4. Social dialects, styles, registers, and beliefs.

Ling 380/Soc 427 (Spring 2021)

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What we'll cover...

- Quiz #2 review.
- Social dialects
- Style, register, and belief
- Reading for next week.

Quiz #2 Review

1. In your own words, what is mutual intelligibility?

If a speaker of a language A could understand the speaker of language B, and vice versa.

Mutual intelligibility is when languages or dialects are similar enough so speakers can understand each other without having to learn the other language or dialect.

Even if people are speaking two different languages, but they can get a general understanding of each other. For an example, if someone who speaks Italian spoke to a person who speaks Spanish, they have a basic understanding with each other as they speak in their native language. Spanish and Italian are part of the Romance Languages which are based off of Latin, so their languages can be similar, even though they are two different languages.

Quiz #2 Review

2. In the text and in class, we discussed Bell's criteria, one of which is "vitality." Which of the following languages has low vitality, as defined in Wardhaugh's text? (Hint: You may need to look some of these languages up.)

"*Vitality [...]* refers to the existence of a living community of speakers." (Wardhaugh, p.37)

- Greek — 13.5 million speakers
- Kazakh — 13.2 million speakers
- English — Hundreds of millions of speakers
- **Gothic** — 0 speakers; last speakers died in 18th century Crimea.

Quiz #2 Review

3. In a given society, what effect does standardization have on nonstandard language varieties?

- It empowers them.

- It often causes them to be reevaluated as inferior.

- It causes them to be written for the first time.

- Standardization rarely has any impact on nonstandard varieties.

Quiz #2 Review

4. What, in your own words, is a dialect continuum?

Gradual changes between regional dialects.

A dialect continuum is when a language varies in dialect gradually. Communities neighboring each other might be able to understand each other. However communities that are a bit further from each other may not have mutual intelligibility.

A dialect continuum is a range of dialects spoken across a geographical area that vary very slightly due to region. The further apart two regions are, the less mutually intelligible they are.

Quiz #2 Review

5. Which of the following is true?

- Everyone has an accent.
- Speakers of a standard dialect don't have an accent, but others might.
- Accent and dialect are the same thing.
- Received Pronunciation is the most widely-used accent in America.

Quick question!

- What does this sentence mean to you?

    "She dropped the door on me."

- Is "drop the door" an expression that you heard of before today?

- If yes, where did you learn it?

Social Dialects

- Last week, we talked about *regional dialects*, where people living in different areas speak different dialects.

- There are also *social dialects*, which are associated with a given *social group* or *social class*.

- A *social group* can be hard to define, but can involve religion, ethnicity, or subcultural affinities (e.g. genre of music).

- *Social class* often involves a group's relationship with wealth, prestige, and power.

Social Dialects

In a city like Baghdad the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim inhabitants speak different varieties of Arabic. In this case the first two groups use their variety solely within the group but the Muslim variety serves as a lingua franca, or common language, among the groups. Consequently, Christians and Jews who deal with Muslims must use two varieties: their own at home and the Muslim variety for trade and in all inter-group relationships.

- Where is Baghdad?
- Why would the Muslim variety be the common language?

Baghdad Jewish Arabic has few if any remaining speakers in Baghdad, but survives in the diaspora in Israel and the U.S.

Baghdadi Christian Arabic and Baghdadi Jewish Arabic are more closely related to one another than either is to Baghdadi Muslim Arabic.

Social Dialects

Ethnic variation can be seen in the United States, where one variety of English has become so identified with an ethnic group that it is often referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

AAVE is sometimes also known as AAE because "vernacular" might be seen as pejorative.

- To be clear, not all African Americans speak AAE.

- Can someone who's not African American speak AAE? Consider this in light of Bell's criterion of *historicity.*

- One subject that's been somewhat neglected is the intersection of regionalism and AAE. It's been taken as a given in much of the literature that AAE is a nationwide dialect, but is the AAE in Chicago different than the AAE in New Orleans, for example?

Historicity refers to the fact that a particular group of people finds a sense of identity through using a particular language: it belongs to them.

Martha's Vineyard English

- An island in Massachusetts, three miles from the mainland.

- At the time of William Labov's study, it was quite poor *and* had an expensive cost of living. Virtually no industry on the island.

- Historically, its economy depended upon whaling.

- Later, it came to depend upon tourism ("summer people").

