

ENG124: Language and Society

4. Language in a Social Context: Linguistic Variation

Language viewed through the window of the social

- The social agent and his place in a social world
 - An agent who not only accesses lists, combines and decomposes but also *embeds* the linguistic expression in a usage context, assigning it *different interpretations* in different contexts.
- The psychiatrist helped torture victims.
 - Combinatorial and contextual aspects of ambiguity

Assumption so far. . .

- Language production and understanding
 - Reference and combinatoriality
- Underlying assumption
 - An ideal or typical agent/user
 - Invariance and homogeneity
- However, the actual use of language imposes choices on both source and recipient.

The actual use of language

- The actual use of language imposes choices on both source and recipient.
- Challenges a simplistic view of *reference* and *combinatoriality*
- Underlines linguistic *variation* rather than linguistic *homogeneity*
- Makes *a language* the frame of reference

A language

- The question of what is *a language* is not the same as what is *language*.
- What is language?
 - A universalistic answer
 - Declarative and procedural aspects
- What is *a language*?
 - A particularistic answer
 - A language-specific lexicon and language-specific procedures at various levels

Reference - a relook

- Naming is a socio-cultural practice.
- Referential possibilities are defined by how cultures view reality.
- Language specific naming practices determined by a culture's world view
- Kinship terminology: Neighbourhood as an extension of family in the Indian context
- Terminology of flora etc.
- Finer classifications in flora in specific languages
- Colour distinctions

Colour naming

- Well-known examples of non-correspondence of colour terms across languages
- Russian: no single term for blue. Instead it has *goluboy* “light pale blue”; and *siniy* “dark, bright blue”, which are regarded as different colours, not different shades of the same colour.
- The English *Brown* has no equivalent in French; the range of colours denoted by *brown* would be described in French as *brun*, *marron*, and *jaune*.
- Welsh *glas* translates into English as *blue*, *green* or even *grey*.
- Dialectal differences: the colour names *nyu:l* and *sabz* in D1 in Kashmiri translate into *nyu:l* in D2

Colour-naming

- Very often, it is not just an individual colour term which does not have an exact equivalent in another language.
- Rather it is the set of colour terms as a whole that fails to correspond with that of another language.
- The Bantu languages are on the whole rather poor in colour terms.

- The Southern African language Tsonga, for instance, has only seven basic colour terms. These with their approximate English equivalents are:

ntima: black

rikuma: grey

basa: white, beige;

tshuwuka: red, pink, purple

xitshooana: yellow, orange

rihzala: green, blue

ribungu: dark brown, dull yellowish brown

Terminology of rituals

- Terminology of rituals such as birth, marriage, death etc.
- Floral offering/tribute; phu:l bhent/arpit karna (Hindi); pesh karna/chaDha:na (urdu), etc.
- The Jain practice of Santhara or Sallekhana
- The Rajasthan High Court declared Santhara an offence punishable under IPC, holding that the practice is tantamount to an attempt to commit suicide, punishable under Section 309 of the IPC illegal in the same sense as a suicide. The Supreme Court stayed the judgement subsequently.

Procedures: a relook

- Interrogative systems across languages:
 - 1) **Interrogative distribution:** generally, occurrence in an interactive context
 - 2) **Interrogative syntax:** inversion of normal order of elements, Qwords, Qparticles, affixes, tags, and other devices
 - 3) **Interrogative intonation:** predominance of terminal rising or high pitch
 - 4) **Interrogative gesture:** eyebrows lifted, head inclined forward, mouth left open at the end of the utterance etc.

Q-feature classification

The Q-features generally studied:

- 1) **Interrogative elements:** interrogative particles and affixes, words, tags etc.
- 2) **Intonation:** sentence/tag intonation;
Qparticle/Qword stress
- 3) **Order:** Main constituent inversion,
positional relationships of tag, QP or QW
to clause or clause constituent

Cross-cutting the classification

- 1) **The type of expected response:** yes-no (YN), information (IN), alternative (AL) [Mandarin: *nii mierge chu.chiuh bu chu.chiuh a?*; Lit. Are you going out not going out tomorrow?] etc.
- 2) **The type of Q-features:** those pertaining to clause or sentence as opposed to those pertaining to a word, essentially a morphology-syntax dichotomy.
 - This dichotomy reflects a corresponding focus of the interrogation on the entire proposition or a subpart of it, which has interesting consequences for how interrogatives are interpreted.

Culture specific features

- Culture specific features that can add nuances to the general interrogative theme:
 - 1) Degree of familiarity between the Speaker and the Hearer
 - 2) Degree of doubt/certainty about the proposition in question
 - 3) Rhetoricity of the question
 - 4) Echo in the question
- Variations in the form of the interrogative sentences come from the features (1-4).

How does interrogation work in English?

- **IN-Question**(e.g. What are you doing?)
- **YN-Question** (e.g. Are you coming?)
- **TAG-Question** (e.g. You are coming, aren't you?)
- **RH-Question** (e.g. Who hasn't heard of Mahatma Gandhi?)
- **ECH-Question** (e.g. You are going to ask whom for what? "Repeat yourself!")
- **IND-Question** (e.g. I wondered whether he would accompany me.)
- **AL-Question** (e.g. Would you accompany me or you won't?)

