11. Language Change II

Ling 380/Soc 427 (Spring 2021)

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What we'll do...

1. Recap last week
2. Continue our discussion of language change
3. Course evaluations
4. What to do for next week

Language Change Recap

- Last week, we talked about language change.
- All languages change over time.
- Change is driven by variation, but the two are different: "Change has a direction, being both progressive and linear."
- We discussed internal change and external change.
- We discussed the recency illusion, where long term stable variation is mistaken for change.
- We discussed the Northern Cities Shift, and how it's reversing among some young people in Chicago.

This week

- In this week's reading, there is further discussion of the process of change, and how to observe it.

Language Change

[Labov] stresses the importance of having good data on which to base claims. Such data can come from studies of a community conducted at different times. However, it is often the case that only a single study is done and the different responses of various age groups are compared and conclusions drawn about changes. Such studies are *apparent-time* studies and require real-time confirmation.

- Why is this real-time confirmation necessary?
- Hibya (1996) used real-time data to confirm apparent-time data in discussing the realization of [ŋ] vs. [g] in Japanese.
- He recorded data on two occasions: at one time, during the 1940s–1950s,

Language Change

- Hibya (1996) used real-time data to confirm apparent-time data in discussing the realization of [ŋ] vs. [g] in Japanese.

- He recorded data on two occasions:

1. In the mid-1940s to mid-1950s, he recorded the speech of 60- to 80-year-olds.

2. Later, in 1986, he recorded the speech of people of a wide range of ages.

- For his study, he plotted his results, factoring in the results from both time periods.
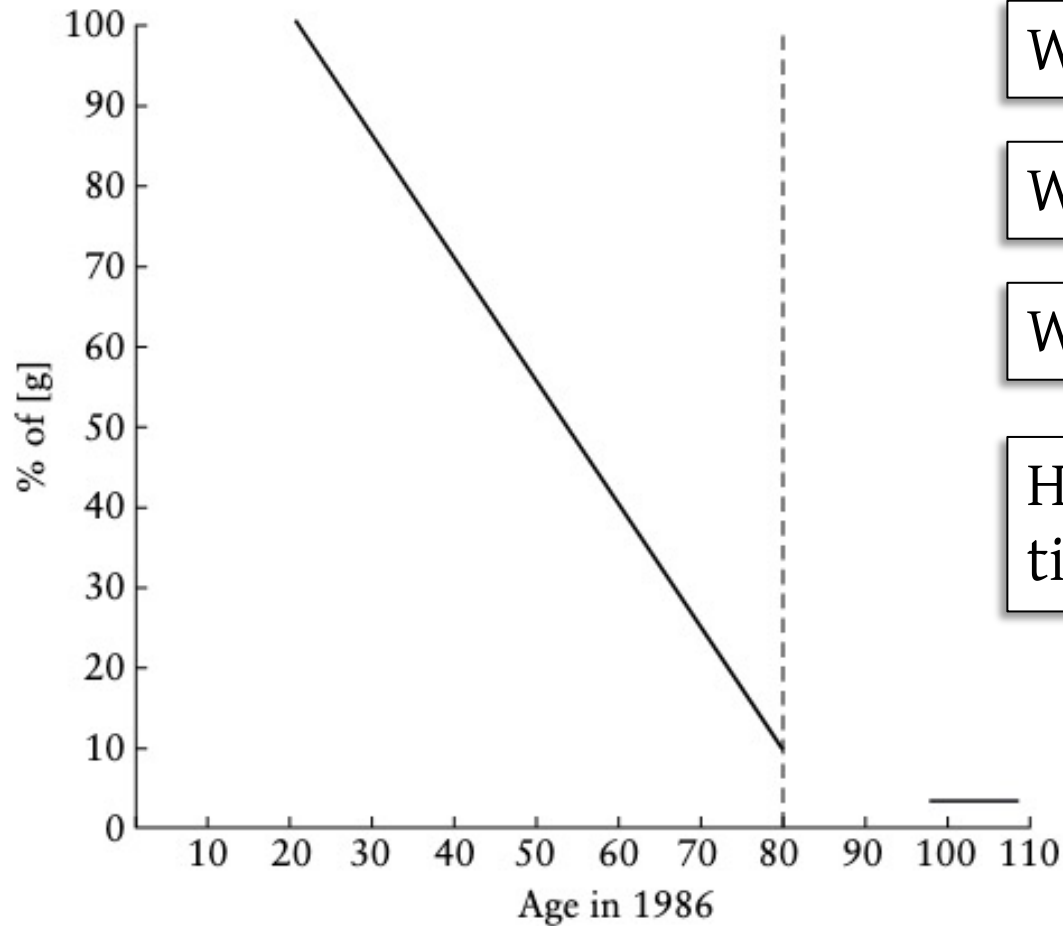
Language Change

