

Linguistics

The systematic or scientific inquiry into human language – into its structures and uses and the relationship between them, as well as into the development and acquisition of language.

Language

An *arbitrary* vocal system used by human beings to communicate with one another. (It is also written and signed.)

What do you know when you know a language?

- How to articulate the sounds—*Phonetics*
- How the sounds can change in combinations—*Phonology*
- How to form words—*Morphology*
- How to form sentences—*Syntax*
- How to change form in different social settings
- Knowledge of different varieties (regional, social etc.)

Language and Dialects

- “A language is a dialect with an army”
 - The Romance *Languages*: Spanish, French, Italian, etc
 - The Chinese *Dialects*: Mandarin, Cantonese
 - Hindi (India) and Urdu (Pakistan)
 - Indigenous Dialects or Languages?
- All dialects are equally “grammatical” from a linguistic point of view. There is no basis for preferring one set of rules or grammatical competence over another.
- Judgments about dialects or languages such as “illogical, impure, decayed, bastardized” often represent judgments of the speakers of the dialect.
 - e.g. Matched Guise Tests
 - Bilingual reads passage in 2 languages
 - Listeners rate for:
 - level of education
 - likeability
 - intelligence
 - friendliness
 - looks
 - height
 - dependable or not
 - ambitious or not
 - respectable or not
 - Canadian study in Late 50’s
 - English listeners: English better
 - French listeners: English better

Standard Variety of a Language or Dialect

- The standard is not more grammatical or pure in any sense; it is picked as the standard for political and social reasons.
- Often the regional and socio-economic variety spoken in large centers of commerce and government. Historically, in the US it is (arguably) upper middle class northeastern varieties.
- The standard variety can be a combination of several dialects/languages, e.g. standard Mayan in Guatemala
- The standard variety is often the target for second language learning.
 - Why do you think this is the case?

Regional Dialects

British *vs.* American

[a:]

[æ]

[t]

“flapped [t]”

deleted

[r]

in hospital
to university
next day
O U are ahead
Have you...?

in the hospital
to the university
the next day
OU is a head
Do you have...?

Lift

Elevator

First Floor

Second Floor

Telly

TV

Torch

Flashlight

Bonnet

Hood

Boot

Trunk

Biscuits

Cookies

Petrol

Gas

Lorry

Truck

Tin

Can

Interval

Intermission

Queue

Line

Way Out

Exit

Social Dialects

Ethnic Varieties

- Yiddish influenced English in NYC
 - Yiddish borrowings: Schlep, Schmuck, Nebbish
 - Characteristic intonation patterns
 - Syntactic structures:
The book, I told you to read it.
- African-American English (AAE)
 - Not all African-Americans speak AAE
 - Non-African-Americans speak AAE
 - Similarities to Southern White English
 - Different grammar than standard English

AAE

vs. Standard English

That my bike

That's my bike

The coffee cold

The coffee's cold

The coffee be cold

The coffee is (always) cold

She be talking

She (always) talks

Emphatic “come”

It is a Miss J. in the
office

There is a ...

Multiple negatives

Socio-Economic Varieties

- Post vocalic 'r' in New York City
- Post vocalic 'r' in London

Gendered Varieties

- Tag questions
- Phonetic variation
- Lexical differences

Pidgins and Creoles

Pidginization occurs when different L1 groups develop a functionally reduced L2, based on limited access to a superstrate language, for certain restricted kind of referential inter-group communication.

e.g. Japanese Portuguese, Chinese and Filipino workers developing an English-based pidgin on the sugar plantations of Hawaii

Creolization occurs when a pidgin is adopted as a native language and acquires a more extensive vocabulary and range of use. The grammar becomes more complex over time

e.g. French Creole in Haiti and English Creole in Jamaica. AAE has some Creole influences. Indeed some people consider English a Creole.

Questions

Why is one dialect usually chosen as the standard?

Why do you think some people come to believe that the standard dialect is in some way better than other dialects?

Why is this assessment incorrect from a linguistic point of view?