

The “Standard”

LCD 205: Sociolinguistics
Queens College, CUNY

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Outline

- Homework & Exams
- The Standard

Homework & Exam

- Exam in class
 - NOT open book
 - Can use notes
- Do bolded key words in the text. Can bring to exam
 - Matching definitions are taken from the textbook's bolded words

PRESTIGE & STANDARD

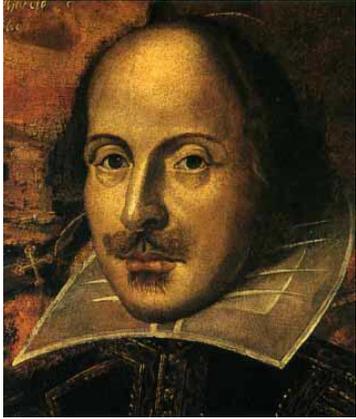
Interaction of Class, Race, and Language

- Intersection of language, race, and class
- We cannot discuss race, class, and gender directly, but we can veil the discussion in terms of language

So-called Standard Dialect

- Distinctions between standard and non-standard ways of saying things, never have anything to do with the linguistic forms themselves.
- Rather, “polite” or standard speech is a convention, just like good table manners.
- Standard forms are legitimized through their use in writing, by people of authority and in places of authority.

Changing Standards



Shakespeare



Chaucer

In fact, what counts as “polite” or “correct” speech varies over time and from place to place:

1. ‘He went down the road for to see his mother.’ (Chaucer)
2. ‘I have already chose my officer.’ (Othello, I, 1.)
3. Split infinitives—*To boldly go...*
4. H-dropping
5. British vs. American *car* [ka:]

So-called Standard Dialect

- What counted as “good grammar” was close to the speech of the elite.
- Prescriptivists sometimes *rationalized post hoc* what counts as correct speech. What is supposed to be wrong with these?
 - (1) She didn't see nothing.
 - (2) Who did she go with?
 - (3) It wasn't me.
 - (4) Saying *She's walkin'* vs. *She's walking*.
 - (5) I don't want to suddenly find out I'm wrong.

The Prestige Dialect

- The “Standard” dialect
 - doesn’t really exist as a natural dialect
 - Based on language of prestigious social groups
 - Mixed with some made-up prescriptive rules
- “proper” purely due to social reasons
 - no scientific reason for “superiority”
 - all dialects are systematic and follow linguistic rules

So-called Standard Dialect

- So, what counts as “correct” is a social/historical **accident**, and doesn’t follow from any inherent linguistic properties of the features involved.
- **Prescription**: Social pressure to use language (for example) in the “right” way. Often this means pressure to use **standard** features—the kind of language that grammar teachers and fussy parents tell you to use.
- Ultimately, these are just **conventions**.

So-called Standard Dialect

- Notions of “correctness” and “good language” are therefore not particularly useful to anyone and are damaging to speakers of non-standard varieties
- In this class, please stifle your impulse to describe things as
 - “good English”,
 - “correct language”
 - “Proper”
 - “slang”
- These are evaluative, and have no place in science.

Standard language ideology

- So, we've seen that no way of speaking is inherently (linguistically) better or worse than another.
- **BUT!** this isn't the way speakers of a language *experience* differences between standard and non-standard forms!
- Rather, we tend to feel that many (standard) forms are *right*, and that non-standard forms are *wrong* in the same way that $2+2=4$ is right and $2+2=5$ is wrong.
- Why is this??!!



W. Safire

Standard language ideology

- Standard language gets legitimized through its *use* by people of authority in places of authority.
- These associations objectified by language mavens, teachers and parents, who describe certain ways of talking as objectively “right” and “wrong”.
- In so doing we *reify* links between social meaning and linguistic form... and at the same time legitimates their position of power.



Standard English

- Do a web of Association for the standard
 - including Location, space, race, class
- Describe the standard
 - Where is it used
 - Who speaks it
 - What does it sound like
 - Any key identifying features

Standard language ideology

Standard language ideology (Milroy and Milroy 1991): The intolerance of variation, and especially deviation from written form. Variation, as we've seen is pervasive, hence this is an *ideal* about language use.

But there's another sense in which our common sense understandings of "right" and "wrong" languages are *ideological*.

Language ideology: Shared, *taken for granted* notions about the language in the world, that that we use to make sense of world (Woolard 1999:4).

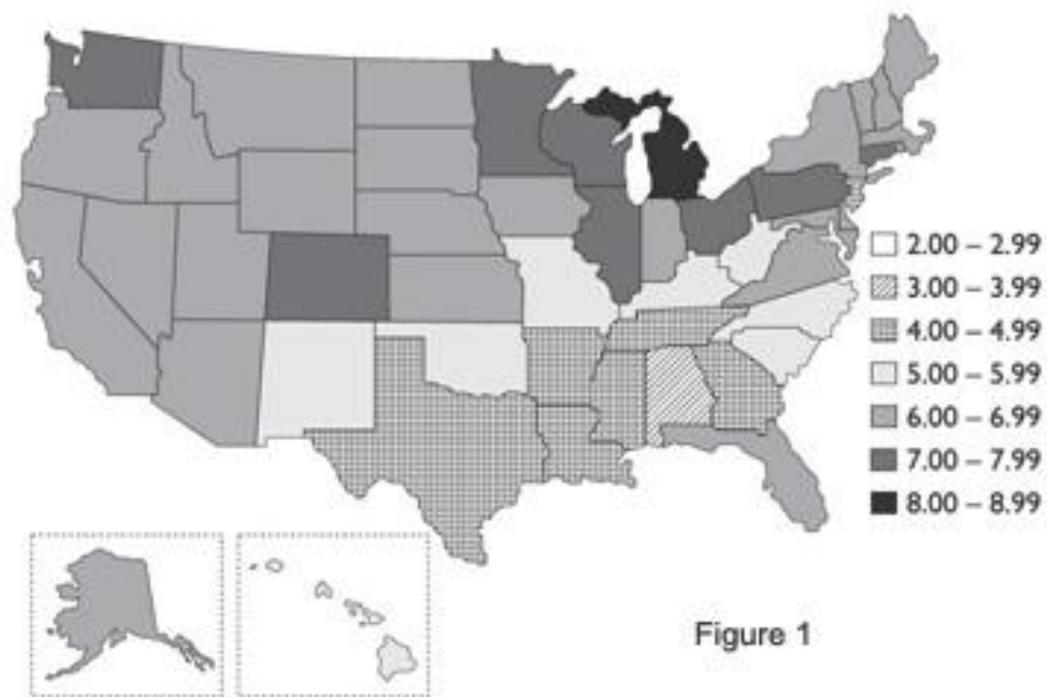


L. Milroy

Standard language ideology

- Understandings of non-standard varieties as “illogical,” “lazy,” “ignorant,” “stupid” etc. serve legitimise differences in power between standard-speakers and non-standard-speakers. This has important consequences for speakers of these varieties.

- *Perceptions of “correct” English* (Preston 1999)



Linguistic Insecurity

- A product of the “standard” is...
 - Linguistic Insecurity – Hypercorrection
 - Speakers of the second highest class will produce more prestige variants than expected when paying attention to their speech.
- Juliet and Romeo often go to the library to check out the newest books.

The Standard Dialect

- What is the standard in another language you speak? Who are the people in authority that speak this?
- What should we call the standard?
- Should people learn the standard?
- How can we re-conceptualize the standard so that it isn't damaging?