Figure 8.2 Age and use of [g] in Tokyo
Source: based on Hibya (1996)

What's this dotted line represent?

Who are these hundred-year-old speakers?

What does this chart show us?

How did Hibya (1996) successfully use real-time data to confirm apparent-time data?

Language Change

- Language change exists. It is well documented, and can occur for all kinds of different reasons.

- We saw the Northern Cities Shift occur for unclear reasons, and we saw it begin to reverse among young speakers in Chicago.

- It would be useful to have a term to describe these two different kinds of changes: unintentional changes that seem to happen naturally or by chance, and intentional changes that seem driven by conscious decisionmaking.

(beg)   caught

bag/(hat) ⟵ hot/(cot)
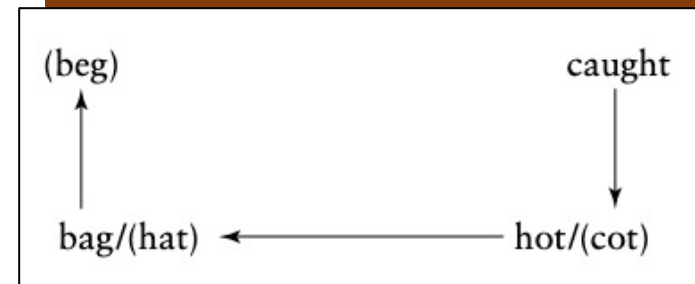
Why did it begin to reverse?

Language Change

Labov (1972) identified two basic kinds of change:

- *change from below*, i.e. from below conscious awareness. This is systematic and unconscious (like the Northern Cities Shift).

- *change from above*, which is sporadic and conscious (like the reversal of the Northern Cities Shift).

Discussion!

- What are some examples of *change from below* (unconscious change) that we've seen?

- What are some examples of *change from above* (conscious change) that we've seen?

Language Change

- Labov (1994) argues that "cities have always been at the center of linguistic innovation."

- He looked into Philadelphia to address the question of how and where change begins. He was interested in the changing pronunciation of vowels "ow" as in *out* and *down*, "ey" as in *made* and *pain*, and "ai" as in *right* and *fight*.

- How did he conduct this research? (p.210)

Why might this be the case?

Language Change

- Labov found that "the speakers who are most advanced in the sound changes are those with the highest status in their local community ... [have] the largest number of local contacts within the neighborhood, yet ... [have] the highest proportion of their acquaintances outside the neighborhood."

- In Philadelphia, the changes were led by upper working-class women, with men lagging a generation behind.

