2. Languages, dialects, and varieties

Ling 380 (Spring 2023)

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Varieties

- Wardhaugh gives two definitions of *variety*, one by Hudson (1996) and one by Ferguson (1972).

- What is Ferguson's definition?

"Any body of human speech patterns which is sufficiently homogenous to be analyzed by available techniques of synchronic description and which has a sufficiently large repertory of elements and their arrangements or processes with broad enough semantic scope to function in all formal contexts of communication."

- There's a lot of jargon in here. What does this definition actually mean?

"Any body of <u>human speech patterns</u>[1] which is <u>sufficiently homogenous to be analyzed by available techniques of synchronic description</u>[2] and which has a <u>sufficiently large repertory of elements and their arrangements or processes with broad enough semantic scope to function in all formal contexts of communication</u>[3]."

1. Human language – not a computer code, not music, not animal calls. Within linguistics, signed languages are considered speech.

2. Consistent enough that accurate generalizations can be made about it. *Synchronic* means at a given time, as opposed to *diachronic*, meaning over the course of time.

3. Multifaceted enough that you can use it for any kind of normal communication.

Point 3 seems like it would leave out purpose-oriented languages: trade languages, moribund religious languages, thieves' argot, etc.

Varieties

- Given Ferguson's definition, Wardhaugh gives some examples of varieties: "Standard English, Cockney, lower-class New York City speech, Oxford English, legalese, [and] cocktail party talk."

- One task in sociolinguistics is to "determine if such unique sets of items or patterns do exist." In other words, we try to identify and verify the existence of different varieties.

Discussion! (p.26, q.2)

Hymes (1974: 123) has observed that language boundaries between groups are drawn not on the basis of the use of linguistic items alone, because attitudes and social meanings attached to those items also count. [...] "Part of the creativity of users of languages lies in the freedom to determine what and how much linguistic difference matters." How does this interrelationship between linguistic items and social evaluations of such items apply in how we regard each of the following pronunciations?

butter, budder, bu'er

been pronounced like *bean*, like *bin*

fishing, fishin'

mischievous pronounced with four syllables, like mischievious

farm, fahm

aluminum vs. aluminium

pólice, gúitar, Détroit (with first-syllable stress)

width pronounced like *wit*, like *with*

He hurt hisself.

He done it.

He dove in.

Cuba pronounced as Cuber

He run away last week.

It looks like it's going to rain.

ate pronounced like *eight*, like *et*

To whom did you give it?

Try and do it soon.

Activity

- Let's learn some geography.

Ethnicity and Language

- Ethnicity and language are often intertwined: the idea that to be German is to speak German, to be an Arab is to speak Arabic, or to be Pakistani is to speak Urdu.

- Is Urdu a different language than Hindi?

- Mandarin and Cantonese are what linguists consider different languages, but speakers of both will say that they speak Chinese. Also, both read and write the same. There's a notion that to be Chinese *is* to speak Chinese.

- "Hispanic" as an ethnicity.

Language vs. dialect

- There is no standard scientific way of distinguishing between a dialect and a language.

- But there are some factors to consider.

- Mutual intelligibility – can someone speaking X understand someone speaking Y, and vice versa? If so, X and Y have some degree of mutual intelligibility.

Discussion! (p.41, q.2)

- A question found on many national census forms concerns the language or languages spoken (or known). It may ask respondents either to check one or more language names or to volunteer a name or names. What problems do you see in collecting data in such a way? Think of countries like China, the United States, Canada, India, France, Spain, and Norway.

Bell's Criteria

Bell's criteria (p.33) for discussing languages are really useful. They are:

1. standardization
2. vitality
3. historicity
4. autonomy
5. reduction
6. mixture
7. *de facto* norms

Standardization

"The process by which a language has been codified in some way."

- Wardhaugh quotes Williams (1992: 146) who says:

"[Standardization is] a sociopolitical process involving the legitimization and institutionalization of a language variety as a feature of sanctioning that variety as socially preferable."

- Standardization often follows the development of a body of literature.

- The norm is often idealized: the standard variety may be similar to one spoken variety, but will often be artificial to some degree.

Standardization

- When a language is standardized, all those varieties that are nonstandard often get regarded as *substandard*.

