

Seminar in Sociolinguistics: The grammatical locus of linguistic variation

LING-GA 3510.001 – Spring 2017

1. Course logistics

Time Tue 9:30–12:15
Location 10 Washington Pl. #308 (Socio lab)

Instructor Dr. Laurel MacKenzie
Contact laurel.mackenzie@nyu.edu
Office 10 Washington Pl. #305
Office hour by appointment

Prerequisite: LING-GA 1510 (Sociolinguistics) or permission of instructor

Auditors are welcome. If you're planning on auditing, please send a short email to the course instructor (laurel.mackenzie@nyu.edu) with your NYU netID in order to gain access to the course materials.

2. Course description

Our focus in this seminar will be the grammatical locus of sociolinguistic variables, traditionally defined as cases in which speakers have "two or more ways of saying the same thing" (e.g. Weiner and Labov, 1983). We will read, discuss, and synthesize a number of papers which use data from language production to support arguments about the abstract locus of surface variability. Questions to be considered include:

- Are probabilistic alternations part of the grammar, i.e. the same system that instantiates categorical alternations?
- How do we define a linguistic variable? Is this a useful theoretical/methodological construct?
- How are conditions on variable phenomena represented grammatically? Are social and stylistic factors part of grammar? Are all types of variables subject to the same sorts of conditioning, or do we find asymmetries? If so, why should this be?
- How do we locate where in the grammar particular instances of surface variation are situated? We'll consider case studies in which quantitative data is brought to bear on the locus of particular variables.
- What advantages/disadvantages are offered by different frameworks for representing variable phenomena in grammar? (e.g. variable rules, competing grammars, exemplar-based frameworks) What kind of data were they developed to account for, and how well do they extend to other cases?

In some cases we will consider side-by-side two or more papers that approach similar questions from different angles, and see if we can figure out what, if anything, they have to say to one another. We will make a concerted effort to consider both "p-side" and "s-side" variables, as well as variables whose level of grammar isn't immediately apparent. We will draw both on classic papers and on recent publications.

3. Requirements

3.1. Presentations

This is a seminar class, in which we will learn from each other through discussion of the papers we read and the issues they raise. Participants (both enrolled students and auditors) will take turns leading class meetings and presenting on the assigned papers. Enrolled students are additionally required to propose a relevant paper to read, which they will present in the last two weeks of class. This should be a paper that connects to the student's own research interests and/or term paper for this course.

3.2. Participation

All participants are expected to do the assigned reading and to participate in the discussion of the material in class. For each paper, there will be a discussion forum on NYU Classes. Enrolled students are required, and auditors are encouraged, to post one question for each paper by 9pm on Monday. (If you're presenting a paper the next day, you don't also have to post a question on it.)

3.3. Term paper

Enrolled students will write a short paper on a topic of their choice, and present on this work in the last class meeting. A 1–2 page abstract and bibliography should be circulated to the class on **Monday, 3/20**. Papers will be due **Tuesday, 5/9**.

4. Schedule

4.1. Is variation part of grammar?

- 1/24: Yes
Labov (1969) | Cedergren and Sankoff (1974) | Guy and Boberg (1997)
- 1/31: Maybe not always (1)
Preston (2004) | Fruehwald (2016) | Tamminga et al. (2016)
- 2/7: Maybe not always (2)
Coetzee (2016) | Embick (2008)

4.2. What does variation look like under the surface?

- 2/14: The linguistic variable
Labov (1966) | Wolfram (1991)
- 2/21: Locating variable TD-deletion
Guy (1991) | Patrick (1991) | Tamminga (2016)
- 2/28: Locating copula/auxiliary variation
Rickford et al. (1991) | MacKenzie (2013)
- 3/7: The variant as the bearer of social meaning and/or locus of change
Campbell-Kibler (2011) | Dinkin (2016)

Spring Break – no class

3/20: Circulate term paper abstract & bibliography

4.3. Representing the variable: variation as competition

- 3/21: Competition & change
Kroch (1989) | Fruehwald et al. (2013) | Labov et al. (2016)
- 3/28: Competition & stability
Adger (2006) | Wallenberg (2013)

4.4. Representing the variable: other approaches

10. 4/4: Representing the variable: Optimality Theoretic approaches
Auger (2001) | Bresnan et al. (2007)
11. 4/11: Representing the variable: exemplar-based approaches
Pierrehumbert (2006) | Hay and Foulkes (2016)

