

Term Paper Assignment

Shaping your report

During the semester we explored different dimensions of language variation. Chief among these were the ways in which geography, social status, age, gender and ethnicity shape the sounds, words and grammatical structure of language. Your term paper should demonstrate how you use what you have learned in class to analyze the dialect data that you and other students collect.

You can demonstrate this best by providing a detailed discussion of the survey results that link your findings to the course readings. You will need to cite specific readings in your paper and provide a list of references at the end of your paper. Use Sharon Ash's (2006) paper as a model for writing your own paper.

Introduction

Ash tests the hypothesis that the Midland dialect area is defined by a set of linguistic features that set it apart from the Inland North and the South. In the introduction to your paper review the research cited by Ash and Trudgill that defines the Midland region as a distinct dialect area. You should include examples from the papers by Gordon (2004b) and Murray and Simon (2004) as well. Compare this hypothesis with the alternative hypothesis that the Midland region contains a mixture of Inland North and Southern dialect features. State the evidence that would support treating the Midland region as a dialect area that is distinct.

A second part of the introduction should describe the limitations of Ash's research, namely that she did not examine the effects of gender, age, social status and ethnicity on the Midland dialect. You should state how you will test the effects of two (or more) of these variables individually and together. Be sure to say how you defined these features for your analysis. What do the chapters in Trudgill and the Kretzschmar (2004) predict the effects will be? Once again, state the evidence that would show the effects of the social factors that you decide to examine.

Methods

The next section of your paper should describe the linguistic features that we used in the survey and how they were chosen. Be sure to note the features that replicate the features that were used in other surveys such as Ash's and the New York Times' survey. You should note the geographic region that you expect to be tied to each survey question. You should add your survey questions to the end of the paper as an appendix.

This section should also discuss why we settled on an interview technique rather than an internet survey or the participant observation method. Be sure to cite the Milroy chapter for the advantages and disadvantages of the interview method and the steps we took to elicit informal reactions from the speakers. You should provide a detailed description of the way you elicited data for each item so that someone reading your paper would be able to repeat your study. Include a description of the people that we interviewed, as well as when and where the interviews were conducted. You should also discuss how you contacted people for your survey and how you described the purpose of the survey. You should note any odd reactions or interruptions that occurred during the interviews. Finally, you should add tables that display the

basic demographic features for the people that we interviewed and discuss how you grouped together the data for specific variables, e.g. age and geographic region.

Results

This is the section of the paper that should provide tables that show how the linguistic features in the survey vary by geographic region as well as by the other demographic features that you examined. Use Table 2, p. 49 in Ash's paper as a model for reporting how the linguistic features vary by geographic region. You can use the same table format to report the results for the other demographic features that you analyzed. For example, if you decided to evaluate the role of social class in shaping the responses that you collect, you should include a table that shows how the linguistic features vary by social class. You should include a description of the data that are shown in each table and explain any of the abbreviations or variable names that are in the tables. You should also note any major differences that you find in the tables or the absence of such differences, e.g. any similarities between the Midland and the South.

Discussion

This is the section of your paper that compares the results that the survey produced to the predictions that each hypothesis makes. You should first discuss the degree to which our results replicate the results in Ash's paper. Compare your results to the results that Ash reports in her Table 2. Which results replicate Ash's findings and which do not? Can any differences be explained by differences in the methods we used? Do you find evidence for a distinct Midland dialect region?

Next you should discuss any evidence for the effect of other demographic variables on the linguistic features we surveyed, e.g. the *a/ɔ* variable. Do you find any effects of social class that are similar to those referenced in Trudgill (2000:37)? Does the effect of social class vary by age, gender or dialect region?

You will need to decide how to tell if the data that you collect support the hypotheses or don't support the hypotheses. For example, to test whether the pronunciation of the vowel in *chalk* is related to social class you should line up the data for the /a/ vowel with the data for parent education as shown in the following table.

Subject	Parent	a
1	x	
2	x	x
3		x
4	x	x

You should then state the specific result, e.g. that only two of the four speakers (#2 and #4) produced the predicted result, and then state your conclusion that the data shown in the table do not support a social class basis for a/o merger. Your discussion of the results should refer to your tables. Instead of using general descriptions such as “the results show a Midwestern pattern” you should cite specific results found in the literature, e.g. Gordon (2004b). Discuss the results from individual speakers that do not fit the general patterns in a separate section of your paper.

Conclusion

Your paper should end with a conclusion section. The conclusion section should briefly state your major findings, such as whether you succeeded or failed to replicate Ash’s results. Note the implications for the use of the interview technique to reveal vernacular dialect features. You should also discuss the limitations of our study.

References

Your paper must contain a reference section for the articles that you cite in your paper. You must cite at least four papers in your report.

The Paper

Your paper should be at least 15 pages long (in standard format) with full references to the books, articles and web pages you use for your paper. The analysis section of your paper should contain summary tables like the table above that show the basis for your conclusions. You should send me the final version of your term paper in electronic form by 5 p.m., **Friday, December 14th.**

Your paper must include the following sections:

	Points
I. Introduction	10
Literature review and the hypotheses that you tested	
II. Methods	10
a. List the linguistic items you used and their relation to each region	
b. Describe the people you surveyed and how you contacted them	
c. Describe the procedure you used to elicit the responses	
III. Results	10
a. Provide tables that display your results and explain what the tables show	
IV. Discussion	10
a. Discuss how the results support or don’t support the hypotheses	
b. Discuss any items that produced problematic responses	
V. Conclusion	10
VI. References	10

