DIALECT TYPOLOGY: PHONOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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LABURPENA

Hizkuntz tipologia eta egitura sozialen arteko harremanak aztertzen dira hitzaldian zehar ondoko galderari erantzun egokiak bilatzen: zenbateraino da zilegi egitura linguistikoen tipologia, egitura sozialen tipologiarekin harremanetan jartzea? Era berean, zenbateraino eztabaida daiteke dialekto mota ezberdinak gizarte mota ezberdinetan ematen direla? Hitzaldian galdera hauek aztertzen dira, harreman sozial eta isolamendu sozialaren ildotik batez ere.

RESUMEN

En la ponencia se analizan las relaciones entre la tipología lingüística y la estructura social. Para ello el autor se pregunta ¿en qué medida se puede relacionar una tipología de estructuras lingüísticas con una de estructuras sociales? Por otra parte, ¿es o no válido el argumento, desde un enfoque lingüístico, de que cierto tipo de dialecto surge en cierto tipo de sociedades? La ponencia trata estos problemas, haciendo especial referencia a los contactos sociales y al aislamiento social.

This paper is concerned with the study of the extent to which, if at all, differences of linguistic structure between dialects can be ascribed to or explained in terms of features of the society in which the dialects in question are spoken. The question one wants to answer in this type of study is: do different types of society produce different types of language structure; and are these differences, if they exist, the result of different types of linguistic change? The purpose is to seek to link a typology of language varieties and language change to a typology of societies.

Linguists are very used to assuming a connection of some sort between language and society at the level of lexical and semantic structure, although of course theses such as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis remain controversial. One only has to mention the Eskimo language and snow for a well-know connection to be recognised; and it is obvious that the vocabulary of a language is likely to reflect to a considerable extent the needs and preoccupations of the society that speaks it. It is likely that at the level of discourse, too, we will be able to establish connections between language use and societal type (see Trudgill 1991). Bernstein (1971), for instance, distinguished between what he called "elaborated" and "restricted" codes. Speakers of "restricted code", he claimed, give relatively little background information when speaking and take a fund of shared knowledge for granted. Bernstein's insight here was to note that speakers who are relatively unused to communicating with interlocutors from outside their own social networks -who have relatively little contact with members of other groups- are more likely to use "restricted code", even where this may not be appropriate. On the other hand, speakers who are used to communicating with interlocutors with whom they share relatively little background information are more aware of the need not to take too much common knowledge for granted. We can assume that "restricted code", in the sense of a discourse style that takes large amounts of shared information for granted, will work much better, and thus presumably be more common, in some types of community than in others. The typological point is that restricted code is much more likely to occur, and will be easier to comprehend when it occurs, in small, tightly-knit, close-network types of community which have large amounts of shared knowledge in common.

If the case for a link between language and society is relatively easy to argue for at the linguistic levels of lexis and discourse, it is correspondingly equally easy to suggest that the most abstract of linguistic levels, the core level of syntax, is probably the least likely to have any connexion with societal structure. The most interesting question, however, would seem to concern the intermediate levels of phonology and morphology. Are there any respects in which societal type could possibly have an effect on linguistic structure at these levels? In Trudgill (1991), I have looked briefly at some morphological evidence. In this paper, I concentrate on phonology. What follows is a brief

review of a few possible links, both diachronic and synchronic, between societal and phonological structure.

In an important paper on this topic, Kroch (1978) argued that "the public prestige dialect of the elite in a stratified community differs from the dialects of the non-elite strata" in resisting normal "ease of articulation"-type processes of phonetic conditioning. "Non-prestige dialects tend to be articulatorily more economical" he argues "than the prestige dialect". The main point of interest, however, is Kroch's explanation for this phenomenon. His claim is that this differentiation is due to ideology and to the prestige group's desire to mark themselves off not only as distinctive but also as superior. From the perspective of dialect typology, however, we can question (a) whether ideology is the whole story, and (b) at least some of the facts. Let us first consider consonantal simplifications and vowel mergers, taking examples from the English dialects of England. It is true that the British prestige accent RP has resisted a number of mergers and other simplificatory processes that have taken place or are currently under way in the dialects of London and other areas of the heavily populated southeast of England. These processes include the merger of vowels before /l/, as in the lexical sets of *doll* and *dole*; the merger of /f/ and /θ/, as in *fin* and *thin*; and the loss of /h/ (see Wells 1986). An examination of other dialects of English English quickly shows, however, that the tendency of RP to resist such changes is not only shared but considerably surpassed by regional dialects in the more geographically peripheral areas of the country. It is in these, peripheral areas, for example, where, in modern dialects, /h/ is preserved, as in RP; where /hw/ and /w/, as in *which* and *witch*, now merged in RP, are preserved as distinct; where non-prevocalic /r/ as in *cart*, which has been lost by RP, is preserved; and where Middle English /ɔu/ and /ɔ:/ as in *mown* and *moan*, which have been merged in RP, are preserved as distinct. One probable conclusion that can be drawn here is that those dialects which most strongly resist the processes which Kroch discusses are not prestige varieties such as RP (which are often relatively high-contact koinés -see below- in origin) at all, but varieties which are in some way peripheral, in this case geographically so. The varieties which most strongly resist mergers and simplifications are those which have been least subject to dialect contact.