- The more divergent a variety is from the standard, the less authentic – or the more "broken" – it will be regarded as.

- These nonstandard varieties are often called "dialects" by the general public.

Dante Alighieri
The vernacular in which he wrote *La Divina Commedia* and other works shaped standard Italian.

Standardization

- Think about this in connection with English. What varieties are disempowered?

- Who speaks "standard English"?

- The development of the standard is often a way of realizing political goals.

- Atatürk and his followers transformed Turkish by shedding Arabic and Persian loanwords and adopting the Latin alphabet. Why?

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk
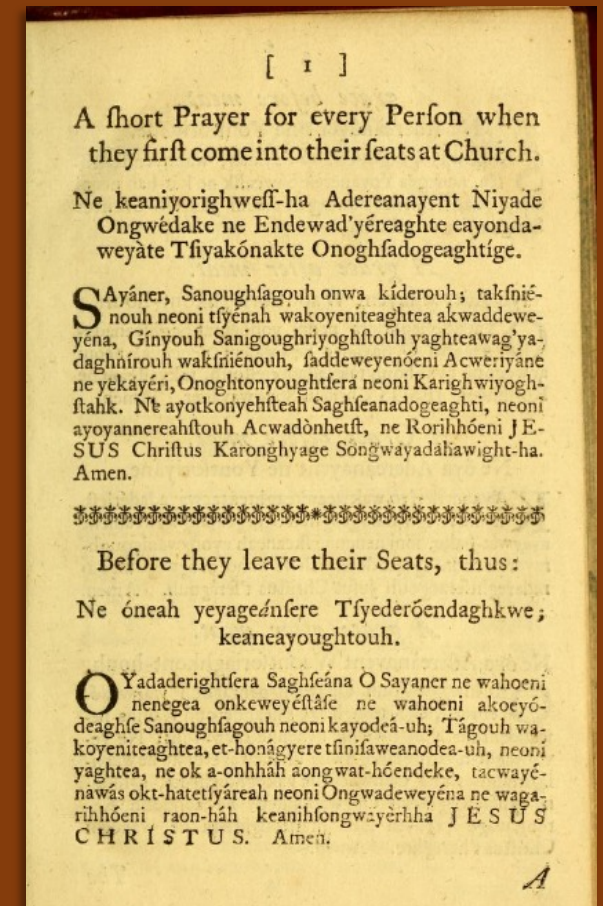As part of his de-Ottomanization of Turkey, the Turkish language was drastically reformed.

Discussion! (p.41, q.2)

- Mencken wrote a series of books under the general title *The American Language*. Why did he choose this particular title? Why not *The English Language in America*? If the English of the United States is properly regarded as a separate language, how about the varieties found in Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Singapore?

Vitality

"The existence of a living community of speakers."

- Used to identify languages as 'alive' or 'dead.'
- Those with a cultural connection to 'dead' languages often find this terminology problematic, and prefer 'dormant.'
- By this criterion, is Latin a dead language?
- Coptic?
- Classical Arabic?
- Language endangerment is often tied to colonialism and imperialism, as speakers teach their children more "useful" languages like Spanish, Mandarin, and English, rather than their traditional, less prestigious language. This may be helped along by public policies that actually intend upon "killing" a language (and culture).

[1]

A short Prayer for every Person when they first come into their seats at Church.

Ne keaniyorighweff-ha Adereanayent Niyade Ongwédake ne Endewad'yéreaghte eayonda-weyàte Tfiyakónakte Onoghfadogeaghtíge.

SAyáner, Sanoughfagouh onwa kíderouh; takfnié-nouh neoni tfyénah wakoyeniteaghtea akwadde weyéna, Gínyouh Sanigoughriyoghftouh yaghteawag'ya-daghníirouh wakfniénouh, faddeweyenóeni Acweriyáne ne yekayéri, Onoghtonyoughtfera neoni Karighwiyogh-ftahk. Nè ayotkonyehfteah Saghfeanadogeaghti, neoni ayoyannereahftouh Acwadònhetft, ne Rorihhóeni JE-SUS Chriftus Karonghyage Songwayadaliawight-ha. Amen.

Before they leave their Seats, thus:

Ne óneah yeyageánfere Tfyederóendaghkwe; keaneayoughtouh.

