then saying things like, "and stuff like that**." That was a change in progress, and young people had picked up on that picture and taken it forward, to the point where people said to me, "What are teenagers doing? All they do is say 'stuff' all the time." There I would be at my kitchen, doing the dishes and eavesdropping on the kids at the table. And I would hear things like, "Stuff, stuff, stuff, stuff." And I said to my son one day, "What did you do at school?", he said, "Stuff.", and I thought, "Okay, now we're going to go look at 'stuff,' and see what's going on there." And indeed, the use of this generic in English has not always been there. 'Stuff' did not always used to mean 'anything'; it started as a very different word. We started tracking that word in English, and we found out that it has taken over as the generic in English.

The interesting thing about teen language that people often ask me is: "Where did they get this terrible way of speaking?" Well of course, where they get it is from older people. It is just that **teenagers push those changes forward** to the extent that they have differentiated themselves very strongly from the older generations, and so there is always going to be this **perception that the way young people talk is different**. And if it is different, then it must be bad. So, the evaluation of teen language is very negative in our society. And really, what we are just reacting to is change in progress. I think an important message for **young people to have is that their language is not bad**. They are the movers and shakers of language, and we are interested in knowing what they are doing.

Then I started noticing adjectives. How do young people use adjectives? They use adjectives in very different ways than older people. I started looking at different types of adjectives, and then we got into the idea of semantic sets, and how semantic sets had their own evolution, as well. We looked at the **adjectives of strangeness**. I got very captivated by how people say something is unusual, or peculiar, or strange. There is a whole set of words that mean weird. And if you listen to kids today, they say 'weird' a lot. So, I did another study on the adjectives of strangeness, and discovered that **'weird' is taking over that lexical field**. If you want to talk about something being unusual, young people are far more likely to use 'weird', than any other word, even though those other words are there. It became a very interesting exercise to pick up these words that people targeted in teen languages, as being reprehensible or bad or overused, and find out what was really going on with that, and where those words had come from, and why they were there.

Gender differences

There are so many gender differences, especially among teenagers. It's like Penny Eckert has always said, it is the heterosexual marketplace in a lot of ways. And it is not just the heterosexual marketplace; it is the sexuality marketplace. **Kids are learning how to figure out** their way in the world, and who they are, and what **their identity** is. And they do start **differentiating themselves with respect to language**. The best example I have of that is when I had the kids at the kitchen table, and I was hearing my daughter doing one thing, and my son doing another thing. And I said one time to my daughter's boyfriend: "Does Tara sound like you?" And he said, "Heck, no. She sounds like a girl." And that was right. There is a

real divide amongst teenagers between what the guys or girls are doing.

We see played out in teen language, these principles of linguistic change that Labov has talked about in his seminal works on how change happens. It is not just sound change that happens like that. There are many **changes that are being led by these young teenage girls**, as they push language into the future. I have not found one that is led by boys yet, except for one. And the one change that I have found, that seems to be pushed forward by guys, is the use of "stuff." So, young boys are much more likely to say "What did you do today?" "Stuff," than girls are. I talked a bit about the Quotative 'be like'. And that was one of those features that young girls picked up and pushed forward very quickly over the last 30 years. And the boys came along after, but they really did push it forward.

Shifts in the use of Taboo Words
The **'G'-words are all the words and euphemisms using the word God**. It used to be the case that you did not utter the word "God" out loud, unless you did it in an oath, or a saying, like "Praise God," or "so help me, God," or "I swear to God". Over the centuries, or the decades in the **20th century, you had euphemisms develop**. You would have things like, *golly*, and *gosh*, and others. And what I found was that those euphemisms are very common among older people, but at a certain point in time, the phrase, "oh my God" became more and more prevalent, to the point that young women today use "Oh my God" "Oh, my God," all the time.

Taboo words have undergone a real transformation over the course of the 20th century, to the point where today, "oh my God" is a mundane expression, if anything. Whereas in the 16th century or the early 20th century, that would have been quite risqué. That kind of shift in the way we use words is another interesting thing. So, you just have to eavesdrop on teenagers anywhere you go. And I say to my students, "Just stand on a bus, and if you see a gaggle of young people, just

ease over towards them, and then stand there, and shut your eyes, and just listen to what they say. You'll hear things like, "Stuff. Oh, my god. I'm like, what? Weird.", all kinds of words like that are part of the way teenagers use language.

Internet language
Internet language is such a great laboratory for linguists, because there you see **people using language in such a playful way**. Some forms of language are very erudite; in academic meetings we get the most erudite of our abilities pushed to the forefront. But in texting, we are playful. We do very different types of things.

I did a study, and I again experimented with my students, where we got them to become part of a class project. The students collected text messages from their interactions with people their own age, emails, and instant messaging texts forth on Facebook, or MSN Messenger, between people of their own age. I also got them to submit to the project their largest piece of writing that they had done at the time. Then I **compared the use of their linguistic behavior across those four registers**. And indeed, we find very playful, interesting language in SMS, in texting, when you are using your thumbs. Shortened forms, all kinds of different behavior; right up through to the very complex sentence structure of formal, written language.

