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Abstracts

Adele Beck

And He Said, "Ha ha ha" – The Need for Precise Transcription of Laughter Particles in Conversation

In the reporting of conversation there are two main ways people recount what has transpired. One is via a category "(e.g. He insulted me)". A second is to "quote the utterance (e.g. He said 'you dumb jerk.')" (Jefferson 1985, 25). The report of laughter, however, is only ever done by category. Yet laughter contains much more information than the expression of amusement. In fact, the expression of amusement is only one small part of the role of laugher in communication. Often laughter is shrugged off as not of linguistic importance because it is seen as having no syntactic function in language. Whilst it is true that laughter particles are not verbs, nouns, articles nor any other linguistically defined category, laughter does convey meaning and is used systematically in communication.

Laughter can be manageable and managed as an interactional resource; as a methodic activity which warrants and rewards more than a reference to its occurrence, but close attention to just how and just where it occurs (Jefferson 1986, 15) must be paid. One of the few researchers to look at laughter as a linguistic tool is Gail Jefferson. Through the examination of her essays on laughter and laughter in transcription, I seek to illustrate the necessity of not only transcribing laughter, but of improving her transcription method

Katherine Bristowe

Approaching a Framework for Medical Jargon Use

Jargon is complex language used by specific professionals or esoteric groups. Its use can leave laypersons obfuscated and excluded. Historically, jargon use has always been common in medical encounters. However much of the language used is opaque to the layperson, as though the doctor is speaking a foreign language or code (Roter and Hall, 1992).

The further doctors progress in their medical career, the more difficult they find it to recall a lay perspective of medicine (Billings-Gagliardi, 2001). Are professionals aware that much of their language is incomprehensible and, if so, are they willing to speak differently (Janicki, 2002)?

On average, doctors use 2.75 unexplained complex medical terms per consultation (Bristowe, 2004). However, simple medical terms and everyday words in a medical context can prove equally incomprehensible to laypersons. This paper describes the following framework to more effectively describe medical jargon use. It identifies six types of medical jargon:

TYPE	EXAMPLE
Greek/Latin/Eponymous	Cerebellum, Broca's area
Complex Medical	Hepatomegaly, Carboplatin
Simple Medical	Virus, Aspirin
Medical Borrowings in Everyday Language	Anorexia, Stomach
Everyday Borrowings in Medical Language	Progressive, Positive
Lay Terminology	Foot (In Jamaican English, this refers to the whole leg)

It is hoped that such a framework could also help to improve doctors' awareness of jargon use and its effect on patient comprehension.

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Claire Jones

Overlapping Talk: The Suppression of Afro-Caribbean Suspects' Narratives

Overlapping talk is generally analysed in terms of being either facilitative or interruptive (West and Zimmerman 1983; Goldberg 1990; Bargiela-Chiapinni 1997). Whilst this is a useful way of uncovering the functions of overlapping talk, it does not say anything meaningful about the consequences for participants who get their overlaps taken up in contrast to those who don't.

My research uses data from UK police interviews conducted with White British suspects and Afro-Caribbean suspects. Using a combined quantitative and qualitative approach for the analysis of overlapping talk it was possible to reveal both the frequencies of taken up and not taken up overlaps and the implications for the Afro-Caribbean suspects whose overlaps generally get ignored.

My quantitative findings show that in the Afro-Caribbean suspect interviews, the suspects got taken up 24% of the time whereas the police officers got 88% of their overlaps taken up. In contrast, the suspects in the White British suspect interviews got 78% of their overlaps taken up whilst the police officers had 66% of their overlaps taken up. This shows a marked difference between the two ethnic groups in terms of getting overlaps acknowledged or ignored.

My qualitative analysis reveals that the consequences, for the Afro-Caribbean suspects whose overlaps generally get ignored, go beyond the level of the overlap. More specifically, through their overlaps not getting taken up, the Afro-Caribbean suspects' narratives get suppressed, crucially when they do not conform to a preferred version of guilt. This culminates in overt accusations of guilt and the repeated rejection of suspects' responses which do not point to guilt. On the other hand the White British suspects' alternative accounts are not suppressed and as a result there are no accusations of guilt but collaboration between the police officer and suspect to construct a version of events.

Essentially overlapping talk empowers the White British suspects because they are given the opportunity to 'tell their side'. On the other hand the Afro-Caribbean suspects are disempowered because their narratives are suppressed. My findings highlight the differential treatment of Afro-Caribbean suspects during the first part of the criminal justice process.

