5. Codes

Sociology of Language (Spring 2023)

Joseph Pentangelo

The College of Staten Island, CUNY

Code

- What is a *code*?

  "[...] it is possible to refer to a language or a variety of language as a *code*."

  "[*code*] can be used to refer to any kind of system that two or more people employ for communication."

- By this definition, what we've previously discussed as *dialects*, *languages*, *styles*, *registers*, and *varieties* can all be considered codes.

- Why does Wardhaugh indicate that *code* might be preferable to terms like *dialect, language, style*, etc.?

  Code is 'neutral,' and does not "arouse emotions," like other terms might.

Code

- Virtually all speakers of any given language—including everyone in this class—are in control of several codes.

> In general [...] when you open your mouth, you must choose a particular language, dialect, style, register, or variety—that is, a particular code. [...] The various choices will have different social meanings. What are some of the factors that influence the choices you make?

- Switching from one code to another is called *code-switching*.
- In the *diglossic* situation, there are "clear functional differences between the codes" that govern your choice.

Discussion! (p.89, q.1)

- Use of the term *code* allows us to use derivative terms like *codification* and *recodification*. Writing systems are said to be codifications of speech. How do the English and Chinese writing systems differ as codifications of their respective languages?

Chinese is written with a logosyllabary. Most characters represent a word, but many words contain two+ characters. In these words, one character suggests the meaning, while another suggests the pronunciation.

口 'mouth, opening'

吃 'eat'

唱 'sing'

虫 'insect'

蚁 'ant'

茧 'cocoon'

Discussion! (p.89, q.2)

- A recodification is a further manipulation of a code. Morse Code and Pig Latin are two simple recodifications. What are the principles behind each?

Morse Code
Dots and dashes for each letter.

A ●—   J ●———   S ●●●
B —●●●   K —●—   T —
C —●—●   L ●—●●   U ●●—
D —●●   M ——   V ●●●—
E ●   N —●   W ●——
F ●●—●   O ———   X —●●—
G ——●   P ●——●   Y —●——
H ●●●●   Q ——●—   Z ——●●
I ●●   R ●—●

Pig Latin
Move first letter (or consonant cluster) to end of word, then add /eɪ/ (spelt 'ay').

pig → igpay
latin → atinlay
school → oolschay

Diglossia

- What is diglossia?
- How is it defined by Ferguson?

> diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.

Diglossia

With diglossia, there are two separate codes:

- one, the language of everyday use (the 'low variety,' or L)

- another, a superimposed, stylized variety (the 'high variety,' H)

- A diglossic situation is *much* more extreme than that found in spoken American English.

- In diglossia, the H variety is usually nobody's native language, and the H and L varieties may be mutually unintelligible.

- Crucially, the two varieties have very clearly distinguished uses.

Diglossia

- Often, the H variety is derived from an earlier version of the L variety.

- Imagine if the English that we speak was the L variety, and the H variety was basically Old English, but with new words developed for technology and other things that people in medieval England were unaware of.

- This is almost exactly the situation in Arabic, where the H variety is Classical Arabic (plus some innovations), and the local spoken varieties are L.

I. Genesis 1.1–5.

1. On angynne gescēop God heofonan and eorðan. 2. Sēo eorðe
In [the] beginning created God heavens and earth. The earth
wæs sōðlīce īdel and æmtig, and þēostra wæron ofer ðǣre
was truly void and empty, and darknesses were over the
nywelnysse brādnysse; and Godes gāst wæs geferod ofer wæteru.
abyss's surface; and God's spirit was brought over [the] water.
3. God cwæð ðā: Gewurðe lēoht, and lēoht wearð geworht. 4. God
God said then: Be light, and light was made. God
geseah ðā ðæt hit gōd wæs, and hē tōdǣlde ðæt lēoht fram ðam
saw then that it good was, and he divided the light from the
ðēostrum. 5. And hēt ðæt lēoht dæg and þā ðēostru niht: ðā
darkness. And called the light day and the darkness night: then
wæs geworden æfen and morgen ān dæg.
was made evening and morning one day.

