



ENG423A:  
Current Issues in  
Linguistics  
Language and Social Control  
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# What is social control?

- The term “social control” by introduced by 19<sup>th</sup> century sociologists to refer to the set of rules and standards in society that bind individuals to conventionalised standards.
- There are two basic forms of social control recognised by subsequent scholars in social sciences:
  - 1) Formal means: Regulations imposed by recognised agencies
  - 2) Informal means: Internalised through socialisation

# How is language a means of social control?

- Leibowitz (1974) spearheaded the discussion on how language is not merely a means of communication or a social resource, but also a means of social control.

# Official languages

- Education – mother-tongue education, higher education – medium of instructions and languages taught; languages included in competitive exams; drop outs.
- Governance - access of political processes through official languages; implicit and silent recognition of certain languages; active development and support of certain languages.
- Economic activities – regulations and permissions for book keeping and filing taxes in select language(s).

# Language and political access - United States

- The requirement that one wishing to become a citizen must show an ability to read and write English was added much later in the internal Security Act of 1950. The rationale for the English literacy requirement is seen in the Report of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the later remarks of Senator McCarren.
- "The matter of voting is an excellent example of the inadequacy of the present situation (referring to the fact that the former naturalization law did not require English literacy) : Many persons even after they have become naturalized are unable to participate fully in the general affairs of their communities and states because of their inability to read English. This causes them to draw together and apart from- English - speaking people in order to discuss such matters in their native tongue and thus become further-isolated instead of, being fully incorporated into their communities." (Leibowitz 1972)

- A common language forges a similarity of attitude and values which can have important unifying aspects 'while different languages tend to divide and make direction from the center more difficult.

# Standardisation

- Even though every language is a composite of dialects, many people talk and think about a language as if it were a well-defined fixed system with various dialects diverging from this norm.
- Prescriptive grammarians, or language “purists”, usually consider the dialect used by political leaders and the upper socioeconomic classes, the dialect used for literature or printed documents, the dialect taught in schools, as the correct form of the language.

- A standard dialect (or prestige dialect) of a particular language may have social functions – to bind people together or to provide a common written form for multi-dialectal speakers.
- It is, however, neither more expressive, more logical, more complex, nor more regular than any other dialect or language.
- Any judgments, therefore, as to the superiority or inferiority of a particular dialect or language are social judgments, not linguistic or scientific ones.



# Standard Language

- Standards do not arise through natural course of linguistic evolution
- It is a result of direct and deliberate intervention of society. This intervention is called Standardisation.
- A standard is not inherent, but an acquired or deliberately and artificially imposed characteristic.

# Processes of standardization

- A typical standard language would have passed through the following processes:
  1. Selection
  2. Codification
  3. Elaboration of function
  4. Acceptance

# Selection

- Either a variety of political and commercial significance or a amalgam of various varieties
- So, the variety and the people who speak it gain prestige
- It is possible that the chosen variety has no native speakers at all. Eg: Classical Hebrew in Israel

# Codification

- Dictionary and grammar books to bolster the variety and its prestige, so that everyone agrees on what is 'correct'
- Once codification takes place, it becomes necessary for any ambitious citizen to learn the 'correct' forms and not use any 'incorrect' form that may exist in their native variety.

# Elaboration of function

- Selected variety can be used in all function related to governance and writing.
  - Eg: In Parliament and courts; in bureaucratic, academic and scientific writing.
- Developing new conventions of using existing forms.
  - Eg: formulate question papers, writing formal letters etc.

# Acceptance

- The variety has to be accepted by the relevant population as the variety of the community.
- The standard is supposed to serve as an unifying force for the state, a symbol of its independence from other states and as a marker of its difference from other states. Eg: Urdu in Pakistan.
- It is this symbolic function which motivates states to develop a standard.

# Consequences of standardization

- Standardization is one of the main agents of inequality.
- Sociolinguistic patterns reveal uneven distribution of access to the standard variety.
- Standard Variety engenders the notion that it is somehow the ‘real’ language or the language as it ‘should be’
- and that other varieties of it are degenerate or corrupt versions of it.
- There is usually a great deal of resistance to changes in a standard language and resistance to new usages.

# Standardization and literacy

- The acquisition of literacy presupposes the existence of a codified written standard.
- Standardization depends on the existence of a written form of language.
- When a language is written, linguistic matters can be subject to regulation in a way they cannot be when a language exists in spoken form only.
- Linguistic matters can then be governed by a superimposed 'logic' which is derived from the way in which items are arranged in print.