"Increasing dependence on the summer trade acts as a threat to [Vineyarders'] personal independence. The more far-seeing Vineyarders can envisage the day when they and their kind will be expropriated as surely as the Indians before them." (Labov 1972: 28)

Martha's Vineyard English

Image: Elkman on Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 3.0.
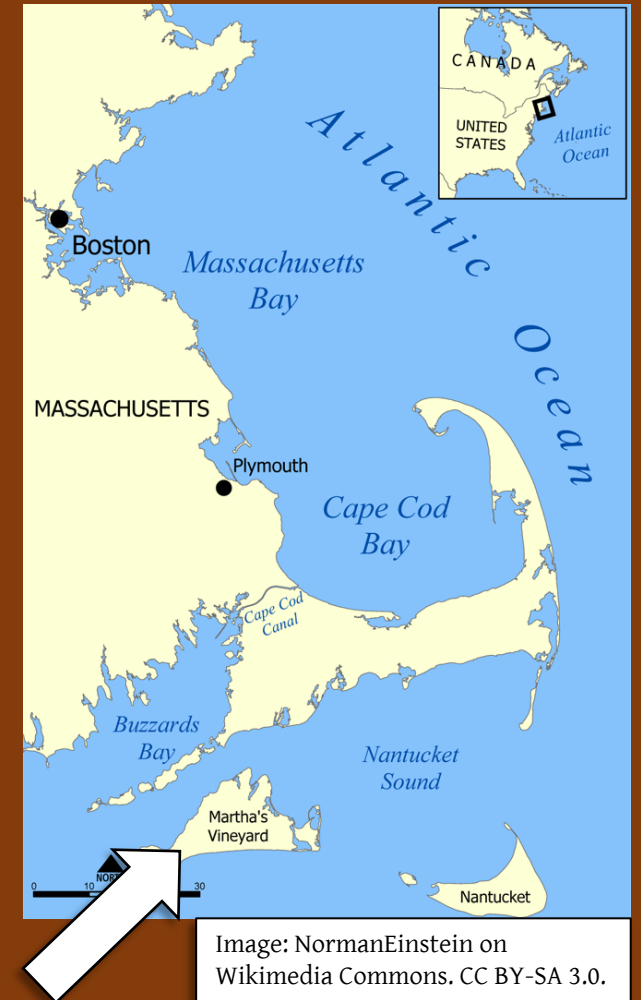
> "It is not unnatural […] to find phonetic differences becoming stronger and stronger as the group fights to maintain its identity." (Labov 1972: 29)

- Resentment of these "summer people" from the mainland drove language change among the longtime residents of Martha's Vineyard.

- People most resistant to the outsiders – fishermen from the town of Chilmark – began to favor an archaic pronunciation of /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ to differentiate themselves.

	Mainlanders	Traditionalists
right, eye	[aɪ]	[əɪ]
sound, cow	[aʊ]	[əʊ]

- It spread out among similarly-minded people on the island.

A followup study (Blake & Josey 2003) found that the situation had changed. There were far fewer traditionalists on the island, and the salience of this pronunciation had dissipated.

Grunge English

- Music-oriented subcultures often develop their own slang.

- Examples include jazz (*axe* "instrument," *beat* "exhausted, tired"), rock-oriented hippies (*heavy* "serious," *far out* "cool"), punk (*liberty spikes* "large mohawk hairdo," *straightedge* "abstaining from intoxicants"), etc.

- What was grunge?

- A genre of alternative rock popular in the early 1990s, largely associated with Seattle and certain record labels, like Sub Pop.
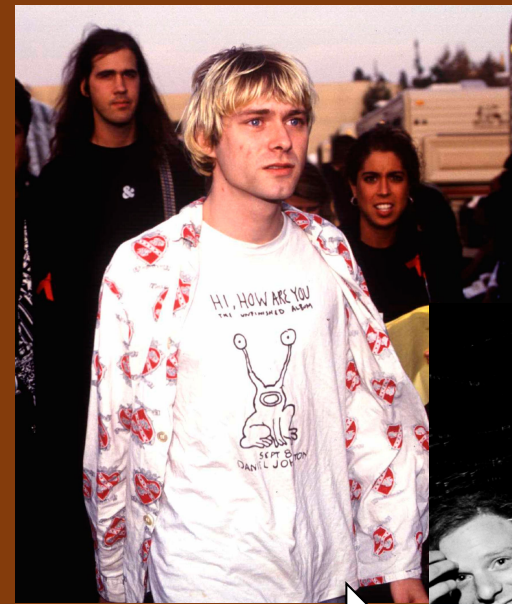
Nirvana

Mudhoney

Alice in Chains

Pearl Jam

Grunge English

- In 1992, the *New York Times* published an article on grunge with this sidebar.

- Journalist Rick Marin contacted Sub Pop records' cofounder Jonathan Poneman, who directed Marin to Megan Jasper, who used to be a receptionist at Sub Pop.

- Unfortunately for Marin, Megan Jasper made up these slang terms. They had *nothing* to do with grunge.

- But why prank the guy?

