

## ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

### 1. Ethnicity

- ethnic groups may use the language that identify their ethnicity;
- if the dominant language is used, speakers may incorporate linguistic signals that identifies their ethnic background:

Study the Example #2 on p. 187

#### 1.1 African-American vernacular English

There are three theories about the origin of African American Vernacular English (AAVE):

- (i) AAVE has no characteristics which are not found in other varieties of English (in particular, non-standard varieties of American English spoken by people of any colour in the South).
- (ii) AAVE is a Creole:

West-African / English Creole



POLITICAL ISSUE!

Arguments:

AAVE *badmouth* < Vai (West African) ‘curse’

*dig* ‘understand’ < Vai *dega*

*jazz, banjo* etc. < West African languages

Substitution of [b] for [v] in words such as *river, devil* :  
West African languages lack [v]!

Because they were socially isolated, many AAVE speakers kept the [b] for generations. However, it is not a feature of most AAVE dialects today.

AAVE < West African  
NOT A PLAUSIBLE HYPOTHESIS!



Identity issue!

- (iii) Labov: Every unique feature in AAVE can be derived by rule from Standard English.

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Examples of linguistic differences that represent cultural distinctiveness:

- Absence of the verb *be*

Example #4, p. 188

- Invariant forms of the verb *be*

Example #5, p. 189

- Multiple negations

Figure 8.1, p. 189

## 1.2 British Black English

Members of the British Black community (born in England) speak a variety of Jamaican Creole, known also as Patois or British Jamaican Creole.

Patois may be used as symbol of ethnic identity; those who are not proficient in Patois, use English with Patois features – this way their English is marked as “Black” – signaling the identity of the speaker.

Study the Example #6 on p. 190.

Examples of some characteristic Patois features:

- (i) Pronunciation:

[den], [tin] for ‘then’ and ‘thin’  
[niem] ‘name’  
etc.

(ii) Vocabulary:

*lick* meaning: kick  
*kenge* meaning: 'weak'  
etc.

(iii) Morphology, syntax:

Plural forms: no *-s* on the end;  
Tenses are not marked on verbs: *walk, jump*  
meaning also: *walked, jumped*  
*mi*  
meaning: I, me, my  
*mi niem* 'my name'  
etc.

These differences from standard English have a clear function: representing opposition to mainstream values!

1.3 Maori English

Recommended reading: pp. 193-194.

1.4 New Englishes

The term is used for varieties developed in post-colonial societies where the legacy of English still remains.

A distinction has to be made between two types of New Englishes:

*settlement colonies* – English has always been the first language, for example, Australia, New Zealand;

*exploitation colonies* – multilingualism with English as a language of administration, for example, Hong Kong, Singapore.

**2. Social networks**

Study the Example #9, on p. 196. Comment! Study the example of a social network: Figure 8.2, p. 197.
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Milroy and Milroy (1978), Milroy (1980, 1987): research on linguistic variables in relation to social networks.

In the social network as shown in the example above, the strongest correlation between linguistic variables and network strength were:

- (i) the vowel in words such as *man* is pronounced [mo:n], and *map* is pronounced [ma:p];
- (ii) deleting the [ð] in words such as *mother*, *father*.

In describing social networks, a scale of two factors has been developed representing patterns of social interactions within the network:

*density*: refers to the fact that many people share the same social contacts;

*plexity*: people are in touch with each other in the network.

*uniplex* relationship: when the link to someone else is only in one area;

*multiplex* relationship: interactions with others in several dimensions.

### 3. Communities of practice and construction of social identity

Linguistic patterns described by sociolinguists correlate to *macro-level categories* such as gender, age, ethnicity and class.

Describing day-to-day interactions between individuals requires categories of *social network* (see above) and *community of practice*.



It develops

- (i) around activities that group members share;
- (ii) around shared goals and attitudes.

Study the example #11 and #12 on p. 200-201. Comment!

The concept of *community of practice* is aimed at understanding the complexities of belonging to a certain group.