OYadaderightfera Saghfeána Ò Sayaner ne wahoeni nenégea onkeweyéftàfe ne wahoeni akoeyó-deaghfe Sanoughfagouh neoni kayodeá-uh; Tágouh wa-koyeniteaghtea, et-honágyere tfinifaweanodea-uh, neoni yaghtea, ne ok a-onhháh aongwat-hóendeke, tacwayé-nawás okt-hatetfyáreah neoni Ongwadeweyéna ne waga-rihhóeni raon-háh keanihfongwayèrhha JESUS CHRISTUS. Amen.

A

From a 1780 Church of England prayerbook in Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) and English.

Historicity

"A particular group of people finds a sense of identity through using a particular language: it belongs to them."

- Often, an ethnicity may be identified with a particular language.

- Historic efforts to unify all German speakers in Europe, for one example.

- A common sense of "speaking Arabic" among speakers whose varieties may be mutually unintelligible, because of the cultural, historic, and religious significance of Arabic to these communities.

Autonomy

"A language must be felt by its speakers to be different from other languages."

- Often ties into nationalism.

- Scots speakers (and some linguists) may proclaim Scots as a different language than English.

- Croatian, Serbian, Bosniak, Montenegrin – all mutually-intelligible, and historically considered a single language, but regarded by their speakers as different languages because they belong to different communities.

- EU-member Bulgaria blocking North Macedonia's accession to the EU because N.M. claims they speak Macedonian, while Bulgaria argues that there's no such language – that Macedonian is just Bulgarian.

North Macedonia and
the Macedonian region

◉ Sofia
BULGARIA
Skopje ◉
**NORTH
MACEDONIA** ____

GREECE

▨ Macedonian
geographical region

DW

Reg. Nordmazedonien

POLITICS | NORTH MACEDONIA

Bulgaria and North Macedonia: A new start?

Boris Georgievski
01/24/2022

For two years, Bulgaria has blocked North Macedonia's bid to open accession talks with the EU because of a historical row. But with new governments in Skopje and Sofia, there is hope that compromise can be reached.

"The impasse stems primarily from the fact that the previous Bulgarian government led by Boyko Borisov demanded that North Macedonia accept that both the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian language are Bulgarian in origin and character. Skopje had rejected the ultimatum, saying that it goes against European principles and its right of self-determination."

Discussion! (p.42, q.11)

- If Scotland continues to devolve from England, what might this mean for the variety of English spoken there?

- How might Scots become unequivocally a distinctive variety of English?

Reduction

"A particular variety may be regarded as a sub-variety rather than as an independent entity."

- When speakers of a particular variety regard it as a sub-variety of another language.

- May not be written, or may serve a limited array of functions.

- Cockney is the example given in the text: a variety of English, whose speakers will acknowledge that they're speaking English, admit it's a nonstandard variety, and recognize that there are other similar nonstandard varieties.

Mixture

"Feelings speakers have about the 'purity' of the variety they speak."

- Not a big deal in English – we happily borrow words from all kinds of languages.
  - But see Anglic for an attempt at a Germanic-only English, devoid of Latinate influence.
- A bigger deal in French and German, whose speakers sometimes assert their *autonomy* by ridding the language of "impurities" – often loanwords from English.
- This is connected to the Atatürk-spearheaded removal of Persian and Arabic influence from Turkish.
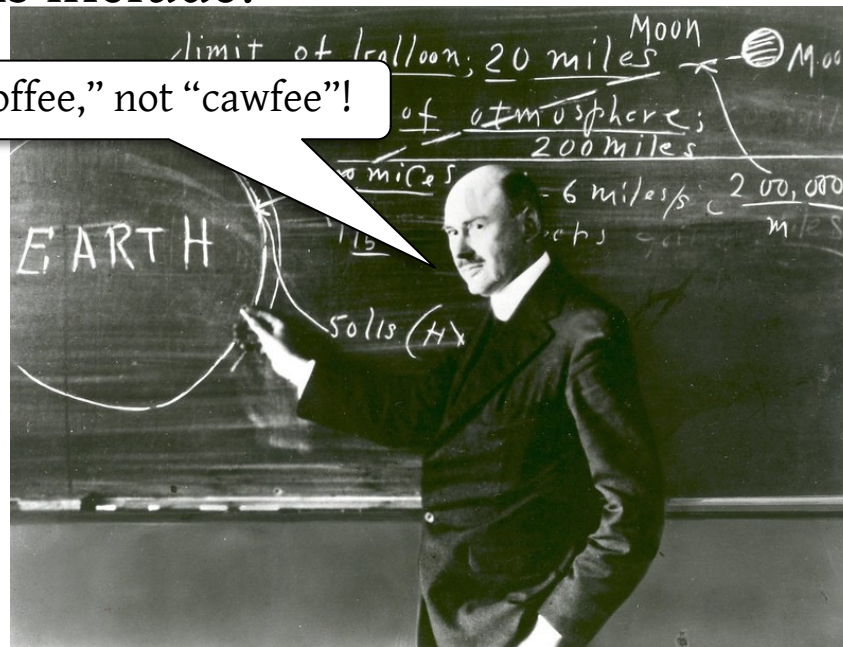
De Facto Norms