# Linguistic Imperialism

- Robert Philipson (1992) - Phillipson argues that the defining characteristics of linguistic imperialism are:
- As a form of linguicism, which manifests in favoring the dominant language over another along similar lines as racism and sexism.
- As a structurally manifested idea, where more resources and infrastructure are given to the dominant language.
- As being ideological, in that it encourages beliefs that the dominant language form is more prestigious than others. These ideas are hegemonic and internalized and naturalized as being "normal".
- As intertwined with the same structure as imperialism in culture, education, media, and politics.



# Linguistic Imperialism

- As having an exploitative essence, which causes injustice and inequality between those who use the dominant language and those who do not.
- As having a subtractive influence on other languages, in that learning the dominant language is at the expense of others.
- As being contested and resisted, because of these factors.



# Linguistic purism or linguistic protectionism

- The prescriptive practice of defining or recognizing one variety of a language as being purer or of intrinsically higher quality than other varieties. Linguistic purism was institutionalized through language academies.



# Language and national Identity

- The Bhutanese population is composed of various linguistic groups dominated by three major ethnic groups – Ngalops, Sarchops and Nepalis, distinguished basically by their linguistic differences.
- The official language of Bhutan is Dzongkha, which is derived from Tibetan.
- Dzongkha is presented as the key symbol of national identity in Bhutan.
- Propagation of Dzongkha in Bhutan took place in a closed society under absolute monarchy. Adoption of Dzongkha as the national and official language of the country had not been a consensus decision arrived at by multilingual Bhutanese society.
- The rationale given for the adoption of Dzongkha is that Bhutan must use a single language owing to its geographical and population size.

# Language rights in the legal system Canada

- Right to use English/French in the parliament/Legislature
- Laws are bilingual
- Right to use English or French in courts
- Right to trial in language of choice : criminal;  
federal/provincial/territorial; civil offences

# Politeness

- When one discusses about politeness, one is alluding straightforwardly and implication to society. Albeit, the demonstration of acting politely is performed by a singular specialist, the act is inherently a social one.
- Politeness is a structure that intercedes between the individual and the social.
- Brown & Levinson (1987) build on the hypothesis that all able grown-up individuals are worried about their 'face', the mental self-portrait they present to other people, and that they perceive others have comparable 'face' needs.

- Politeness theory focuses on the idea of a “model person” who is a rational agent.
- This rational agent can think strategically and is conscious of the language choices to communicate and facilitate proper language use in his social circle.
- This “model person” has two different faces- positive and negative; and is a fluent of a language with two unique qualities- “Face and rationality”
- By *rationality* it is meant that the “model person” would be able to use a specific mode of reasoning to make language choices that will satisfy his *wants*.

- Tanaka and Kawade (2008) predict that a speaker will use polite strategies whenever he/she is in a situation where he/she perceives himself/herself as socially and/or psychologically distant from his/her addressee.
- Power relationship becomes crucial in the selection of politeness strategies (Upadhyay, 1999). Syntactic constructions like interrogatives, imperatives, declaratives, etc. play important role in studying politeness strategies through various types of speech acts like order, request, offer, urge, etc.



- Methais (2011) and several others who distinguished the concept of “under-politeness” from that of “impoliteness” based on the degree of fluctuations in the level of ‘social harmony/disharmony’ generated in social relationships by their own verbal behaviour.
- Methais describes under-politeness as a failure of an interlocutor to achieve the required level of politeness desired by the other in any conversation exchange.
- He noted that “under-politeness” can be important in achieving group ascription and promoting collaboration in certain contexts.

- Several researchers from Asian, Islamic as well as African cultures, including Ide (1990) and Nwoye (1992) among others, criticise Brown and Levinson's approach by calling it an individualistic interpretation of face.
- These scholars question the validity of negative face in cultures, where individuals' social status determines their freedom of thought and action.

# Honorifics

- An honorific (abbreviated as HON) is a grammatical or morphosyntactic structure that encodes the overall relative stratification or ranks of the participants involved in a discussion.
- A vital component of an honorific framework is that one can pass on similar message in both honorific and recognizable structures—i.e., it is feasible to say something like "The soup is hot" such that it presents honour or deference on one of the members of the discussion (Brown and Levinson, 1978).
- Honorific discourse is a sort of friendly deixis. As a specific circumstance—for this situation, the relative status of the speaker compared to different members or spectators—is significant to its utilization.

# Honorificity in Indian languages

- According to Subbarao et al. (1991), changing sociocultural constraints in a community might emphasise some politeness methods, resulting in their preservation, whereas diffuse politeness strategies result in their extinction. A good example is the honorific system in Indian languages. In most Indian languages, a two- or three-level hierarchy in the second person pronominal is employed to indicate various levels of politeness by paying proper deference to the hearer based on the speaker's and hearer's differing status. Many Indian languages contain additional respectful or humiliating forms that seek to either elevate or decrease the listener's status.
- Different syntactic methods, such as multiple agreement, passives, causatives, past tenses, and so on, may also be used to indicate politeness.