What I discovered was that the **underlying grammatical patterns did not change.** The **forms changed**; the construction of the forms changed, in terms of their orthography or their form, but, the patterns did not change. What that showed me was that internet language has this incredible ability to give people the chance to be playful with language, in the way they deploy their forms, and in the embellishments they make. But they are **using the same grammar, throughout**, and it is very interesting. You can see one person in texting, doing all these things, and we think, "Oh, my goodness, this person doesn't have any

grammar, at all." And then you see the same person in an email message, with none of those embellishments. And when I say 'embellishment', I mean things like capitalization, elongation of vowels, no capitalization, using an ellipse; all of the things that you can do in text to fancy it up. I think that **internet language gives us this incredible way of gaining insight into how people use different registers of language** to encode interactional closeness or to encode that they are a smart person and can write a good argument, or just interactional, mundane communication.

And a lot of people say to me, "Well, it must be really hot stuff that you get from these teenagers when you get their text messages." And I say, "You know what? It's the most mundane stuff you'd ever hope to see". It is them making arrangements, trying to figure out how to get to the library, who is going to be in tutorial this afternoon, etc. But the forms they use to do it are very cool. Internet language is great, but we have to keep in mind, that it is still language, and it still has the same underlying structure. Otherwise, they would not be able to communicate very well.

Teen slang

Slang has a bad reputation, so people think that teenagers use these crazy words, and that it is just slang. Certain words come and go. When I was a teenager, it was really "in" to say, "Oo, peachy keen." And what did 'peachy keen' mean? It was probably what people would call slang, but it was part of the way we deployed new, vibrant ways of talking about positivity and interactional things, making us sound like we were cool. Nowadays, people like my son, who are in high school, they do not say 'peachy keen'. They would make fun of me if I told them that. They say things like 'fire', "That's fire" to mean something is good.

And **of these words, which ones will become part of the standard language?** And which ones will go by the wayside? That is the big question that linguists love to ponder. And I do not have an answer for that, but I always ask my students, "Which of these words do you think you'll still use when you're 40? And which of these words will you be making fun of your children when they use them?" We refer to slang as these words that probably will come and go. But how do we know which ones of those words may become the language of our grandchildren? Like the word 'stuff'. It once meant the materials that a soldier has in his pack. And now 'stuff' can mean just about anything. That is why **teenage language is so interesting, because it helps us reflect on so many things**: language change, generational change, who leads language change, how amazing language is.

Week X

Regional Varieties of American English
by Prof. Walt Wolfram (North Carolina State University)
Transcription of the invited lecture
Prepared by: Veronica Miatto

Introduction

Why do we have dialects in the United States? We have dialects because **people from English-speaking areas brought different dialects to begin with**, and they brought them **to particular areas**. A largely Scots Irish population brought various features that are still retained today, from the positive *anymore*, that is the use of *anymore* in a positive construction such as 'Anymore we watch a lot of Netflix'. That sounds really odd to some people, but to other people, it is perfectly normal. So, you get a feature like that, and they use it in Philadelphia where there are lots of Scots Irish. You can then **follow the trail** westward and then southward, and then diffusing out from that. So, we have a settlement to begin with, and then we have secondary movement. People from one area, like upstate New York, etc., moved west, and they took their dialect with them.

American English settlement patterns

You had this transmission of the dialect, and one of the interesting things about this, is there have been a number of dialect studies using different methods, which show the same pattern. In the history of American English, there have been three big dialect surveys. One was the **Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada**, which started in the **late 1920s** and technically is still ongoing. Naturally, it looked at New England first, because it was one of the first settlements. In the making of the Atlas, people would sit down, and researchers would transcribe phonetically what people said. The interviews would take sometimes eight and ten hours to complete. Then, they would carefully plot this out all by hand, so artistically. Second, in the **1960s**, we have the **Dictionary of American Regional English**, where theoretically every county in the United States would have a couple of people interviewed. That was mostly lexical, and it developed into six volumes now digitally available and wonderful to search on the web. Then, in the **1990s**, **Bill Labov did a slightly different survey**. It was primarily based on phonetics and acoustic analysis. It was telephone interviews with two people for basically every city of 50,000 or more people. It led him to a sample of 700, of which about 400 were analyzed.

These are very different methods in very different periods. But, interestingly, **you can still see the remnants and the convergence of these maps**, so you still come up with two or three dialect areas. If you plot the lines or isoglosses of these different maps, you still see them match in ways that seem to be incredible after all this. And part of it is simply the imprint of history, the so-called **'founder's principle'**, meaning that if you get to an area and you are the first one there, you get to have a significant say in what the dialect is going to be. If you then follow the movement,

you see that dialects in the United States still show a pretty **horizontal movement east to west** because that is the way the original migrations took place. Since then, we have had all this movement north to south, to the West Coast, and so forth, but we still have this original settlement pattern that has been pretty persistent. This says something very significant about settlement, the founder's effect, and development from that point.