"The feeling that many speakers have that there are both 'good' speakers and 'poor' speakers and that the good speakers represent the norms of proper usage."

- Norms are often reinforced in education.

- In English, some norms include:

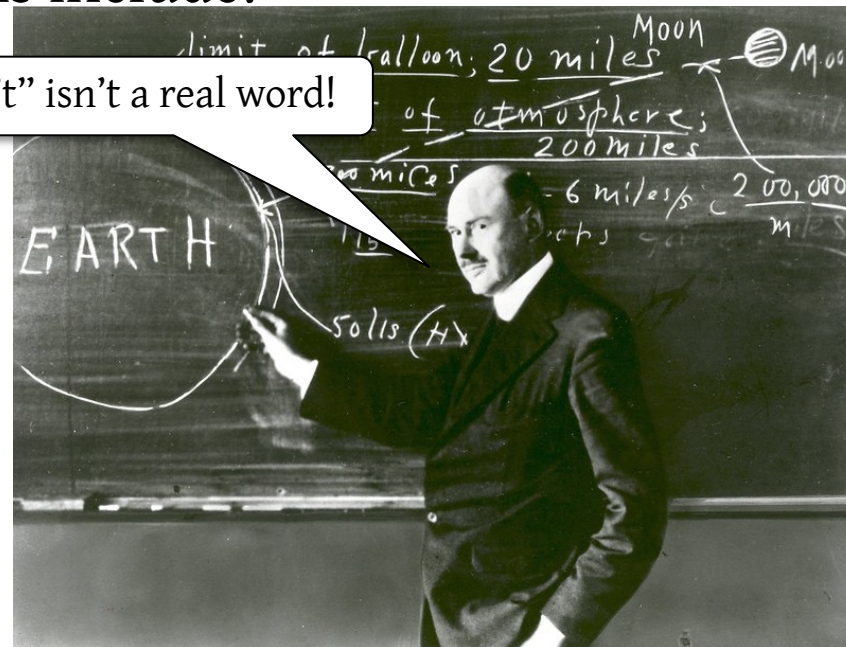Don't end a sentence in a preposition!