Rhetorical Question

- A question asked not to interrogate but to make a forceful assertion
- The term rhetorical comes from the threefold division of knowledge in ancient Greece.
- The scholastic trivium: *Grammar, Logic, Rhetorics*, where rhetorics dealt with the art of persuasion.
- *logos, pathos* and *ethos*

IN-Question in English

- **How does the IN-Question work?**
 - Where is Sita?
 - What are you reading?
- **Negation not possible:**
 - *Where isn't Sita?
 - *What aren't you reading?

How IN-Qs interact with negation

- Consider the following:
 - Where isn't Sita – in New York last week, in Chicago now.
 - What aren't we reading – fiction last week, history now.
- Negation gives a rhetorical dimension to the content question – pungency or sarcasm.

Linguistic variation

- A pervasive feature of multilingual communities
 - many *varieties*, which are identified as distinct languages, coexist.
 - convergences among neighbouring languages
- Even monolingual communities exhibit
 - a rich repertoire of *varieties* of the same language
 - e.g. dialects, idiolects and sociolects

Idiolect

We must be careful not to overrate the uniformity of existing languages: it is far enough from being absolute. In a true and defensible sense, every individual speaks a language different from every other.

Whitney, 1875

Dialect

- Geographical distances between communities, which breed differences in terms of linguistic features at all levels
- The term *dialect* is generally used to refer to regional varieties of a given language.

Dialects

- **Regional varieties of a language**
 - A language may have as many dialects as the regions it is spoken in.
- **English**
 - American / British / Irish / Chinese / Nigerian / Scottish / Indian etc.
 - Indian English: yet to be recognized as a standard variety of English – as many *Indian Englishes* as there are indigenous language varieties.

Dialects of Hindi

- One of the most important dialects of Hindi is the **Khariboli** (also Khadiboli or the Khari dialect), which is spoken in Western Uttar Pradesh.
 - Khariboli is the variety of Hindi language that is used in administration and education.
 - It was largely a colloquial variety in its early days, but post 18th century, it started being used as the literary form.
 - Almost all the significant modern Hindi literature from 18th Century onwards has been produced in Khariboli.
 - It contains a large number of Persian and Arabic words.

Dialects of Hindi

- **Brajbhasa**, spoken in the region of Braj.
- Brajbhasa was the language of the Bhakti movement, and of the neo-Vaishnavite religious sects, whose chief deity was Krishna.
- Therefore, much of the literature in Braj composed in medieval times pertains to Krishna (Meera Bai's early verses in Mewari and later in Braj; Surdas)
- As of now, no claims for Braj as a language in its own right despite a rich literary tradition

Surdas: Braj Bhasha

निसिदिन बरसत नैन हमारे।

सदा रहत पावस ऋतु हम पर, जबते स्याम सिधारे॥
अंजन थिर न रहत अँखियन में, कर कपोल भये
कारे।

कंचुकि-पट सूखत नहिं कबहुँ, उर बिच बहत पनारे॥
आँसू सलिल भये पग थाके, बहे जात सित तारे।
'सूरदास' अब डूबत है ब्रज, काहे न लेत उबारे॥

Dialects of Hindi

- Yet another dialect is **Mumbaiyya**, a variety of Hindi spoken primarily in Mumbai – an inter-mingling of Hindi, English, Marathi and Gujarati, as well as Telugu, Tamil and other languages from South India, a dialect popularised by Hindi movies.
- Other major regional varieties of Hindi: Awadhi, Kanauji, Bundeli, Bagheli, Chhattisgarhi, also called Kosali (Lahariya/Khalwahi), Hariyanvi (Bangaru or Jatu), etc.
- Dialect names very often turn out to be place names because of the regional affiliation.

Eastern Dialects of Hindi

Bhojpuri: मोरा गोरा अंग लई ले, मोहे शाम रंग दई दे

Maithili:

- 1) के पतिया लए जायत रे मोरा प्रियतम पास
- 2) दधि मागे जशोधा के लाल, कि गोकुल हम ना जइबे

Magahi: Jiya ho bihar ke lala jiya tu hazaar saala
jiya ho tu bhor ba lala jiya tu hazaar sala
jiya tu hazaar tani naachi ke
tani gaayi ke, tani naachi gaayi sabke mann behlawo
re bhaiya

Bajjika:

Historical roots

- Apabhraṃśa: Hindi dialects of the Gangetic plain
- Ardhamagadhi Prakrit: Eastern dialects of Hindi
- After Maithili being recognised as a separate language, the dialect division has to be reformulated.

Where are you from?

- Henry Higgins: I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets.