- Certain humiliating formulations assign a slave like lower status to the speaker. Eg: Speaker: oye, e(y)e ; Respondent: hukum
- The most sure means of pleasing your interlocutor is to lower your own status. It could be one of the universals of social interaction, with different languages employing various linguistic tactics to achieve this goal.
- It's possible that it's a holdover from earlier societies when civility was dictated by ascribed status and deference rather than attained status and demeanour (Neustupny 1978: 209-211).

# Multiple Agreement Phenomena (MAP)

- Unlike Hindi, multiple agreement markers can be found in Maithili, Magahi, and Bhojpuri.
- . The multiple agreement mechanism is very limited, allowing only agreement between non-honorific, mid-honorific, and high honorific referents (Singh et al. 2014).
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- ham ahã:-ke      pa:i      de- l- ahũ:      [Maithili]
- I      you.hon-dat money      give-pst-agr.Hon
- 'I gave you money.'      (Singh 1979)

- hām un-ka:      kəh-l-iy-ain      [Magahi]
- 1.SG 3.SG.H-A/D tell-PST-1-3.H
- 'I told him/her(H)'

# Causatives

- Subbarao, et.al. (1991) expounds on the utilization of causatives for graciousness that, the utilization of causative development assists with limiting the risk of the listeners face loss by appearing that he comprehends that it isn't his/her work and that he doesn't plan to force him/her into accomplishing something beneath his/her respect.
- For instance, the suffixes '-aa' and '-waa' are the causative suffixes in Bhojpuri. The non-causative verb becomes the causative verb when these suffixes are added to it. Sentence (a) is more polite than sentence (b) since it employs a causal verb. The tool for making indirectness is Causativization.



(a) shyaam ke      bol-aa-wa  
shyam DAT      call  
'Call Shyam'

[Bhojpuri]

(Singh et al. 2014)

(b) shyaam ke      bola-waa-wa  
shyam DAT call. CAUS  
'Shyam be called.'

[Bhojpuri]

(Singh et al. 2014)

# Pronominals as honorifics

- Different pronominals pass on various degrees of respectfulness by paying courtesy to the listener as indicated by the respectful status of the listener and the speaker.
- These pronominals pass on various degrees of good manners through paying suitable regard to the listener as per the differential status of the speaker and the listener.

Language	Level(s) of hierarchy	Non-honorific	Mid-honorific	High-honorific
Thethi	One	tõ:		
Magahi	Two	tũ:		əpne
Angika	One	tohõ		
Haryanvi	One	tə nne		
Punjabi	Three	tũ:	tussi:	a:p ji:

# Requests

- Requests are fulfilled through a combination of indirectness and external and internal adjustments (Blum-Kulka, 1989).
- We can't ignore responses when reviewing requests. There have been studies like Clark (1979), Clark & Schunk (1980), on how people respond to direct and usually indirect requests.
- $\text{t̪ hoʃa: əndəʀ aaie}$  [Hindi]
- please inside come.2.H
- 'Please! Can you come inside?'

# Taboo and euphemisms

- A word or phrase not only has a linguistic **denotative meaning** but also has a **connotative meaning**, reflecting attitudes, emotions, value judgments and, so on.
- Certain words in all societies are considered **taboo** –they are not to be used at least in “polite company”.
- what acts or words are forbidden reflect particular customs and views of the society.
- Hell, damn → heck, darn
- The existence of taboo words or taboo ideas stimulates the creation of **euphemisms**.
- A euphemism is a word or a phrase that replaces a taboo word or serves to avoid frightening or unpleasant subjects.

- Warren's (1992) model of euphemistic formation goes through two types of innovations: (i) formal and (ii) semantic innovations.
- Formal innovation is carried out through the means of word formation devices, phonemic modifications and loan words.
- Warren listed five-word formation devices of euphemism formation: compounding, derivation, blends, acronyms, and onomatopoeia. Phonemic modification occurs via back slang, rhyming slang, phonemic replacement, and abbreviations. Loan words are also used for euphemism formation.
- Methods of semantic innovation listed by Warren includes particularisation, implication, metaphor, metonym, reversal, understatement, and overstatement.