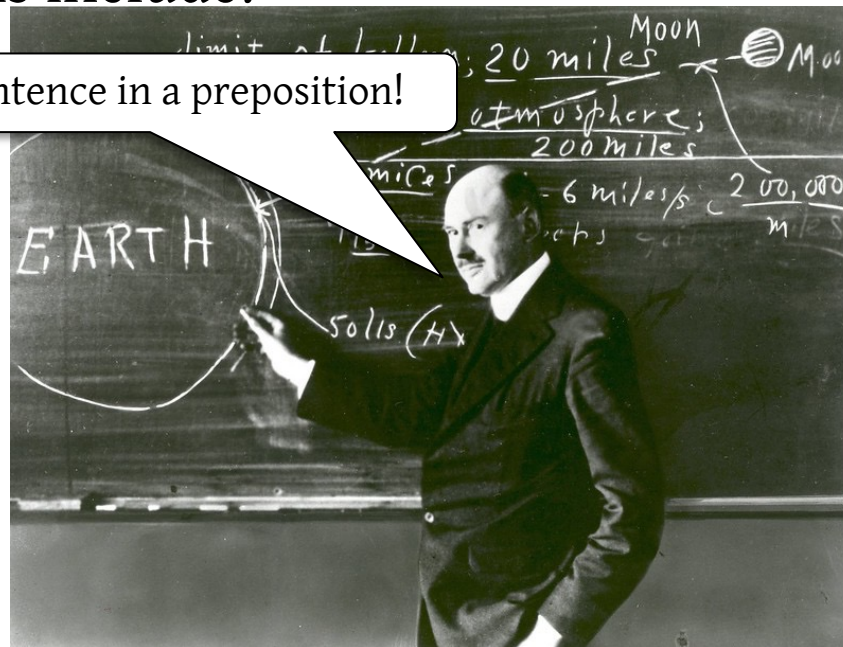
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"Brang" isn't a real word!
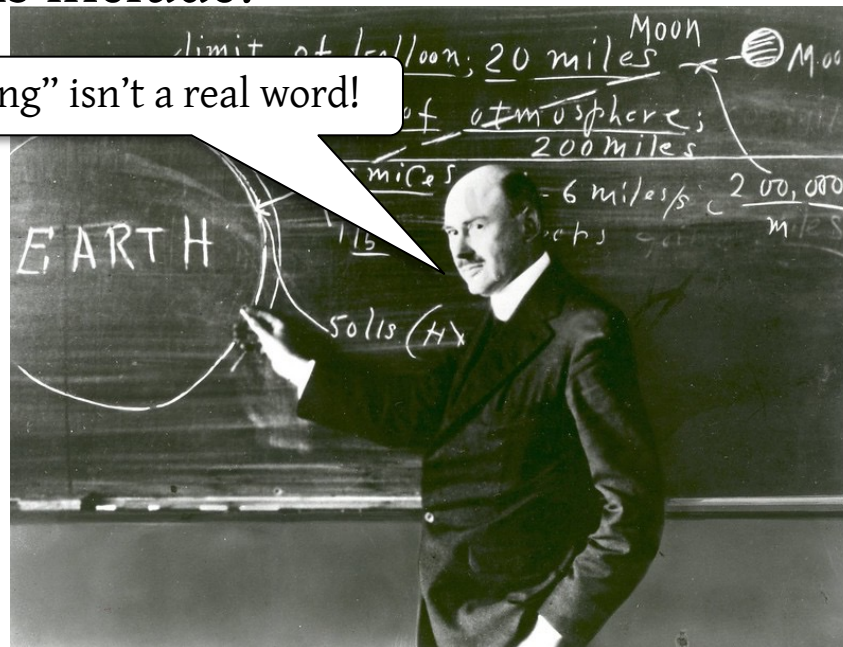
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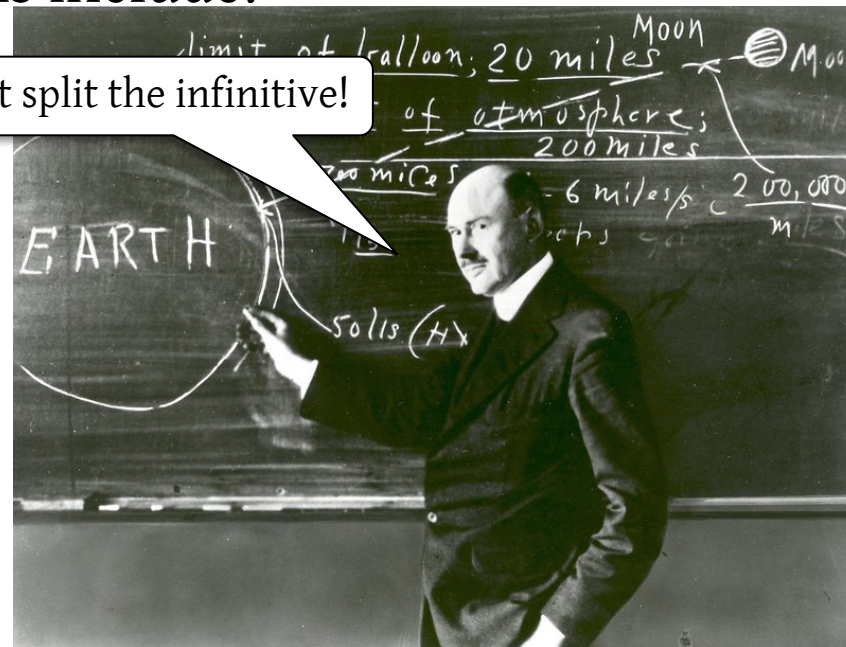- In English, some norms include:

Say "coffee," not "cawfee"!