More controversially, I want to suggest that it may also be the case that small and/or tightly-knit and/or isolated communities are more likely than larger communities to produce certain sorts of sound change. While small isolated communities might be more resistant to change as such, when changes do occur, these communities might be able, because of their network structures, to push through, enforce and sustain *changes of a less 'natural' or usual phonological type* that might never be successful in larger, more fluid societies (see Bailey 1982). Isolated communities may be more likely to produce chan-

ges that could be labelled, in Henning Andersen's words, "slightly unusual" (Andersen 1988).

Andersen discusses the historically unconnected but surely non-fortuitous development of parasitic velar consonants out of high or mid vowels in several isolated areas of Europe in dialects of a number of languages, including Romansch, Provencal, Danish, German and Flemish, along with the absence of such changes in metropolitan varieties. In Romansch, for instance, parasitic consonants occur in three separate and non-contiguous dialects -suggesting independent development- in the upper reaches of three separate river basins, namely the Inn, the Albula, and the Oberhalbstein branch of the Rhein.

The dialect of Bergün on the Albula, for instance, has forms such as /škregvər/ 'to write' cf. /škrevər/; /krɛkšta/ 'ridge' cf. /krɛšta/; /voks/ 'you (pl)' cf. /vos/. This particular sound change does strike many historical linguists as unusual and does appear to be confined, at least in western Europe, to small communities in geographically remote and/or peripheral areas.

In attempting to investigate this issue, it is useful, as Andersen's work suggests, to compare related dialects or languages which have different demographies and different histories of contact and isolation. Elsewhere (Trudgill 1991a), I have compared the two Scandinavian languages Norwegian and Faroese, noting that Faroese is both a much more isolated language than Norwegian and characterised by a great deal more morphological complexity (see Lockwood 1977). As far as phonology is concerned, most linguists would probably agree that the sound changes which have occurred in Norwegian in recent centuries have been rather more natural and expected, and rather less complex, than many of those which have occurred in Faroese. For example, the vowel shift undergone by many varieties of Norwegian such /aː/ > /oː/ > /uː/ > /ʉː/ strikes no linguist as being at all strange. On the other hand, Faroese changes such as the "Verschärfung", whereby forms such as /kigv/ developed from earlier /kuː/ 'cow' and /nudž/ from earlier /nyː/ 'new', and diphthongisations such as /iː/ > /uy/ as in /luyk/ from earlier /liːk/ 'like', are intuitively felt by many historical linguists to be rather unusual.

Similarly, we can note that some of the sound changes that have occurred in isolated Polynesian languages appear to be as non-natural as any that have occurred in Faroese or Alpine Romansch. Note the following unconditioned and independent sound changes in Polynesian (see Clark 1976; Biggs 1978; Harlow 1982):

/t/ >	/k/	in Hawaiian and Luangiua
/ŋ/ >	/k/	in S. Island Maori and Marquesan
/ŋ/ >	/ʔ/	in Tahitian
/l/ >	/ŋg/	in Rennellese
/l/ >	/ʔ/	in Marquesan

Kroch (1978) also refers to resistance by elite speakers to allophonic variation and assimilation. Again, it is not at all clear that ideology can be the sole explanatory factor here. The research of the Milroys in Belfast is very revealing on this point. J. Milroy (1982), like Kroch, has argued that standard varieties are more likely to demonstrate allophonic invariance than vernacular varieties, citing the Belfast vernacular as having considerable allophonic complexity in its realisation of certain vowels, vis-a-vis the middle-class norm. However, it is especially important to note that much of this complexity is not, as Kroch would have it, of an assimilatory type. In Belfast, for example, the vowel /a/ as in *bat* etc. is consistently realised as [a] in middle-class speech. In working class speech, however, it has allophones in different phonological contexts which range from [ɛ] through [æ], [a] and [ɑ] to [ɔ]. Crucially, though, front [ɛ] occurs as the realisation of /a/ before back (velar) consonants, and back [ɔ] occurs before front nasals, as in *bag* [bɛg], *man* [mɔn]. What we are dealing with, then, is not allophonic variation due to articulatory economy but allophonic complexity.

