

## Language change and society

## Why does language change?

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- We need new words for new ideas.
- Linguistic factors: e.g. people want to simplify pronunciations, abbreviate frequent words, avoid confusing expressions, etc.
- Social factors: e.g. influence from a more prestigious language variety; use of slang for the solidarity of a peer group etc.

## Language change and language variation

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- Language doesn't change from one grammar to another grammar overnight.
- Language change always involves language variation at each moment.
- Age difference is particularly relevant to language change.

## Age difference and “apparent time” method

- Sometimes it is possible to track language change based on historical records.
- An alternative is **apparent-time** studies: study age difference suggests language change.
- But one must be careful because an age difference doesn't always mean language change. It may be due to the fact that young people like to use slang, for example

## *Ranuki-kotoba* (ら抜き言葉) in a corpus

*mi-rareru* (見られる)

*mi-reru* (見れる)

(Sano 2011)

## *yabai* with a positive meaning

## Language change and dialects

- An ongoing language change can also appear as difference between dialects, social class, or gender

## Concentric circles of dialects: *snail*

- Kunio Yanagida (1930) *Kagyūkō*.

## *Aho-Baka* distribution

## *Ra-nuki kotoba* (ら抜き言葉)

The use of  
*ra-nuki kotoba*  
by people born  
around 1910

## Recent pattern of spread of a new expression

- A new expression spreads locally until it reaches Tokyo
- When a word reaches Tokyo, it shows up on TV and spreads nationwide

## Examples

- *chigau* (違う) as adjective — ***chigakute*** (違くて), ***chigakatta*** (違かった), ***chigee*** (ちげー) etc.
- ***-mitaku*** (〜みたく)
- ***iku nai*** (いくない)
  - Traditional dialectal forms in Fukushima and Tochigi prefectures
- ***uzattai*** (うざったい), now often ***uzai*** (うざい) or ***uzee*** (うぜー)
- ***kattarui*** (かったるい), now often ***tarui*** (たるい) or ***tarii*** (たりー)
  - Traditional dialectal forms in Kanto area (west of Tokyo)

*Uzattai* in 1983

Glottogram for  
*Chigaku natta*

## Standard language and prescriptivism

## Prescriptivism and descriptivism

- **Prescriptivists** argue how people *should* speak.
  - Traditional grammar books and modern popular (non-scientific) discussions on language are often prescriptivist.
- **Descriptivists** argue how people speak in reality.
  - Modern linguists are descriptivists.

## Prescriptivism and descriptivism

- People often talk about whether an expression is correct or not.
- For linguists, correct/incorrect doesn't make sense.
  - It doesn't make sense for a biologist to say "this butterfly is correct."
- It makes sense to describe whether an expression is new or rare, or people's attitudes toward an expression.

## Standard language

- The standard language may be needed as a reference in making official documents, education, etc.
- It is like a traffic law. It is better to drive on the left where everyone else drives on the left. We don't need to have a reason why left (or right) is inherently better.

## Labov's experiment

"Where are the women's shoes?"

"Fourth floor."

"What did you say?"

"FOURTH FLOOR."

(At the fourth floor) "Excuse me, what floor is this?"

"Fourth floor."

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- Note that pronunciation without [r] is the standard in UK, indicating the arbitrariness of the standard.

cf. [ŋ] in Standard Japanese

## African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

- *It's a girl name Shirley Jones live in Washington. 'most everybody on her street like her, 'cause she a nice girl. Shirley like a boy name Charles. But she keep away from him and Charles don't hardly say nothing to her neither.*

## Characteristics of AAVE

- Phonology
  - *dis* 'this', *mouf* 'mouth', *bik* 'big'
  - *tes* 'test'
  - *Ca'ol* 'Carol', *inte'ested* 'interested'

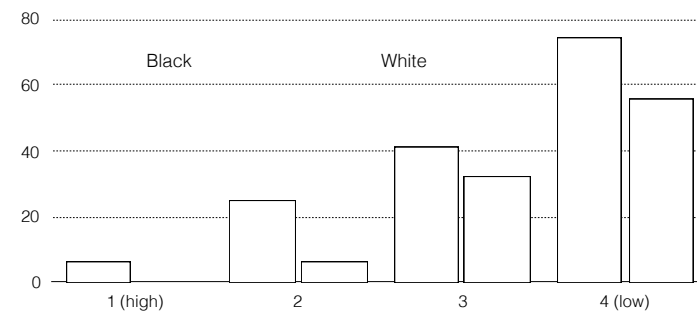
## Multiple negation

***He didn't give me no food.*** - "He didn't give me (any) food." or "He gave me no food."

- Is multiple negation illogical?

cf. ***It ain nobody I can't trust.*** - "There is nobody I can't trust." (i.e. "I can trust everyone.")

## Multiple negation



(Based on Shuy, Wolfram & Riley 1967)

## AAVE *be*

*He sick today.*

*The coffee cold.*

*She **be** late every day.*

*I see her when I **bees** on my way to school.*

*They usually **be** tired when they come home.*

*\*They **be** tired right now.*

- What does *be/bees* mean in AAVE?

## Discussion

- People often find a new expression annoying and call it “wrong”
- Why do people think in that way?
- Is such a claim well-founded?