From Algeo (2009: 108)

Diglossia

Other examples discussed include:

• Standard German (H) and Swiss German (L) in Switzerland.

• Standard French (H) and Haitian Creole (L) in Haïti

• Katharévousa (H) and Demotic (L) in Greece.

Do any of you speak any of these varieties? How would you describe the situation?

Diglossia

- The H variety is prestigious and powerful.
- The L variety has minimal prestige or power. (Wardhaugh writes that people may even deny knowing the L variety.)

People in diglossic societies often claim that the H variety is just better: more beautiful, more well-formed, more expressive, more logical, etc.

People may resist translating something from the H variety into the L variety, especially where religious texts are concerned.
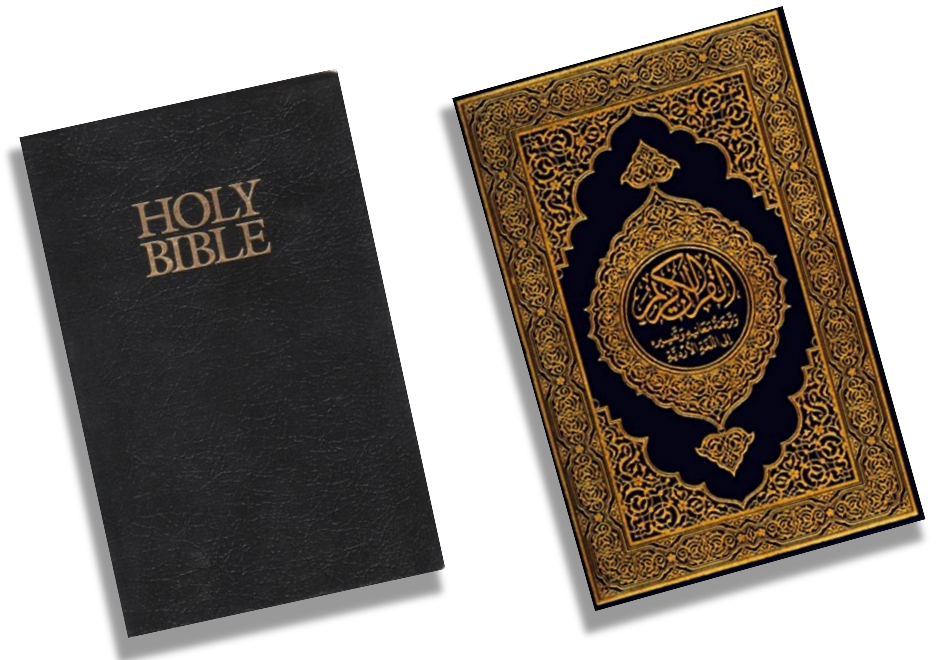
Diglossia

- In diglossic societies, most or all literature exists in the H variety.
- If the L variety is written, it might be for low-prestige applications, e.g. tabloids, shop signs, cheap restaurant menus, folk literature.
- At the same time, the L variety is more widely spoken: all children will learn it, while only some will go on to acquire the H variety.

"[...] the H variety is 'taught,' whereas the L variety is 'learned.'"

Discussion! (p.95, q.4)

- If someone were to tell you that diglossia is but a simple reflection of the social, cultural, or political oppression of a people, how might you answer?

Discussion! (p.96, q.5)

- How 'diglossic' are classroom situations in which children who come to school speaking only a regional or social variety of English well removed from the standard variety are taught the standard variety and its various uses, particularly its use in writing?

Something to consider...

- To what extent can we rely on ancient literature and monuments in reconstructing the everyday languages of ancient peoples?

- Consider: Hieroglyphics for ancient Egyptian, the Biblical Old Testament for ancient Hebrew, the literature in Sanskrit.

- How can we supplement our knowledge?

Multilingualism

In much of the world, the ability to speak several languages is the norm.