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Dave Sayers

BEYOND THE SPEECH COMMUNITY: Global linguistic innovations, global media, and the 'linguistic virtual collective'

At last year's SociolinguistEssex conference I presented an initial outline of the 'linguistic virtual collective', a model I was developing to conceptualise the spread of 'global linguistic innovations' between highly disparate speech communities, supposedly via the media – for example quotative be like, as in 'I was like, no way!' (Macaulay, 2001; Tagliamonte & D'Arcy, 2004; Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999; Winter, 2004). In the current paper, I present my progress on this model, with additional illustrative material from sociolinguistics, as well as drawing from other disciplines like media impact theory to create an inter-disciplinary understanding of this phenomenon.

In terms of theory, I will be reviewing how emerging sociolinguistic studies (e.g. Meyerhoff & Niedzielski, 2003; Buchstaller, in prep.) are grappling with the problem of global linguistic innovations, and their varying success in applying theories of globalisation and 'glocalisation' to their data. Throughout I will be using the linguistic virtual collective as a conceptual backdrop, showcasing it as an effective way to plug the ontological gaps I identify.

In terms of methodology, I will argue that people's engagement with the media is a unique form of interaction, allowing the transmission of linguistic innovations between distant places, whereupon those innovations diffuse across the speech community between people; and that this qualitatively different form of interaction needs to be analysed with methodological tools outside sociolinguistics (as is being pioneered by e.g. Stuart Smith et al., in prep.). The linguistic virtual collective allows an understanding of the interplay between these two very different forms of communication, and also for their correspondingly different research methodologies to be placed together in a unifying explanatory framework. This in turn enables us to move beyond studying isolated instances of language globalisation, and tell the whole story of global innovation diffusion.

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Batoul Hassan

Competing With a Divine Language: Investigating Language Ideologies in Kuwait

Assumptions, values, and beliefs about language, whether conscious or unconscious, all serve to naturalize social practices, including linguistic usage. Ideologies concerning language can shed light on variation in language use among different speech communities. This study attempts to describe and analyse the ideologies of a minority Kuwaiti speech community (Ajam) towards Arabic and Eimi. Eimi, a dialect of Persian spoken in Kuwait, is currently undergoing language shift towards Arabic.

To fully understand the shift process it is important to investigate the underlying beliefs that motivate the rationale of the behaviour. Results indicate that while negative attitudes towards Eimi contribute to language loss, positive attitudes towards Arabic indicate direction of language shift. The main assumptions and beliefs regarding Eimi are:

1. it is not a standard language,
2. it has low economic and political status, and
3. it is a link to the religious Shiite movement.

The three main ideological constructs attached to Arabic are:

1. Arab nationalism,
2. Kuwaiti nationalism, and
3. religious linguistic superiority.

Although informants experience conflicting religious ideologies concerning language, the superiority of Arabic as the language of Islam dominates their beliefs.

Bagamba Bukpa

Analysing language use data in multilingual settings: How to make sense of the so-called linguistic cacophony

Multilingual settings present several challenges to language planners. In the regions where most languages are unwritten, deciding which of the co-territorial vernaculars should be developed in order to best serve multilingual speech communities is not easy. Generally, language planners agree that the most frequently spoken vernaculars are the best candidates for development. However, identifying such languages in multilingual settings, particularly in the environments where members of communities speak two or more languages alternatively constitutes a considerable methodological challenge.

I propose a three-phased technique of data analysis which disentangles frequencies of reported multiple code usage and focuses on the usage of each language individually. Firstly, a meticulous breakdown of frequencies of interchangeable use of linguistic codes is conducted. Secondly, these instances of interchangeable use of languages are extracted from the overall data and quantified separately. Thirdly, the investigator redistributes and reconstructs the frequencies of the reported data in order to establish the sociolinguistic profile of each language.

Philip Tipton

Are 'Sintelliners' from Merseyside? On identity and linguistic maintenace in England's north west.

The study of the variety of English spoken in Liverpool, Scouse, has received a relatively large amount of attention in the linguistic literature (eg, Knowles 1973, Watson 2006, Honeybone 2001). The extent to which Scouse features are travelling outside the confines of the city itself is, however, something which has received rather less attention from linguists working within the variationist paradigm. This situation is somewhat surprising when the extensive literature on dialect contact and dialect levelling is taken into consideration (eg Williams and Kerswill 1999, Kerswill 2003). This paper examines a phonological feature of Scouse, the NURSE~SQUARE merger, in the context of its realisation in young speakers in and around the town of St Helens, situated some seventeen miles north-east of Liverpool city centre.