Lexicon of Grunge: Breaking the Code

All subcultures speak in code; grunge is no exception. Megan Jasper, a 25-year-old sales representative at Caroline Records in Seattle, provided this lexicon of grunge-speak, coming soon to a high school or mall near you:

WACK SLACKS: Old ripped jeans

FUZZ: Heavy wool sweaters

PLATS: Platform shoes

KICKERS: Heavy boots

SWINGIN' ON THE FLIPPITY-FLOP: Hanging out

BOUND-AND-HAGGED: Staying home on Friday or Saturday night

SCORE: Great

HARSH REALM: Bummer

COB NOBBLER: Loser

DISH: Desirable guy

BLOATED, BIG BAG OF BLOATATION: Drunk

LAMESTAIN: Uncool person

TOM-TOM CLUB: Uncool outsiders

ROCK ON: A happy goodbye

New York Times, November 15, 1992

HOAX

Polari

- In the mid-twentieth century, this was slang used by the (male) gay subculture in London, England. Associated with "camp" men in particular.

- Flourished in the 1950s, when being gay was criminal. Faded in the 1970s, with growing acceptance.

- Evolved out of an earlier trade language "used by fairground and circus people as well as prostitutes, beggars and buskers" (Baker 2002: 2). From there, it spread to the theatre, and from there, to London's gay subculture.

- Influence from other underprivileged languages, including Italian, Yiddish, Romani.

Examples
From Paul Baker's (2002) *Fantabulosa: A Dictionary of Polari and Gay Slang*

Polari 'gay language; to talk.'
From Italian *parlare* 'to speak.'

nanti 'no, none, don't, nothing.'
Probably from Italian *niente* 'nothing.'

nanti polari 'don't say anything'

omee 'man'
Perhaps from Italian *uomo* 'man.'

meshigener 'crazy'
From Yiddish *meshugana.*

gajo 'outsider'
From Romani.

ecaf 'face'
From the backwards spelling of *face.*

Polari

- Got some pop-culture attention when it was in a single by Morrissey, 1990's *Piccadilly Palare.*

The Piccadilly Palare
was just silly slang
between me and the boys in my gang.
"So <u>bona</u> to <u>vada</u>, oh, you.
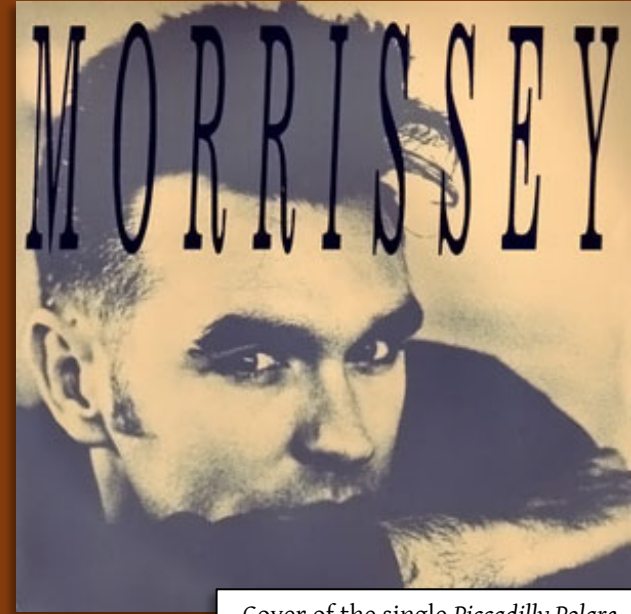Your lovely <u>eek</u> and
your lovely <u>riah</u>."

Bona 'good.'
From Italian *buono, buona* 'good'

Vada 'see.'
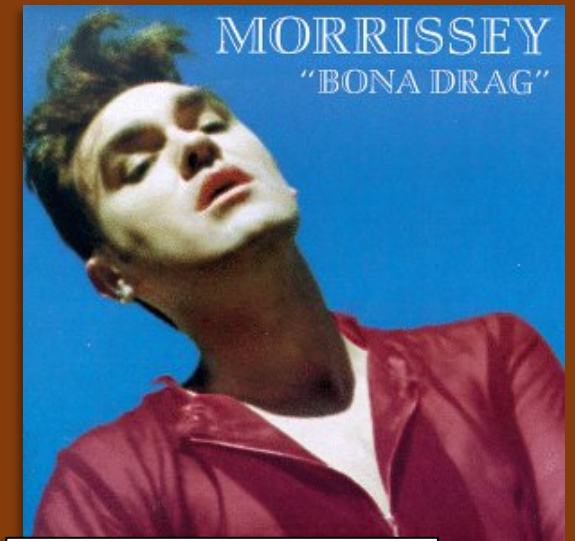From Italian *vedere* 'see'

Eek 'face.'
Abbreviation of *ecaf* 'face,' from backward spelling of *face*.

Riah 'hair.'
Hair spelt backwards.

- Also used in title of his simultaneously released compilation album, *Bona Drag* 'nice outfit.'

Discussion!

- Do you speak any social dialects? If so, what are they?
- If you don't speak any, are you aware of any?