There is this **notion that dialects are disappearing** in the United States. I cannot tell you how many times reporters call me and say, 'I'd like to talk to you about the fact that because of migration and because of the media dialects are dying'. It almost sounds intuitive, but in fact, **it is false**. While dialects are certainly reconfiguring, we have dialects that have been stable for centuries. We have some dialects that are receding, and we have some dialects that are accelerating.

Northern Dialects
Dialectologists generally talk about two or three main dialects, depending on how many pieces you want to cut the pie into. They will sometimes talk about simply North and South, or they will talk about the Midland area. These generally follow migratory paths that have diffused from that point.

One of the most interesting dimensions is what is happening in Northern dialects. In northern dialects, as Bill Labov and his studies have shown, **in the big cities the dialects are actually diverging**. They are becoming more different from Southern dialects and other dialects than they have been in the past. This is somewhat stunning to people who think that because of migration, movement, and the media, they should be stabilizing and American dialects should be homogenizing. That is not taking place first of all because linguistic things happen independently of society. Language is always changing. Vowel systems are always changing and now there is this shift that is referred to as the **Northern Cities Vowel Shift**, which

has been taking place over the last at least 50 to 100 years, and that affects big cities.

It is a nice shift because you do not see just one vowel, but a whole **set of vowels changing in a domino effect**. The vowel /ɔ/, as in *coffee* /kɔfi/ is moving down, so it is closer to /kɑfi/, while the vowel /ɑ/ is moving forward, so instead of saying something *lock* /lɑk/ you got *lack* /læk/. And then the vowel of /æ/, as is *bat* /bæt/ is moving up so that it sounds more like *bet* /bɛt/. Subsequently, the vowels of that area are moving back, so for example *bet* /bɛt/ becomes more like *but* /bʌt/ and then *but* becomes more like bot /bɔt/. So, for example, *busses* may sound like *bosses* and so forth.

But what is interesting about it is that this change is triggered by one shift and then this domino effect makes this system very different. Some people have said that what is taking place in the Northern Cities Vowel Shift, is **akin to the Great Vowel Shift** of the 1300s-1600s. It is that radical. This is a dramatic movement, and it is also dramatic in the way the shift diffuses, which is not contiguous. It starts in the big cities and then there is a cascade effect, so it **happens in the big cities and then it diffuses to slightly smaller cities**. So, if you're in Chicago it might diffuse to Peoria and then move over the intervening areas. That is not a movement we might expect, because of how population travel between urban areas; it jumps over the intervening areas.

Southern dialects
The south is very different. The **traditional vernacular southern features**, such as the ungliding /a/ vowel, so saying *time* /taːm/ instead of /taɪm/, and classic /r/-lessness as in *father* becoming /faðə/, **have been receding** in the south, primarily in the urban areas. There is also a Southern Vowel Shift, but the Southern Vowel Shift is very different from the Northern Cities Vowel Shift. The Northern Cities Vowel Shift is accelerating, whereas the Southern Vowel Shift is receding. In the Southern Vowel Shift, the bet vowel, as

in *bed* /bɛd/, glides and raises so you get something like *bade* /beɪd/, and instead of saying something like *bad* /bæd/, you might get *bade* /bæɪd/. The high front vowel of words like *beat* /bit/ goes back and down like /biᵊt/, and the vowel of /eɪ/ for example, like the British vowel, so instead of saying like *bait*, or *bade* you get /baɪd/.

This whole Southern Shift is **receding in the urban areas**. In a sense, the **North and the South are diametrically opposed** in terms of what is happening in the shift, and the dimensions of it. In the South, it is largely the urban areas that are leading the recession, whereas in the North it is the urban areas that are leading the acceleration. And this probably says something about the cultural significance of these urban centers in the North. These are the main things that people talk about in terms of the South and the North.

Stable and new dialects

At the same time, we have some **areas that have remained reasonably stable**, with some changes, and we have new areas that are developing. This is important to understand because the whole point is that dialects are dying. They are shifting in a way that reflects the changing cultural centers and regionality of North America. So, **the Boston dialect** with its merger of *caught* and *cot* as /kɑt/, and the /r/-lessness in older people, are still pretty stable in the Northeast and New England. Among younger kids, there are a lot of social dimensions that influence how much of that they retain.

What is also intriguing is 50 years ago people talked about states like **California** as dialectically uninteresting. They are not saying that anymore. What they are saying is that California is now **undergoing a vowel shift**. It is not like the Northern Cities Vowel Shift, although some things are similar. For example, the vowel in *brook* /brʊk/ is centralizing so it is becoming something like /brʌk/. So, we have these shifts and we have the creation of these new dialects,

as people reside there, as they form their identity, and as they accommodate the natural changes that language is going through.