# CAC8

Sociolinguistics

## OBJECTIVES

- Language and Identity
- Group membership - 'us' and 'them'
- Factors in variation in speech

## 'Langue' and 'parole'

- Two different and complementary ways of thinking about language...
- Ferdinand de Saussure (1916)
  - **Langue**: the principles of (a) language. A system shared by all speakers.
  - **Parole:** actual uses of a language (speech acts) by individuals in real situations.

## Formal language learning

- When we learn languages through formal education we learn **langue**.
- General language rules.
- Always a gap between langue and parole.
- Parole is as *varied* as the individuals that use a langue.

## Variations in language use

- Does language use vary in a *consistent* way?
- What factors affect language use?
  - In general
  - In a particular group (society, 'culture'?)

## Greetings in UK English

- Alternatives to "Hello" ?
  - Hi! (Hey!)
  - Hiya!
  - How's things?
  - Yo!
  - 'Sup?
  - How's it going?

- Nah then!
- Wotcher!
- Long time no see!
- Alright?
- A'reyt?
- What fettle?
- Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening! etc

## Language culture

- Not *all* speakers have all these alternatives available to them in the same way.
- Cultural/social rules place limits on who can use what sorts of language.

## Language culture

- We use language to create an identity:
  - assert membership of groups
  - deny membership of other groups
- But, we are also *restrained* by the meanings attached to membership of these groups and the languages choices they require.

## Group membership

- "Barbarian"
- Greek *barbaros* "foreign, strange, ignorant,"
  root *barbar - **echoic of unintelligible speech of foreigners.**
  - Sanskrit /barbara-/ "stammering," also "non-Aryan,"
  - Latin /balbus/ "stammering,"
  - Czech /blblati/ "to stammer".

## שִׁבֹּלֶת "Shibboleth"



- **shibbólet**: "the part of a plant containing grains, such as an *ear* of corn or a *stalk* of grain"
- Used by the people of Gilead to distinguish their enemies, the Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the "sh" / ʃ / sound 'correctly'.
- Now used to describe any (often trivial) thing (word, behaviour etc) used as a marker of group belonging.

## Speech variations

- **Dialect** (primarily geographical)
- **Styles** – people can use *another layer of variation* on top of their dialect and choose different 'styles' of speech for different situations.
- How and when people choose different styles can tell us about their position in society and how they feel about it.

## Politeness

- One of the primary style changes distinguishes between levels of 'politeness'.
- How exactly 'politeness' is expressed depends on the language/culture/society.
- All societies have it!



Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some language universals in language use.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Changes in vocabulary

| humble | neutral | respectful |
|--------|---------|------------|
| *itadaku* | *taberu* | *meshiagaru* |
| *haiken suru* | *miru* | *go-ran ni naru* |

**Also, changes in "morphology" (the form of words)**

- *taberu → tabemasu*

- *~da → ~desu → ~de aru → ~de arimasu*

## Other common changes

- Speed of speech
  - Slower → more formal
- Tone of voice / intonation
- Structuredness ("grammaticality")
  - More 'correct' → more formal
- Length of utterance (directness)
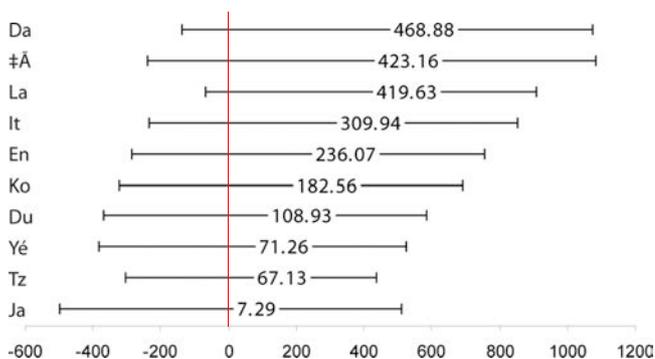  - Longer → more formal

## Length of utterance...

- Shut the window!

- Excuse me, can/could you shut the window (please)?

- I'm terribly sorry to bother you but, if it's not too much trouble, do you think you might possibly find your way to shutting the window for me?

## Turn-taking

- During a conversation, who gets to speak?

- How do the people involved decide/know whose turn is next?

- How long are "turns"?