Like Kroch, Milroy also explains this difference in terms of a characteristic of prestige varieties, claiming that it is due, at least in part, to the tendency of standard varieties to impose invariance. However, consideration of the work of the Milroys themselves suggests that it may be due equally or instead to another factor. I would suggest, as does Milroy himself in later work (1992), that this factor is the ability of the tightly-networked working-class Belfast community to sustain allophonic complexity. This complexity may have its origins diachronically in dialect mixture, as I have suggested elsewhere (Trudgill 1986). But its maintenance can be explained in terms of the social structure of the community which speaks the low-prestige variety. Sociolinguistic research into the influence of social network structure on linguistic change (Milroy 1980; Bortoni 1985) has revealed that the dense, multiplex networks typical of relatively closed, stable, non-fluid communities are more likely to lead to conformity in linguistic behaviour and to the maintenance of group norms as well as the successful carrying through of ongoing linguistic changes. We can suppose that similar processes will be at work in the transmission and maintenance of linguistic complexity, including allophonic complexity, particularly where there are frequent inter-generational interactions.

Let us now consider fast speech phenomena. Again, we can suggest that ideology, while it may indeed play a role, does not provide the whole of the explanation for why, according to Kroch, elite speakers may resist such processes. Efficient communication is sometimes said to result from achieving an equilibrium between the needs of the speaker and the needs of the listener (see Martinet 1962). The speaker wants to communicate quickly or at least with little effort, while the listener needs enough information to process the

message accurately. In contact situations, I would like to suggest, this equilibrium is disturbed, and this conflict is complicated by the needs of the non-native learner as both speaker and listener. Note that fast speech phenomena make things easier for the native speaker: the same message can be got across more quickly and with less articulatory effort. However, crucially, they also make life much more difficult for the non-native listener by reducing the amount of phonetic information available for processing. Paradoxically enough, fast speech phenomena, to the extent that they are variety-specific rather than universal, can also make things more difficult for the non-native *speaker* because they constitute an extra set of rules to learn and remember, as well as an extra set of rules to remember to implement while speaking. English speakers ofter observe of, say, highly-educated Swedes that "they speak English better than we do". This most often means that the Swedes in question do not use many fast speech processes. Why do skilled non-native speakers not use as many fast speech phenomena as native speakers? The answer is obviously that they do not use them because they are unable to do so.

It has not been usual in linguistic science to suppose that some languages or dialects employ more fast speech phenomena, or employ them more often, than others, but it is at least possible that this is the case: anecdotal evidence supports the view that some, often nonstandard, dialects are harder to learn to understand than others for this reason. Certainly, the speech of the socially relatively isolated lower working class in the English city of Norwich (see Trudgill 1974, 182-185) is characterised by more phonetic reduction processes than upper working-class speech. For example, the Norwich research turned up examples from lower working-class speech, which were not matched by equivalent degrees of phonetic reduction in other social-class groups, such as:

[ʔʌs žəs ɐʔ gwän] *That's just how that go on*
  = *That's just how it goes on*

[nʌ ə lʔ bdæ lɛ̈ læiʔlli] *No, I in't (=haven't) been down*
  there lately

It is important to acknowledge here that the reduction processes involved are not haphazard -and not universal- but are subject to rules which, presumably, have to be acquired as part of the child language-acquisition process. There is, for example, a low-level phonetic rule

$$/Vn/ \# \#/\delta/ \rightarrow /\tilde{V}/ \# \# /l/$$

giving, for example, [dæ lɛ̈] as a realisation of *down there*. A legitimate hypothesis would be that learning complex rules for such reduction processes is not just resisted by upper-class speakers for ideological reasons but is facilitated by membership of more tightly-knit social groups with relatively little contact with outsiders.

Conclusion

Language contact is widely and rightly regarded as a highly interesting phenomenon. Our discussion, however, also indicates that language isolation is equally interesting and perhaps more challenging for the historical linguist. We can explain changes in high-contact dialects and languages in terms of imperfect learning by adults and interaction between systems. Perhaps an even more interesting question, however, is: how are we to explain, in socio-linguistic terms, developments that occur in isolated languages and dialects?

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