Styles, Registers, and Beliefs

- Styles and registers can exist within and across dialects.

- *Style*

> You can speak very formally or very informally, your choice being governed by circumstances. […] We appreciate that such distinctions exist when we recognize the stylistic appropriateness of *What do you intend to do, your majesty?* and *Waddya intend doin', Rex?*

- Part of *communicative competence* is knowing which style is called for in a given interaction.

What hast thou called me?

Discussion! (p.54, q.1)

- When might each of the following sentences be stylistically appropriate?

Attention!   Come off it!   Take care!

I do hereby bequeath…   Our Father, which art in Heaven…

Been to see your Dad recently?

Get lost!   Haven't we met somewhere before?

Now if we consider the relationship between social class and income…

Styles, Registers, and Beliefs

- *Register* – How does Wardhaugh define this?

Registers are sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups.

- What does Ferguson say about register?

People participating in recurrent communication situations tend to develop similar vocabularies, similar features of intonation, and characteristic bits of syntax and phonology that they use in these situations.

- What are some "recurrent communication situations"?

Discussion!

- Do you use a particular register at work? What are some characteristic features of that register?

Styles, Registers, and Beliefs

- *Belief*
- People often regard some dialects (and their speakers) to be better than others.
- This was a driving factor in Martha's Vineyard: the mainland pronunciation of [a͡ɪ] and [a͡ʊ] was regarded as worse than the archaic, local pronunciation, [ə͡ɪ] and [ə͡ʊ].
- What do most people think of the typical NYC dialect and accent?
- Why is AAE often regarded as "slang"?

Styles, Registers, and Beliefs

Many people hold strong beliefs on various issues having to do with language and are quite willing to offer their judgments on issues. […] They believe such things as certain languages lack grammar, that you can speak English without an accent, that French is more logical than English, that parents teach their children to speak, that primitive languages exist, that English is degenerating and language standards are slipping, that pronunciation should be based on spelling, and so on and so on.

- These beliefs help shape and reinforce cultural norms concerning language.

- To be clear, linguists stand against all of these beliefs. But knowing what these beliefs *are* is an essential part of sociolinguistics, as they impact language.

Discussion! (p.55, q.5)

- Wolfram and Fasold (1974: 20) offer the following working definitions of what they call *standard*, *superstandard*, and *substandard* speech. They say of someone that:

> If his reaction to the form (not the content) of the utterance is neutral and he can devote full attention to the meaning, then the form is standard for him. If his attention is diverted from the meaning of the utterance because it sounds 'snooty,' then the utterance is superstandard. If his attention is diverted from the message because the utterance sounds like poor English, then the form is substandard.

- What are your reactions to each of the following? Try to apply Wolfram and Fasold's definitions.

Am I not?

He ain't got none.

May I leave now?

Most everyone says that.

It is I.   I seen him.

It was pretty awful.

Lay down, Fido!

He wanted to know whom we met.

Between you and I...

Are you absolutely sure?

Who did you mention it to?

Discussion! (pp.55–56, q.6)

> The law I sign today directs new funds and new focus to the task of collecting vital intelligence on terrorist threats and on <u>weapons of mass production</u>.

- What judgments might you be inclined to make about a person who always clearly and carefully articulates every word they say in all circumstances?

- A person who insists on saying both *between you and I* and *It's I*?

- A person who uses malapropisms?

- A person who, in speaking rapidly in succession to a number of others, easily shifts from one variety of speech to another?
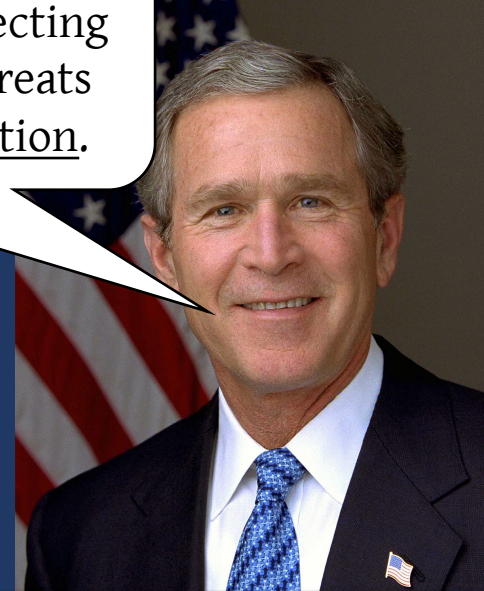
Malapropism: The ludicrous misuse of words, esp. in mistaking a word for another resembling it. (Oxford English Dictionary)

For next week...

- The topic is codes & code-switching.

- Read pp.88–118 in the textbook. I know that 20pp. is a fairly long reading. Come away from the reading with an understanding of what a *code* is, what *diglossia* is, and what *code-switching* is.