- Burridge (2012) classifies linguistic devices that speakers use worldwide to form euphemistic expressions into three broad mechanisms: analogy, distortion, and borrowing.
- Analogy result in the generalisation of forms to new situations like metaphors, general-for-specific and part for-whole substitutions, understatement and hyperbole.
- Distortion includes strategies that lead to the modification of already existing forms to new ones. These modified forms are used to mask the taboo word. These include circumlocutions, shortening, reduplication, acronyms, phonological remodelling, ellipsis, affixation, alliteration, blending and rhyming slangs. Eg: acronyms like STD, P

# Burridge's classification of euphemistic functions

- **1. The protective function-** They help their users by providing an escape from the response to taboo words. How people talk varies according to the context, and when the context is related to taboo topics, the use of protective euphemisms helps overcome context-based choices.
- **2. The underhand function—** Such euphemisms work by camouflaging the truth using strategies like indirection. The use of underhand euphemisms is popular in politics, health care facilities, and the military. For example, “the unlawful deprivation of life” for ‘murder’ or ‘killing’.
- **3. The uplifting function—**The purpose is primarily to uplift or please something or someone. For example, “accommodation of stationary vehicle” over “car space” or “parking space”.

- **4. The provocative function**—They are primarily used to reveal something as well as to inspire. They function by arousing and exciting the hearer about the nature or outcome of the discussion. For example: *5 saal mein ek baar darshan dene wale bhagwaan*
- **5. The cohesive function**—The selection of cohesive euphemisms in such situations evokes a feeling of distinctiveness among its users. For example: *maggu, chapu*
- **6. The ludic functions**— As the name suggests, euphemisms are often employed with a motive of entertainment and fun. For example, well endowed between the ears and above the neck – Used to describe how intelligent a person is; over the hill and picking up speed - old



# Dysphemism

- These expressions are evaluated as **dysphemism** due to the exaggeration of offence induced by these hyperboles.
- According to Burridge, while expressions like “ripe” and “mature” form euphemisms for ‘old age’, other hyperboles like “old fossil” and “shrivelled old git” fall into the dysphemistic category.

# Euphemism treadmill

- Burridge also talks about forces like 'routinization' and 'contamination' as responsible for the existence of a euphemistic treadmill.
- By routinization, he means that new and exciting euphemisms can also become mundane and lose their power to grab attention through constant use, due to which these expressions lose their positive euphemistic value. For example, the word "retarded" was introduced as a kinder alternative to the term "imbecile".
- Burridge also mentions that "insults lose their wounding capacity, swearwords their pungency, slang expressions their vigour. With time, face-saving euphemisms lose their protective magic" (Allan & Burridge 2006:79).
- This whole process was first identified and supported by Osgood (Osgood et al., 1957) and was popularly defined as the 'euphemistic treadmill' by Steven Pinker in 2003.

# Euphemisms across cultures - English

- Jačková (2010), in her study on modern-day English, analysed eighty euphemisms collected from multiple online articles related to the political and business sphere.
- As part of her analysis, she found that the percentage of euphemistic usage was highest in articles dealing with the financial crisis from an economic or political perspective.
- It was observed that Politicians used them to save their possible loss of face in society, particularly from their electorates and to fulfil their own agendas.

- The observation by Grinova (2017) is that the positive function of euphemisms was to tone down others' feelings to avoid any suffering on their part.
- The negative function of euphemisms was to manipulate the others' understanding of the topic to a certain level to mislead them and misrepresent the actual state of affairs. Manipulative use of speech like this is sometimes referred to as doublespeak.
- Its presence was observed in abundance in the economy, politics, and military spheres. It was also observed that not all euphemistic expressions are used to fulfil their primary goals and sometimes end up softening the tabooed word's actual crude meaning, for example, in the case of words related to sex. Many times, loan words are used as euphemistic expressions to reduce the effect of taboo and induce nobility and elegance.

# Euphemisms across cultures- Arabic

- Al-Qadi (2009) observes in the context of Arabic that the purpose of a positive euphemism is to express solidarity with others by using expressions like “environmental engineer” for ‘garbage men’, while negative euphemisms like “low-income” for ‘poverty’ is to help prevent possible loss of face in situations or topics generally avoided in society.

# Euphemisms across cultures- Chinese

- Wang and Peng (2015) argue that the reason behind the difference in responses towards praises and compliments has a lot to do with the culture in question.
- According to them, Chinese culture has more to do with collectivism. Group achievements are always appreciated over individual achievements, while individualism mostly drives English-speaking cultures.

- The topic of privacy is also connected to culture and politeness in that different cultures have different values regarding privacy.
- For instance, it is argued that in the western culture governed by individualism, privacy of the self and the others is considered a very important and sensitive matter, while the Chinese culture does not accord much importance to privacy.
- The reason given for this lack of importance to the issue lies in their belief in collectivism. The Chinese speakers for instance, do not feel restricted in asking questions related to age, salary, property, family, price of some purchase, and even religion to others even in their first meet.

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