- Why might this be?
- Why might this be less the case in the U.S. and U.K. than in Morocco or the Netherlands?
- Have you ever travelled abroad? What were your experiences like linguistically?

An interesting example of multilingualism exists among the Tukano of the northwest Amazon, on the border between Colombia and Brazil (Sorensen, 1971). The Tukano are a multilingual people because men must marry outside their language group; that is, no man may have a wife who speaks his language, for that kind of marriage relationship is not permitted and would be viewed as a kind of incest. Men choose the women they marry from various neighboring tribes who speak other languages. Furthermore, on marriage, women move into the men's households or longhouses. Consequently, in any village several languages are used: the language of the men; the various languages spoken by women who originate from different neighboring tribes; and a widespread regional 'trade' language. Children are born into this multilingual environment: the child's father speaks one language, the child's mother another, and other women with whom the child has daily contact perhaps still others. However, everyone in the community is interested in language learning so most people can speak most of the languages. Multilingualism is taken for granted, and moving from one language to another in the course of a single conversation is very common. In fact, multilingualism is so usual that the Tukano are hardly conscious that they do speak different languages as they shift easily from one to another. They cannot readily tell an outsider how many languages they speak, and must be suitably prompted to enumerate which languages they speak and to describe how well they speak each one.
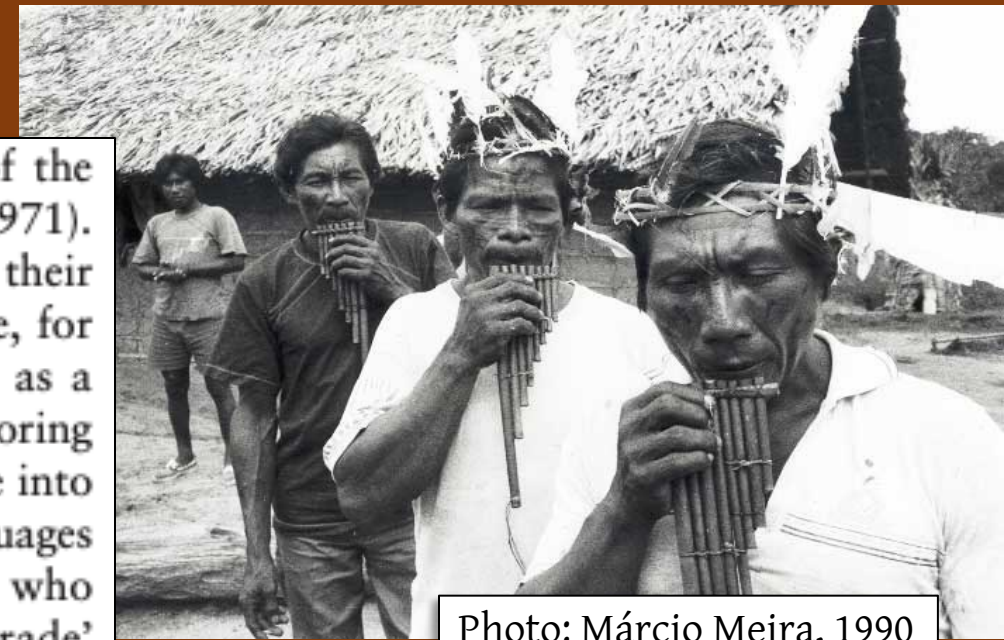
Wardhaugh (2005: 97)

Photo: Márcio Meira, 1990

- Strong gender division.
- Strong connections between neighboring groups.