The NURSE~SQUARE vocalic merger (Wells 1982) is commonly understood to be one of the defining features of the Scouse variety. The usual Scouse realisation of the vowel in the words contained within these lexical sets is [e:], but a very different situation is noted in the young St Helens speakers (Tipton 2005, 2006). Their realisation of the merger, on the whole, is the centralised variant [3:]. The current study analyses data collected over a period of two years. Informants, of whom there were fifteen in number, were asked to perform a number of linguistic tasks as well as engage in informal conversation. Both quantitative and qualitative observations will be adduced. The implications of this example of linguistic divergence in conditions which might otherwise favour levelling will be analysed with particular reference to the notion of a unified Merseyside identity, or lack thereof, as mediated through language. It will be argued that for the 'Sintelliners' in the sample, Scouse and Merseyside are not salient socio-cultural influences, but rather that St Helens sits in a curious 'identity no-man's land' where the local is valued over the regional.

Aziza Alessa

Dialect Contact in Jeddah: The Interdental Variables

This paper is based on empirical research in the Hijazi city of Jeddah with a sample of 61 Najdi speakers. The speakers were interviewed and their speech was tape recorded. The data were subjected to quantitative analysis within the framework of variationist sociolinguistic theory.

The research aims to investigate the linguistic outcome of the contact between two major Arabic dialects: Najdi, a Bedouin dialect, and Hijazi, a sedentary dialect. The immigration of Najdis to Hijazi cities, such as Jeddah, started more than sixty years ago. However, contact with Hijazi locals was for some time limited to formal encounters in the workplace, the market and schools, but has increased markedly in recent years. The research as a whole provides analysis of 7 phonological and morpho-syntactic linguistic variables.

In this paper, I will focus on three phonological variables: ( ), (¶), and (¶ñ), each of which has two variants: an interdental sound and a stop counterpart. The variation between interdental and stop is a well known phenomenon in Arabic dialects; in communities where both variants are found, the tendency is for the stop variants to expand at the expense of the interdental fricative sounds (see for example, Jordanian Arabic, Mecca Arabic, Palestinian Arabic, among others). In my study, the interdental variables show less variation than the rest of the phonological variables under investigation. Furthermore, they appear to be more resilient among Najdis in Jeddah compared with the same features in other Arabic dialects. The paper will present the details of the analysis of these variables, and will address the issue of the resilience to change of these particular phonological variables.

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Veronique Lacoste

Learning Whole-word Pronunciations in Standard Jamaican English: Evidence from Word-final Consonant Clusters

This paper examines the acquisition of Standard Jamaican English (SJE) coronal (-t, -d) stops in word-final consonant clusters by 24 Jamaican children aged 7. Their productive performance is contrasted to that of their 3 class teachers. Consonant clusters are reported to be complex sequences of segments to acquire, and are usually internalised relatively late. Jamaican children are no exception. The analysis investigates the level at which children discriminate between those clusters permitted in Jamaican Creole (JC), and the superset permitted in SJE, first in their actual production, and second in their mental representations of the systems.

Most children acquire JC at home, and learn SJE as a second language, principally via schooling. Children are required to memorise whole-word pronunciations in class, thus acquiring simultaneously information about the lexical as well as the phonological structure of specific word forms.

Cluster production is examined in relation to four contextual explanatory factors:

  I.   Targeted (vs. Non-Targeted) words in lesson content and teaching methodology,
  II.   Word frequency (measured over the children's output),
  III. Type of consonant cluster (in terms of preceding segment),
  IV.   Type of lexical items (in terms of novelty of acquisition and permissibility of cluster in JC vs. SJE).

The nature of the phonological input children receive in class, and the frequency with which they are exposed to the norms of SJE, are also investigated. I employ a usage-based model, which predicts that usage affects the phonological shape of words, and that word frequency facilitates the reduction of the articulatory gesture of a sound through automation of production. High-frequency lexical items are hypothesised to have stronger representations in the mental lexicon.

The task facing Jamaican children is to acquire a second phonological system, closely related to their primary vernacular system, while expanding their lexicon and also acquiring literacy skills. I argue that a number of factors play a significant role in the rate at which segmental patterns are acquired, including:

  • the quality of input available for learning,
  • the frequency of input and frequency of exposure, and
  • the interdependence of the JC and SJE systems.

The two systems exhibit considerable lexical overlap, and children's mental representations of these language varieties may be temporarily blurred. Complementary sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic approaches are considered in order to understand the mechanisms engaged in acquiring a new pattern, at a time when children are undergoing substantial cognitive and linguistic development.