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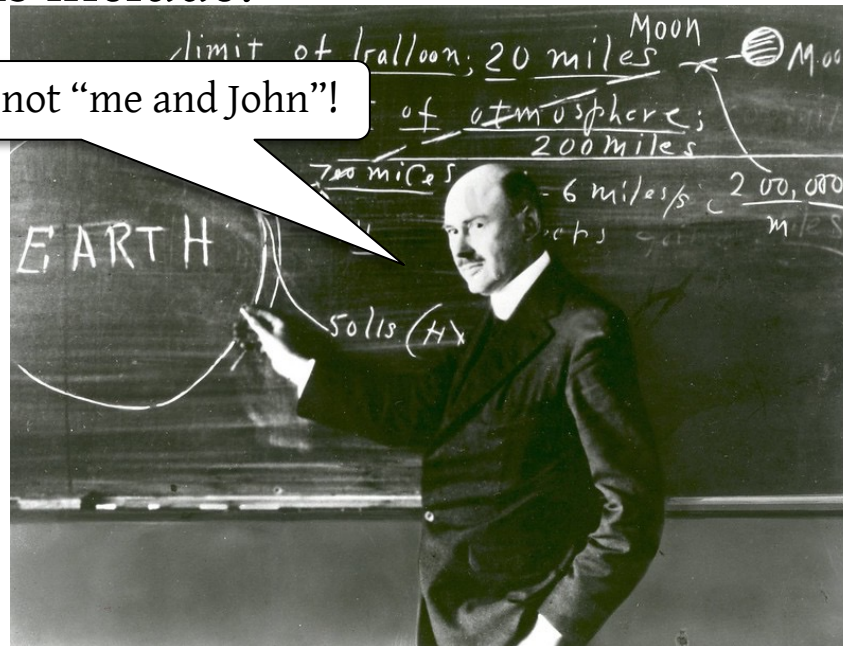- In English, some norms include:

Don't split the infinitive!

De Facto Norms

"The feeling that many speakers have that there are both 'good' speakers and 'poor' speakers and that the good speakers represent the norms of proper usage."

- Norms are often reinforced in education.

- In English, some norms include:

Say "John and I," not "me and John"!

Discussion! (p.43, q.13)

- How would you evaluate each of the following languages according to the criteria stated above (standardization, vitality, historicity, autonomy, reduction, mixture, and *de facto* norms); that is, for each criterion, does the language possess the stated characteristic or lack it?

- Haitian Creole, Provençal, Singapore English, Old English, Pitcairnese, African American Vernacular English, Tok Pisin, Cockney, Ukrainian, and the language of Shakespeare's plays?

Languages and Bell's Criteria

- Different languages fulfill different criteria. We can say that English and Latin are both languages, but their vitality is widely divergent.

- Sometimes, the standard becomes recognized as "the language," and nonstandard varieties get relegated to being "dialects" — and, under influence from the standard variety, they may change to resemble it more.

- Generally, a dialect is subordinate to a language. Given language X, there may be several dialects of language X. When a language has very few speakers, however, there may be no separate dialects, just a single, unitary language.

Discussion! (p.43, q.13)

- 'A language is a dialect with an army and a navy' is a well-known observation. (Today we would add an 'airforce'!) True? And, if so, what are the consequences?

Two more terms

- Vernacular

"the speech of a particular country or region"

"a form of speech transmitted from parent to child as a primary medium of communication"

- Koiné

"a form of speech shared by people of different vernaculars – although for some of them the *koiné* itself may be their vernacular."

- Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the *koiné* of the Arab world, contrasted by many vernacular varieties of Arabic.

Before next class...

- Read the rest of chapter 2, pages 43–54.