4.5. Presentations

- XX. **4/18: No class – Laurel in Edinburgh for Workshop on Sound Change – we’ll find a time to make this session up**
12. Makeup session TBA: Your chosen papers
 13. 4/25: Your chosen papers
 14. 5/2: Term paper presentations
- 5/9: Term paper due**

References

- Adger, David. 2006. Combinatorial variability. *Journal of Linguistics* 42:503–530.
- Auger, Julie. 2001. Phonological variation and Optimality Theory: Evidence from word-initial vowel epenthesis in Vimeu Picard. *Language Variation and Change* 13:253–303.
- Bresnan, Joan, Ashwini Deo, and Devyani Sharma. 2007. Typology in variation: A probabilistic approach to *be* and *n’t* in the *Survey of English Dialects*. *English Language and Linguistics* 11:301–346.
- Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2011. The sociolinguistic variant as a carrier of social meaning. *Language Variation and Change* 22:423–441.
- Cedergren, Henrietta, and David Sankoff. 1974. Variable rules: Performance as a statistical reflection of competence. *Language* 50:333–355.
- Coetzee, Andries W. 2016. A comprehensive model of phonological variation: Grammatical and non-grammatical factors in variable nasal place assimilation. *Phonology* 33:211–246.
- Dinkin, Aaron J. 2016. Variant-centered variation and the *like* conspiracy. *Linguistic Variation* 16:221–246.
- Embick, David. 2008. Variation and morphosyntactic theory: Competition fractionated. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2:59–78.
- Fruehwald, Josef. 2016. Filled pause choice as a sociolinguistic variable. In *U. Penn Working Papers in Linguistics 22.2: Selected Papers from NWAV 44*, ed. Helen Jeoung, 41–49.
- Fruehwald, Josef, Jonathan Gress-Wright, and Joel C. Wallenberg. 2013. Phonological rule change: The Constant Rate Effect. In *Proceedings of NELS 40*, ed. Seda Kan, Claire Moore-Cantwell, and Robert Staubs, 219–230.
- Guy, Gregory R. 1991. Explanation in variable phonology: An exponential model of morphological constraints. *Language Variation and Change* 3:1–22.
- Guy, Gregory R., and Charles Boberg. 1997. Inherent variability and the obligatory contour principle. *Language Variation and Change* 9:149–164.
- Hay, Jennifer, and Paul Foulkes. 2016. The evolution of medial /t/ over real and remembered time. *Language* 92:298–330.
- Kroch, Anthony. 1989. Reflexes of grammar in patterns of language change. *Language Variation and Change* 1:199–244.
- Labov, William. 1966. The linguistic variable as a structural unit. *Washington Linguistics Review* 3:4–22.
- Labov, William. 1969. Contraction, deletion, and inherent variability of the English copula. *Language* 45:715–762.
- Labov, William, Sabriya Fisher, Duna Gylfadottir, Anita Henderson, and Betsy Sneller. 2016. Competing systems in Philadelphia phonology. *Language Variation and Change* 28:273–305.

- MacKenzie, Laurel. 2013. Variation in English auxiliary realization: A new take on contraction. *Language Variation and Change* 25:17–41.
- Patrick, Peter L. 1991. Creoles at the intersection of variable processes: *-t, d* deletion and past-marking in the Jamaican mesolect. *Language Variation and Change* 3:171–189.
- Pierrehumbert, Janet. 2006. The next toolkit. *Journal of Phonetics* 34:516–530.
- Preston, Dennis R. 2004. Three kinds of sociolinguistics: A psycholinguistic perspective. In *Sociolinguistic Variation: Critical Reflections*, ed. Carmen Fought, 140–158. Oxford University Press.
- Rickford, John R., Arnetha Ball, Renée Blake, Raina Jackson, and Nomi Martin. 1991. Rappin on the copula coffin: Theoretical and methodological issues in the analysis of copula variation in African-American Vernacular English. *Language Variation and Change* 3:103–132.
- Tamminga, Meredith. 2016. Persistence in phonological and morphological variation. *Language Variation and Change* 28.
- Tamminga, Meredith, Laurel MacKenzie, and David Embick. 2016. The dynamics of variation in individuals. *Linguistic Variation* 16:300–336.
- Wallenberg, Joel C. 2013. A unified theory of stable variation, syntactic optionality, and syntactic change. Talk given at the 15th Diachronic Generative Syntax Conference, University of Ottawa, August 2, 2013.
- Weiner, E. Judith, and William Labov. 1983. Constraints on the agentless passive. *Journal of Linguistics* 19:29–58.
- Wolfram, Walter A. 1991. The linguistic variable: Fact and fantasy. *American Speech* 66:22–32.