- Are there gaps between speakers?
  - "Overlap"

**Mean time (ms) of turn transitions for each language - speakers of all langs. have an avg. offset time < 500 ms.**

| Language | Mean time (ms) |
|----------|----------------|
| Da | 468.88 |
| ‡Ā | 423.16 |
| La | 419.63 |
| It | 309.94 |
| En | 236.07 |
| Ko | 182.56 |
| Du | 108.93 |
| Yé | 71.26 |
| Tz | 67.13 |
| Ja | 7.29 |

Tanya Stivers et al. PNAS 2009;106:10587-10592
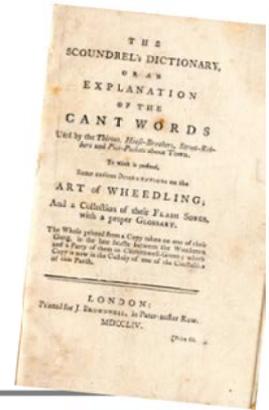
PNAS

## Register

- Special words used by a particular group (within a society or 'culture'), often associated with a particular activity or profession.

- **Cant, argot, jargon** – specialised 'language' often used to mark membership of a **'sub-culture'**

# Polari: "Putting on the Dish"



# Cant – Argot – Jargon

- **Thieves Cant** ('pelting speech')
  - **Ken** - House
  - **Bowsing ken** - Alehouse
  - **Lag** - Water
  - **Autem** - Church
  - **Mort** - Woman
  - **Cove** - Man (widely understood!)



*The scoundrel's dictionary, or an explanation of the cant words used by the thieves, house-breakers, street-robbers and pick-pockets about town. 1754*

# Multi-ethnic London English (MLE)

- "Over-lexicalisation"
- **Stab:** plug, ching, bore, dip, kweng, splash.
- **Gun:** burner, wap, hand ting, iron, leng, mash, mac, mop, scram, skeng, spinner, stick, trey, tum-tum, wap.
- **Knife:** skeng, ox, Rambo, ramsey, shank, sword

https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/29/ching-wap-ox-slang-interpreters-decipher-texts-for-court-evidence

# Cockney Rhyming Slang

- Butcher's (hook) → look
- Dog (and bone) → phone
- Trouble (and strife) → wife
- Apples (and pears) → stairs
- Frog (and toad) → road
- Barnet (Fair) → hair
- Syrup (of figs) → wig



# Sub-culture languages

- **'Anti-language'** (same grammar, diff. vocab.)
- Develops as a way of preventing people from outside the group understanding what 'in-group' members are talking about.
- eg. *Grypsera*: Polish prison speech.
- 'Over-lexicalisation': invention of many new terms to confuse outsiders.

More here → http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20160211-the-secret-anti-languages-youre-not-supposed-to-know

*The Armstrong and Miller Show*
eg. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WK33sl64YNw

# When things go wrong...

# Context…

Gracie Fields
(1898-1979)

Vera Lynn
(1917 - pres)

# Mismatch

- Apparent Identity (situation, clothes, actions)
- Accent ('Received Pron', 'RP')

**VS**

- Vocabulary / slang (London youth)
- Topic ('wrong' considering situation)

- **AUTHENTICITY**

# Gender variations

- Another fundamental part or people's identity is gender identification.
- In many societies there are differences between male and female language use.
  **Why?**

Review of research: *Gender Differences in Language Use: An Analysis of 14,000 Text Samples.* Newman et al. 2008.

# 'Androcentric' language

- Male-dominated societies end up with male-dominated language.
  - '**man**kind' → all human beings
  - 'chair**man**' → leader of a committee
- Replacement with gender neutral terms
  - 'humanity', 'people'
  - 'chair'

# Social/cultural causes...

- **Education**
- Many societies have thought that male and female children should receive different types of education.
- Similar education for both boys and girls tends to means fewer language differences.

# Marriage customs

- Where does a newly married couple live?
  - **Matrilocal** (uxorilocal) residency
    - Husbands move close to bride's family
  - **Patrilocal** residency
    - Brides move near to husband's family
- *Consistent interaction* can mean gender language features are transferred.

# Social Class

- Social class: purely economic?
- Social class as identity?
- "Hyper-correctness" of middle class.
- Eg. UK English
  - 'Dropped' H, pronunciation of final 'g'
  - " 'untin', shootin' and fishin' "

# Social Class

- Linguistic markers of 'class'
- New York: $/t/ \rightarrow /\theta/$
- Norwich (also much of UK): $/ʔ/ \rightarrow /t/$
- Changes in pronunciation of these marker items can be used to claim group membership… but **'authenticity'** is a problem.

Fake Cockney (Mockney) accent?

See: Montgomery, M. (1986). *An introduction to language and society.* Routledge, London ; New York. (new edition, 2013)



# "Mockney" - "Estuary English"



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1mbxFsp2x0

# Summary

- Within any 'language' there are many possible variations.
- Variations are often *consistent* and related to social structures and social norms.
- Variations have 'value' attached to them.
- Language is an important tool for creating/claiming social identity (or identities!)

# Next Week

- **Reading**
- Knapp & Hall: *Effects of Gesture and Posture on Human Communication*