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Abstracts

Mark Gibson [Mark Gibson, Rob Wilson, SCHIN, University of Newcastle]

'A PIL for ever Ill': towards the provision of Patient Information leaflets (PILs) in dominant community languages

As their name suggests, Patient Information Leaflets (PILs) are healthcare advice leaflets which GPs give patients during consultations. Frequently PILs contain preventative and non-drug information which are becoming an integral part of the clinical systems found within General Practice. Traditionally, however, the distribution of PILs have been an under-exploited resource by health professionals, as many leaflets were found to be poorly written. Clinicians and sociologists associated with the University of Newcastle have pinpointed that the prime problem in the past has been one of Audience Design. Research carried out by Wilson et al (1998) suggest that a good deal of PILs have contained specialised medical vocabulary. Therefore, there appears to be a discrepancy between the readability and understandability of existing health education publications and the reading level of the general population of the UK, which is estimated to be on average 9 years of age (the equivalent of Year 4 at school).

Furthermore, given the changing demographic composition of the UK, particularly as regards fertility rates amongst British ethnic minorities (Gibson, Wilson 2000), the dissemination of quality healthcare information in dominant community languages is an issue which deserves considerable attention. However, the provision of PILs in languages such as Urdu, Bengali or Gujarati is not as straight forward as simply commissioning qualified translators to carry out the task. There is already a copious amount of public service information available in dominant community languages whose effectiveness has not been evaluated to date. Nevertheless, anecdotal and qualitative evidence suggests that the following questions need to be addressed prior to embarking on translation:

- Who are we targeting? What are the readability levels of languages such as Urdu, Gujarati or Bangali in the UK? In which *appropriate* register should the health information be written?
- How many languages should the Department of Health provide translations in?
- What are the sociocultural issues which need to be taken account?Gynaecological issues represent an appropriate case in point.
- What about the diverse and relatively smaller language groups represented by current groups of Asylum Seekers, groups whose knowledge of English is limited, if non-existent? The case of Romany.

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Sue Fox

'Estuary English': Fact or Fiction

One aspect of language in the south-east of England in recent years, particularly highlighted by its use in the media, has been the emergence of the term 'Estuary English'. Coined by David Rosewarne in 1984, it was defined as 'a variety of modified regional speech....a mixture of non-regional and local south-eastern English pronunciation and intonation' [Rosewarne, 1984]. More recently, Wells has proposed a new definition - 'Standard English spoken with an accent that includes features localizable in the southeast of England' [Wells, 1998].

It has been suggested that this is a new variety of English whose heartland lies in those areas on the banks of the River Thames and its estuary, hence the term 'Estuary' English. It is also associated with the post-war London overspill building programmes, when Cockney speakers were uprooted and transplanted to new town developments. It has been argued that many Londoners felt the need to modify their Cockney speech to help them settle into their new environment and to promote their social mobility, while at the other end of the scale, RP speakers accommodated their speech towards the newcomers [Coggle, 1993].

This paper examines and perhaps challenges the concept of Estuary English by focusing on the speech of adolescents in the town of Basildon, Essex, situated approximately 25 miles east of London and close to the banks of the Thames estuary. This was a new town developed in the 1950's in answer to a shortage of housing after the Second World War. Most of the 80,000 population who moved there came from the East End of London. If Estuary English exists, one might expect such a place to be a prime example of where it is spoken. The data collected is analysed for examples of features claimed for Estuary English. The findings, however, do not indicate evidence of Estuary English; in this town, there appears to be a case for claiming that the vernacular is simply 'Cockney moved East'.

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Peter Patrick

The Speech Community Revisited

"Speech community" is a core notion in linguistics - empirical, historical, socio- and general linguistics - which remains poorly and controversially defined. This paper works to focus the concept as a theoretical and methodological tool.

Definitions of speech community (and related concepts) have served to advance particular approaches to the empirical study of language. For structuralists (Bloomfield 1926) it grounded the idea of similarity of form; Gumperz (1968, 1971) brought interaction to the fore as defining principle, while his related "linguistic community" explicitly allowed multilingualism; Hymes (1974) named it as social locus of the ethnography of speaking, embodying communicative

competence; Labov (1972) matched an emphasis on linguistic system ("abstract patterns of variation") with perception and social evaluation ("shared norms") as twin pursuits of variationist research.

Recent approaches begin from the diversity of individuals or stress dynamic process and practice over system/competence. Le Page & Tabouret-Keller's (1985) 'Acts of Identity' takes individual perception as primary, striving to explain how speakers figure within communities; Hudson takes this to extremes, arguing that sociolinguistics must restrict itself to "the micro level of the individual person and the individual linguistic item" (1996:229). Duranti (1997) recommends we attend to communicative activities by which speakers constitute a speech community; similarly, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992) utilize the notion "community of practice" to connect such activity with an individual's place in the community. While Coates's (1993) approach is reductionist, fragmenting a community into separate subgroups where behavior differs, Santa Ana & Parodí's (1997) hierarchical model seeks to relate groups of speakers based on their awareness of overlapping sets of norms.

