

Subjective Correlates: From subtlety to stereotype

Convenor: Dennis Preston, Nancy Niedzielski, and Kevin McGowan

These presentations examine work on the "subjective correlates" of language variety (Weinreich et al., 1968), an essential part of the variationist program increasingly exploited under such labels as attitudes, social meaning, enregisterment, and language regard. Weinreich et al. were adamant that these do not automatically emerge from studies of production but require independent investigation. Techniques for acquiring such data stem from work in social psychology (largely experimental), anthropological linguistics (mostly observational), and folk linguistics (generally task- and conversation-oriented), although combinations have become more frequent and are grouped here under the label "language regard" (e.g., Evans et al. 2019). These presentations explore the backgrounds, incorporation, and future of such methodological interdisciplinarity. We hope to have a format that will allow productive discussion of these approaches in the linguistic pursuit of a wide variety of aspects of language regard.

1) Speech perception and the social psychology of language. Kevin B. McGowan, The University of Kentucky USA. How do forms of language regard emerge from largely experimental presentations of exemplars?

The adoption of exemplar models (Nosofsky, 2011) as theories of speech perception (Goldinger, 1998; Johnson, 1997) has inspired a whirlwind quarter century of discovery. Linguistic and social information have proven to be entwined in the speech signal, segmental perception, and word recognition (Sumner et al., 2014) so thoroughly that it is no longer revolutionary to observe that social knowledge and, indeed, language regard can obscure (Niedzielski, 1999), shift (Strand & Johnson, 1996), or enhance (McGowan, 2015) low level perception. Perhaps more surprising is the growing body of evidence that speech perception proceeds along at least two levels (e.g. segmental perception and social category perception), apparently simultaneously, and that these levels, though capable of influencing each other (Bouavichith et al., 2019) need not agree for a listener to arrive at, for example, a perceived vowel quality and a decision about whether someone speaks Quechua-accented Bolivian Spanish (McGowan & Babel, 2020) or a fricative place of articulation and the perceived gender of the talker (Laycock & McGowan, in press). This talk will review such results and propose a model of speech perception that privileges neither linguistic nor social cues in the speech signal but imbues the interpretant (Babel, in press; Peirce, 1955) with agency. Language regard is not a thin veneer that floats over the surface of phonetic processing and phonological grammar but, experimentally, can be observed as a cognitive process that draws linguistic and social knowledge together with our ideas about them as part of an active process of meaning-making.

2) Speech perception, the social psychology of language, and sociolinguistics. Nancy Niedzielski, Rice University USA. How do forms of language regard emerge from experimental and task-oriented presentations of language variety and what is their effect on perception?

In this Presentation I present several studies that illuminate what Preston 2011 terms the "Contrastive Mandate." Preston calls this a "notice-empowering process," characterizing this process as one whereby listeners notice (consciously or subconsciously) forms that speakers use that may contrast with their own usage, and crucially, that listeners expect their interlocutors to use.

These studies are drawn from not only linguistics, but also from sociology, language ideology, and the social psychology of language. They demonstrate that speakers' beliefs and attitudes about language—"language regard" (Preston 2010)—inform and govern speech perception. They shed light on what specific types of cognitive abilities humans use as they make sense of language. As speech perception suggests, the multidimensional processes involved tap into various types of information: acoustic, contextual, social, and psychological. Listeners "know" such information in very different ways: they are overtly aware of some when they say such things as "People who say X are Y," even if hundreds of language attitudes studies show that often what they "know" is inaccurate. Listeners are, however, also covertly aware of some things when they react a variety of perceptual tests as if they have certain information but claim no conscious knowledge of it.

To suggest that speech perception is complicated is hardly original; we know that humans do not merely transform acoustic information into linguistic information, but use all types of cognitive processes. We pay attention to our world, and we create and modify cognitive categories as a result of what we observe. Most of this helps listeners understand interlocutors in complicated conditions: noisy environments, speakers who use different language varieties, language changes, etc. But some of our linguistic categorization leads to inequities, as in education and the legal arena. Methodological approaches from the fields of the social psychology of language, sociolinguistics, and speech perception which demonstrate both implicit and explicit modes of language regard responses and their consequences are presented and evaluated.

3) Speech perception, the social psychology of language, sociolinguistics, and folk linguistics Dennis Preston, University of Kentucky USA

How do forms of language regard emerge in task-oriented, discursal, and observational studies focused on language?

Variationist sociolinguistics, many of whom took the subjective correlate mandate of Weinreich et al. (1968) seriously, were quick to adopt the experimental procedures developed by social psychologists of language but extended in more sophisticated models as in the numerous methods discussed in the previous presentations. This final presentation explores the more qualitative, anthropological, discursal, sociolinguistic, and folk linguistic sides of approaches to language regard.

This presentation examines the tools and value of folk linguistic tasks (e.g., map-drawing, voice identification and imitation), the content of folk linguistic interviews, the means of determining the enregisterment of varieties, and the correlation of these findings with the outcomes of data gathering in the experimental fields already discussed.

First, why would the conscious, overt, asserted meanings from interviews as well as media and other public resources not be a guidepost to the ideological backdrops of language regard in speech communities? This is a basic assumption of ethnographic and folk linguistic approaches to discursal and public event language use and deserves continuing attention.

Second, and more methodologically important to these presentations, why would social psychologists and others who worry about the authenticity of interview and other directly elicited data ignore the fact that a great deal of what happens in language use is presupposed and implicit? When a respondent from the US South is asked to outline where they believe US dialects are and writes in the area they identify as "North" the words "Scratch and claw," they project Southern perceptions of northern speech and the personae and associated behaviors that

rest behind them. More subtly, semantic and pragmatic tools allow us to investigate talk about language that is perhaps as implicit as can be elicited by clever experimental devices. When a US Linguistic Atlas fieldworker wrote in his notes many years ago that his respondent was a "Quick, bright, but poor, hard-working woman," a semantic implicature makes it clear that the reader should understand the mismatch between being "quick" and "bright" and "poor" and "hard-working." Consider this from a recent Facebook meme: "When you can't think of a word, say 'I forgot the English word for it.' That way people will think you're bilingual instead of an idiot." It is not asserted that bilinguals are intelligent nor that people who forget words are stupid, but those links must be recognizable in the popular mind, or they could not be implied.

This presentation summarizes various ways that asserted and unasserted social meanings may be retrieved from folk linguistic interviews, enregisterment data, and a variety of folk linguistic tasks and made a part of the search for the elusive but essential "subjective correlates."

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