Pygmalion: G.B. Shaw

- BBC Radio show on dialects
- Multiple regional identities
- occupational mobility and information explosion

- Supplementary reading available at:

A-ONE Photocopying Centre

Dialect and Accent

- Dialect – variations at all the levels of representation
 - American, Indian and British English
 - What are the distinguishing features?
 - Syntactic, morphological, lexical, phonological
- Accent: variations of the phonological kind
 - American/British/Indian accent
 - What are the distinguishing features?
 - Silent /r/, rolled /r/, pronounced /r/, aspiration, nasal twang, deaffrication, etc
- Usually speakers of different dialects have different accents. But speakers of the same dialect may have different accents too.
- Lect
 - Varieties of language conditioned by various social factors
- Is *a language* the frame of reference for a dialect?
 - Is a dialect a form of deviation from *a Language*.

Language–Dialect Asymmetry

- Gangetic dialects of Hindi
- Eastern dialects of Hindi
- Historical roots are different (Apabhraṃśa and Ardhamagadhi)
- With Maithili being recognised as a language in its own right, the language-dialect distribution in the case of Hindi needs a reformulation
- Also, a distinct dialect of Hindi spoken in Bihar

Language - Dialect Distinction

- Conceptual issues
 - Is the distinction real and tenable?
 - What are its parameters?
 - When and how does a variety cease to be a dialect and become a language?
 - Can a language become a dialect?
 - How do we determine the language that a dialect is affiliated to?

Language-Dialect Distinction contd...

1) Is a given variety a *Language* or a *Dialect*?

- Numerical strength of speakers
- Presence or absence of a script of its own
- Presence or absence of a grammar
- Presence or absence of a literary tradition
- Does a Dialect x belong to language A or B?
 - Mutual intelligibility between varieties

Numerical Strength?

- Numerical strength is a purely incidental parameter.
- It cannot be a legitimate argument for whether a variety should be a language or a dialect though it has sometimes been misused as one.
- A majoritarian prejudice

Script?

- Script is an invention, it doesn't come with the language.
- Two dialects of the same language may be written in different scripts (Punjabi in Eastern and Western Punjab written in Gurumukhi and Shahmukhi respectively; Kashmiri in Perso-arabic and Devanagari)).
- Two different languages may be written in the same script (English and French in Roman or Bengali and Manipuri in Eastern Nagari, at least until recently).

Grammar and Literary Tradition

- Every language/dialect has a grammar.
- An explicitly stated grammar is the linguist's artifact.
- Literary tradition is what people give to languages/dialects.
- Braj: a dialect of Hindi with as strong a literary tradition as Khariboli and stronger than many languages of the region.

What is dialect X a dialect of?

- Does a given dialect X belong to language A or to language B?
 - Commonalities: a shared lexicon, or shared rules, etc. resulting in mutual intelligibility
- Is mutual intelligibility a reliable criterion? What about **dialect continuum** situations?
 - Chain of dialects spoken throughout a region.
 - At any given point in the chain, speakers of a dialect can understand people who live in adjacent areas but not those living further down along the chain, the intelligibility decreasing as you move further away.

The Dialect Continua

- A very common situation in multilingual regions such as Europe, Africa and India
 - An extensive continuum linking all the dialects of languages known as German, Dutch and Flemish
 - The Scandinavian continuum – Norwegian, Swedish and Danish
 - West Romance continuum – Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, French, and Italian
 - North Slavic continuum – Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, Polish and Russian
 - Many dialect continua in the Indian subcontinent

What is dialect X a dialect of?

- Situations where commonalities are assumed despite there being none.
- In these situations, the relationship of a dialect to a language is an artifact of political decision making.
- The Chinese situation: The standardised national and official language *Putonghua* is a variety of Mandarin and the dialects which are not even mutually intelligible are subsumed under ONE LANGUAGE.

Some Answers...

- Language-Dialect distinction — is the distinction real and tenable?
 - A question of standardisation
 - Engineering of the linguistic ecology by state-defined language policy
 - Marginalisation — another logical outcome

Some answers...

- What is dialect X a dialect of?
 - A matter of territorial divisions, which is a matter of political decision making
 - Sylheti: a dialect of Bangla or Assamese?
 - Chakma: a language in Bangla Desh and a dialect of Bengali in India
 - A matter of political expediency
 - Constituent assembly debates (CAD) on the status of Urdu in post independence India when Urdu was already being identified with Islam
 - What today counts as Urdu as opposed to Hindi, Hindi-Urdu, Hirdi, Hindustani, Hindavi, rekhta and a number of so-called languages, dialects and speech varieties has been a matter of controversy for a long time.
 - Urdu-e-mualla: an exalted cantonment (Babar in 16th C), zuban-e Urdu-e mualla, zuban-e Urdu-e shahi (18th C poets)

What is dialect X a dialect of?

- A Matter of political expediency
- Communities clamouring for their dialects or languages to be given the status of constitutionally recognized languages
- Three amendments in the 8th Schedule of the constitution of India since independence signifying the change of status of several varieties from dialects to languages (Maithili, Santhali, Bodo, Dogri)

The army and navy metaphor

- A language is a dialect with an army and a navy. (Weinreich)
 - Emergence of a variety as the standard language is a contingent, socio-economic and political phenomenon
 - A political power backed notion of “standard” language
 - All languages are dialects – its just that some dialects are more equal than the rest