Discussion! (p.101, q.4)

- Is it possible to have a society in which everyone is completely bilingual in the same two languages and there is no diglossia? How stable would such a situation be?
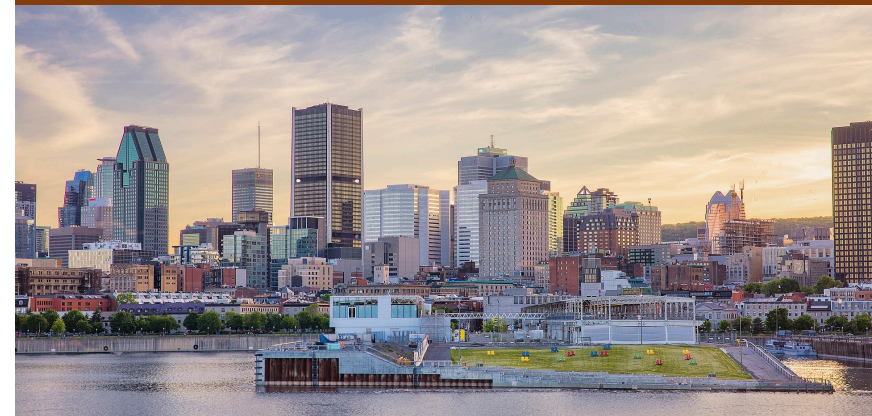
Code-switching

- What is code-switching?

"People [...] are usually required to select a particular code whenever they choose to speak, and they may also decide to switch from one code to another or to mix codes even within sometimes very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process known as *code-switching.*"

- Code switching can be used to express a speaker's social identity, and to attempt to influence how one will be treated.

Code-switching

- Consider the situation in Montréal.
- There are many first-language (L1) English-speakers and many L1 French-speakers.
- Montréal is located within the province of Quebec, which is French-speaking.
- Quebecers often feel mistreated by the majority-English-speaking rest of Canada, and assert their Francophony as a defiant gesture.
- Choosing which language to use in any given interaction in Montréal will convey a lot about what you think of this situation.

Code-switching

- The norms of code-switching differ from community to community.

> In a relatively small Puerto Rican neighborhood in New Jersey, some members freely used code-switching styles and extreme forms of borrowing both in everyday casual talk and in more formal gatherings. Other local residents were careful to speak only Spanish with a minimum of loans on formal occasions, reserving code-switching styles for informal talk. Others again spoke mainly English, using Spanish or code-switching styles only with small children or with neighbors.

Wardhaugh (2005: 107)

- What about "Spanglish," the mixing of Spanish and English within a single sentence?

No van a bring it up in the meeting.

'They're not going to bring it up in the meeting.'

Todos los Mexicanos were riled up.

'All the Mexicans were riled up.'

Code-switching

- Speakers may choose to use codes that are used by others to express solidarity or seek acceptance. This is called *crossing* or *styling*.

- Wardhaugh gives a few examples of white kids adopting AAE (or features of it) to indicate and establish their affiliation with Black peers and "especially hip hop."

- But this can backfire!

Iggy Azalea consistently employs AAE features in her rapping, and is often seen as a poser or appropriating AAE. (She is white and from Australia.)

The Beastie Boys famously made no effort to adopt AAE features in their rapping, and were thus generally regarded positively (Eberhardt & Freeman 2015).

Code-switching

Two types: *situational code-switching* and *metaphorical code-switching.*

- Situational: Choice of code depends on the situation. (Similar to, but far less extreme than, diglossia.)

  What's an example of this?

- Metaphorical: Choice of code reflects a redefinition of the situation. By changing codes, you signal a change to informality, politeness, humorousness, etc.

How might you change your code to signal a change from formality to informality?

How about to signal solidarity?   How about to indicate a shift to humorousness?

How about to indicate that you're uncomfortable?   How might Polari fit into this?

Code-switching

- *Convergence* is when one individual tries to adopt another's traits (including code) in order to signal their affinity and seek their acceptance.

> If the person you're speaking to shifts into an informal code, and you want to be friendly, you would do the same.

- *Divergence* is when one alters their traits (including code) in order to be judged less favorably, and to highlight their differences.

> But if you want to signal that you're *not* friends, or not in a casual environment, you might shift to an even *more* formal code.

Discussion! (p.118, q.2)

- When you visit a foreign country whose language you know either well or poorly, when do you use that language and when do you not? What factors govern your choice?

For next week...

- Read chapter 5 (pp.119–132)
- Do writing assignment #2, which will be emailed to you this weekend.