References

- Ash, Sharon. 2006. The North American Midland as a dialect area. In Beth Lee Simon (ed.), *Language Variation and Change in the American Midland: A New Look at Heartland English*, pp. 33-56. Berlin: John Benjamins.
- Bayley, Robert and Santa Ana, Otto. 2004. Chicano English: morphology and syntax. In Bernd Kortmann, Kate Burridge, Rajend Mesthrie, Edgar W. Schneider and Clive Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Volume 2: Morphology and Syntax*, pp. 374-390. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Gordon, Matthew J. 2004a. New York, Philadelphia, and other northern cities: phonology. In Edgar W. Schneider, Kate Burridge, Bernd Kortmann, Rajend Mesthrie and Clive Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Volume 1: Phonology*, pp. 282-299. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
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- Kretschmar, William A., Jr. 2004. Standard American English pronunciation. In Edgar W. Schneider, Kate Burridge, Bernd Kortmann, Rajend Mesthrie and Clive Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Volume 1: Phonology*, pp. 257-269. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Labov, William. 1972. Some principles of linguistic methodology. *Language in Society* 1: 97-120.
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- Nagy, Naomi and Roberts, Julie. 2004. New England: phonology. In Edgar W. Schneider, Kate Burridge, Bernd Kortmann, Rajend Mesthrie and Clive Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Volume 1: Phonology*, pp. 270-282. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Thomas, Erik R. 2004. Rural Southern white accents. In Edgar W. Schneider, Kate Burridge, Bernd Kortmann, Rajend Mesthrie and Clive Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Volume 1: Phonology*, pp. 300-324. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Tillery, Jan and Bailey, Guy. 2004. The urban South: phonology. In Edgar W. Schneider, Kate Burridge, Bernd Kortmann, Rajend Mesthrie and Clive Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Volume 1: Phonology*, pp. 325-350. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Trudgill, Peter. 2000. Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society. London: Penguin Books.

Grading the paper

I will use the following rubric to assign a grade to the term papers and class presentations.

1. Clarity of purpose statement

What is the goal of your project? Do you have a clear thesis statement?
What is interesting about your project?

2. Literature review

Do you discuss one or two journal articles or books related to your project? Did you identify old and new articles related to your project?
Do you cite the articles in a reference section?
Do you make original suggestions based on these articles?

3. Clarity of method

What methods did you use for your project?
Do the methods support the goal of your project?
Did you identify and attempt to control the variables associated with this method? Do the methods lead to clear predictions?
Do you identify the weaknesses in your research methods?

4. Clarity of results

Do you clearly identify the specific results of your research? Do you discuss the significance of your results?

5. Clarity of writing

Are the topics, literature review, methods and results presented in a clear, concise manner?
Is the presentation overly repetitive?
Are there few mechanical errors in spelling, word choice and grammar?

6. Clarity of presentation

Do you clearly identify the goal of your research? Do you identify and discuss previous studies?
Do you present your own conclusions?

Example 1

Tense is an important part of language, so important, in fact, that it is considered an aspect of universal grammar. But how universal is it? The clearest way to test this is to see how easily aspects of grammar carry over from a first language into a second, in this case, French to

English. There are many factors that could influence this, but the most evident is the Aspect Hypothesis, which is still not completely comprehensive.

This paragraph confuses importance with language universals. It does not define a language universal or tense, or provide a reference to any articles on language universals or tense. A linguistic feature is either universal or not; there are no mostly universals. A universal feature should appear in all languages. A comparison between two languages will not establish that any feature is universal. A comparison of English and French is a poor choice for testing language universals since English and French have borrowed many features from one another. Borrowing must be ruled out before claiming that a feature is universal element of the linguistic capacity. A linguistic hypothesis will attempt to explain linguistic features. An hypothesis will not influence linguistic features. The Aspect Hypothesis is introduced without a description or references to the literature. This paper would be improved by focusing on a description of tense in English.

Example 2

The United States is a fairly new country in comparison to the rest of the world. Having a diverse range of ethnicities and backgrounds, it is surprising that America not only has one obvious dialect or accent, but many across the different regions of the states. When did Americans begin to drop their native accents and begin acquiring new ones? How did accents and dialects change in certain ways in one region and differently in another region? How did these dialects even begin and why are they still recognizable to the rest of the world as American? These are the questions that linguists ask and research today. It is important to first understand dialects, the history of the research, methods used to research, and the different regions before questions can start to be answered.

This paper begins with a flurry of questions without stating the primary thesis. It would take several dissertations to address all of the issues introduced in this paragraph. This paragraph does not define the key term 'dialect' or provide references to any articles on American dialects. The paper assumes that there was originally one American dialect that split into various dialects. The paper does not distinguish between regional dialects and ethnic dialects. The paper would be improved by identifying a single topic such as describing the linguistic features of Kansas English and describing its history.

Example 3

African American Vernacular English (AAVE), more commonly known as Ebonics, has been the center of much debate since the Oakland board of education raised a resolution to use AAVE in schools in 1996. After a nationwide debate ensued, the resolution was not passed until a revised version was drafted in 1997. The debate revealed valuable information about American language ideology and a large degree of misunderstanding about language dialects (Wolfram 1998:118).

Though linguists have still not come to a consensus on whether AAVE is a dialect or a language, the Linguistic Society of America stated in 1977 that AAVE "is systematic and rule-governed like all natural speech varieties" (quoted in Wolfram 117). In this essay, I will discuss the origins, phonological and grammatical features of AAVE, as well as language prejudice and its role in the Ebonics debate.

This paper identifies its main topic immediately as well as its significance. A reference is provided to support the argument. The paper focuses on one English dialect and describes its

linguistic features as well as what it reveals about attitudes towards ethnic dialects in the United States.