Language Change

The identification of the innovators of these sound changes allows us to rule out some of the explanations that have been offered in the past for the phenomenon of sound change. Their advanced social position and the high esteem they hold in the local community rule out the traditional charge of careless ignorance of the norms of society. Their reputation as vigorous and effective users of the language, combined with the nature of the vowel shifts themselves, makes any discussion of the principle of least effort beside the point. The central position that they hold in local networks of communication gives new life to the principle of local density, though we cannot project any discontinuity between these speakers and the exponents of the upper middle-class standard that they are leaving behind in their development of local sound changes. Once we are willing to refine our notion of prestige to give full weight to the local prestige associated with the Philadelphia dialect . . . we must be ready to recognize that such a local prestige, which appears primarily in behavior and rarely in overt reactions, is powerful enough to reverse the normal flow of influence, and allow the local patterns to move upward to the upper middle class and even to the upper class.

Language Change

- But this innovative vowel system is only found among the non-Black residents of Philadelphia.

- Black Philadelphians speak AAE, which does not match the vowel system of non-Black Philadelphians.

According to Labov, the non-black vowel system in Philadelphia gains much of its vitality from recent immigration to the city, with an accompanying renewed emphasis on local identification and assertion of local rights and privileges, together with a resistance to allowing the large black population to have its share of opportunities in the city.

- How is this similar to the Martha's Vineyard study, or to the Northern Cities Shift (and its reversal)?

- Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztIZX6bHBqU

Language Change

- Labov and Harris (1986) suggested that racialized linguistic differences were increasing in Philadelphia:

The Philadelphia speech community is separating into two distinct speech communities: white and black. They share a large part of the general English language, and a number of local words as well... But the number of differences between them in grammar and pronunciation seems to be growing steadily greater.

- How might we test this?

- One difference they highlight is the use of -s as a 'mark of the narrative past' among Black speakers, totally absent from white speech.

Is this racialized in NYC, too?

Language Change

- The Milroys suggest that change results from networks: with strong ties, change is slow; with weak ties, change is often fast.

- "New forms are adopted by innovators with weak ties to more than one group. Some of these innovations are taken up by core members of the groups. Change results."

- How have networks changed since the mid-20th century?

Language Change

Many observers have noted the weakening of network ties as social and geographic mobility increased in the late twentieth century. Social contacts increased but became shallower. One consequence for language has been the fairly rapid spread of innovation. Some, like slang, are ephemeral. Others, like accent change, produce more lasting effects. In England the old regional dialects have been much affected. Local varieties adopted linguistic features from influential centers often with women, particularly younger women, in the vanguard. The results have been the creation of various non-localized norms interposed between the local vernaculars to which many older and less educated speakers still cling and standard RP, itself gradually atrophying.

Language Change

- Eckert studied the linguistic behavior of "jocks" and "burnouts" in "an almost exclusively white suburban Detroit high school."

- What are the differences between jocks and burnouts?

- The differences between the speech of burnout girls vs. jock girls was much greater than the difference between the speech of burnout boys vs. jock boys.

- Which group – jocks or burnouts – are more linguistically conservative?

A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around some enterprise. United by this common enterprise, people come to develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values – in short, practices – as a function of their joint engagement in activity.

- What are some other "communities of practice"?

Discussion! (p.217, q.2)

- Radio, movies, and television show a preponderant use of standard forms. Such media might be expected to exert a considerable influence on linguistic change. Do they, in fact? Try to state a few testable hypotheses on this matter. Note the word testable. You may find it quite easy to come up with a number of hypotheses, but the problem is how to test these rather than just assert them to be obvious truths or well-held beliefs.

Discussion! (p.218, q.3)

- Not every innovation takes root in a language. In fact, you can argue that most innovations go nowhere. Note that the kinds of changes discussed in this chapter seem to build on something that already exists in a language, that is, some existing variant that is put to use. What kinds of linguistic innovations have you observed to go nowhere? In what way or ways do such innovations fail to meet the various requirements for 'taking root' that are discussed in this chapter?

Course evaluations

Course evaluations are now open! Please take some time to fill out the evaluation for this class:

https://csi.mce.cc/

For next week…

- Next week, we'll be reviewing for the final exam. Please bring at least two questions pertaining to topics discussed since the Midterm.

- We'll also go over quiz #4 (the last quiz).