This paper moves towards a notion of speech community meeting current conceptual requirements, while focusing on identification of a social group as a key methodological step in empirical sociolinguistic studies. The retooled 'speech community' must:

- be defined by its local linguistic ecology - explicitly involving attention to 2 or more varieties and their interface (even if only 1 is primary focus);
- be by definition multi-level - no single obvious or logical unit pre-exists for study, rather one is selected and constituted out of many possible cases by the researcher's attention and the nature of her research question;
- remain embedded in that ecological context, which is potentially affected by the research process itself;
- retain the dual focus on linguistic production and social norms inherited from the Labovian definition, though neither allegiance to evaluative norms nor use of forms alone is a definitive guide to full/appropriate membership;
- be oriented explicitly towards diversity of norms - by stressing not their absolute value, but rather the processes of conventionalization which differently-positioned individual members of a community are prepared to recognize and respond to.

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Michelle Kingston

Attrition of the Suffolk dialect - is London taking over?

The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between the traditional rural dialect spoken in the East Anglian county of Suffolk and the non-standard variety of English spoken in London. It seeks to establish the extent to which the Suffolk dialect is currently undergoing change, and possibly total shift, towards London forms (this trend was noticed as early as 1932 by Kokeritz). This research is motivated by three factors: firstly, by personal observation of differences in speech patterns between different generations of Suffolk speakers; secondly, by other research (such as Trudgill, 1983) which confirmed that London features are in use in the linguistically conservative north of East Anglia; and thirdly, by the popular myth that Estuary English is sweeping the UK to the detriment of regional dialects. It also draws heavily on the work of L. Milroy (1987), Lippi-Green (1989) and Britain (1991, 1997) as regards the importance of social network structure and strength for language variation and change.

The medium-sized village of Glemsford is the focus for the research here. Near the Essex/Suffolk border in the south-west of the county, Glemsford is situated between the urban settlements of Haverhill, to the east, and Sudbury and Great Cornard, to the west. The location of the village is important since these towns became centres for migrants from London during the "overspill" period during the 1970s. The existing local social networks came to include both native Suffolk and native London speakers creating a dialect contact situation, which can be seen as creating a three-fold linguistic influence on its speakers: firstly, the traditional Suffolk dialect was in use among the native Glemsfordians; secondly, the overspill population brought with them their London linguistic norms adding them to the mix; and thirdly, there is the ever present influence of standard (or RP) English on speakers as exerted through authority outlets such as education and the media. The extent to which existing local social networks have been reshaped by the Londoners thus provides important clues about the linguistic changes which have occurred.

The data analysed here represent 9 speakers from 2 broad age ranges: "Young" (15-30 years) and "Old" (65-80). Speakers aged 30-65 are not included since the research was only trying to establish that a change had taken place, rather than to track the developments in that change. All informants are native Glemsfordians.

Analysis is concerned with the phonetic variable (au) as found in the MOUTH lexical set and exemplified in words such as how, down and about. The Suffolk realisation of this variable is distinctive, but socially unmarked. The data from each speaker are analysed for presence or absence of the Suffolk variant. Analysis shows that an almost complete change away from the Suffolk pronunciation of MOUTH has indeed occurred during the last century, but that the direction of change is not towards the Cockney variant (as suggested by Kokeritz) nor towards the RP one. Rather, young Suffolk speakers are taking as their model something between the two (although whether this new feature is an 'Estuary English' one is questionable). This, coupled with the changes which have taken place to the area's demography, suggests that interdialect formation could be occurring.

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Jonathan Furaha Chai

Language Standardisation as Prescription: Implications for Swahili in East Africa

Swahili language is one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa after Arabic and it is the lingua franca in East Africa. Swahili language has had its current standard written form since the 1930s when the Inter-territorial Language committee set out to standardise that language. However due to the multilingual situation that obtains in East Africa in general and Kenya in particular, Standard Swahili has had to compete not only with non-standard Swahili varieties but also with other local African languages as well as English.

Due to the fact that Standard Swahili is seldom used for authentic informal oral communication between live speakers, its role as a lingua franca is diminished by the use of non-standards in spoken. The result is a constant need to support the Standard against other varieties (both dialects and Languages). This role normally would be played by gatekeepers who occupy positions of power in society however because of the way the standardisation process itself was done as a prescriptive exercise Swahili lacks these gatekeepers.

The goal of this paper is to examine the concept of 'language standardisation ' as it has been applied to other languages in western societies, focusing on how far standard Swahili meets the characteristics of the ideal standard variety. This will be done by comparing the situation in Kenya with that of Tanzania and highlighting the differences before concluding whether standardisation as language prescription has succeeded in Kenya or not and the implications of this to the future of Swahili language in Kenya.

(Swahili, Standardisation, Dialects, Characteristics, Prescription, Koine')

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Enam Al-Wer

Education as a Speaker Variable

Based, as it is, on empirically collected data, sociolinguistics pays a good deal of attention to methodology. One of the basic considerations in our endeavour to collect real data is to ensure that the grouping of speakers is based on realistic and meaningful categories. The importance of methodological issues in sociolinguistics is reflected in the fact that researchers in the field are continually engaged in refining practices at various stages. In this paper, I take issue with 'Education' as a speaker variable in variation studies on Arabic. In doing so, I critically revisit my own data, and attempt alternative ways of speaker grouping. The thesis I present suggests that in Arabic-speaking communities (and possibly in other communities with similar histories), it is not level of education per se which correlates with linguistic usage, rather that education is a proxy variable, acting on behalf of the frequency and the nature of the speakers' social contacts.

Bashar Bouz Al-Jidy

A Case of language Death

Aramaic is reported in the literature as a dying language. It has already been studied historically and its grammar has been recorded. However, its study at this stage from socio-linguistic aspects could shed more light on the phenomenon of language death. Some of the findings from the data collected are reported and reflected upon.