

Homework 8 (English Version)

Sociolinguistics—Thanksgiving Version

For this homework assignment, you will be observing how language use varies as a factor of some of the sociolinguistic variables we have talked about in class. Specifically, you will use the set of questions on the back of this assignment to conduct a survey of the way that the people you encounter over Thanksgiving break differ in their phonological, lexical, and syntactic choices. Most of these questions were adapted from Bert Vaux's dialect survey, which can be found at: <http://www4.uwm.edu/FLL/linguistics/dialect/maps.html>

Select at least 8 of the questions on the back of this page to use in your survey. If you have favorite questions from the Vaux survey that I did not include on this list, you may swap them in.

Collect data for each of those 8 questions from at least 6 people (8 questions x 6 people = 48 pieces of data). If possible, try to include at least one person who is 5–10 years younger than you, at least one who is 15–30 years older than you, and at least one who is more than 30 years older than you.

You may collect your data by a) informal observation of speech patterns, b) surreptitious elicitation of data during conversations, or c) formal questioning.

In addition to answers to these questions, try to obtain this information from each of your participants:

- exact age
- gender
- city and/or state of birth
- all other cities and/or states lived in for more than 2 years
- highest level of education attained (e.g., 4th grade, high school graduate, college graduate, completed graduate or professional school)
- relationships (familial or otherwise), if any, between speakers tested

After you have collected your data, write up your observations about language variation and the factors that might contribute to it in your population in one piece of prose (1–2 double-spaced pages). Please include a list or table (NOT a graph!) with the data collected from each participant on an additional page. Do NOT give the full names of your study participants—instead, you might use just first names or initials to identify them. In your write up, be sure to describe the sociocultural context in which your observations were made (e.g., during Thanksgiving dinner, during a football game, over the phone, while travelling over the river and through the woods). Provide details about any level of formality, cultural or ethnic variables, or age/gender/regional/educational variation that you think are relevant to your survey. You should also feel free to remark on any differences in language use that you notice that are not mentioned in this assignment.

This assignment must be typed. You should collect data on your own, but you may discuss your results with others before writing them up.

Phonological differences

Be sure to use IPA when you describe these pronunciations in your write-up. [Note, if you're asking someone to pronounce something rather than just observing the way they talk, do not ask them to repeat something that you've said. Instead, either have them read the word, or elicit it from them by asking a leading question like "What's that dessert over there called again?"]

1. pronunciation of "pecan" and "pecan pie"
2. pronunciation of "caught" vs. "cot"
3. pronunciation of "pin" vs. "pen"
4. pronunciation of "Thanksgiving" (listen for the stress in this one)

Lexical differences

5. What is your general term for a sugary carbonated drink? (e.g., pop, soda, coke, seltzer)
6. What do you call the insect that flies around in the summer and has a rear section that glows in the dark? (e.g., firefly, lightening bug)
7. What (if any) is the distinction between dinner and supper?
8. What word do you use for plural "you"? (e.g., you, yous, y'all, you guys, yins, yoots)
9. Can the word "like" be used as a verb of communication? (e.g., "She was like, "Octopi are awesome!")

Syntactic differences

10. Can the word "because" be used as a preposition? (e.g., "Thanksgiving is awesome because pie.")
11. Can you produce two modal auxiliary verbs in a row? (e.g., "You might ought to think about doing the dishes." "I might could do it later.")
12. Can you use the construction "needs + past-tense V" without a "to be" between them? (e.g., "This plant needs watered." "This leftover turkey needs eaten!")