



## Final exam NORW260 (Interim 2021)

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Grade: A (100%)

1. What is linguistics?
  - a. A friend asks you what linguistics is. What is your answer?
  - b. Explain two different areas of linguistic research in detail (what are some overarching greater research questions, methodologies, studies that you have read?).

Linguistics is, simply put, the study of language as a concept. This definition may appear fairly reductive or oversimplified. However, when you think about it, the study of language can encapsulate so many different things. We use language in almost every aspect of our lives. This creates subsections of linguistics, such as applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, computational linguistics, historical linguistics, the list goes on. So, overall, linguistics is the study of languages, their origin and function, and their application to our lives.

Sociolinguistics studies the effect of language on society and examines the social stigma behind certain linguistic trends. Linguists like William Labov conducted studies revealing the ways in which society, class, and linguistic patterns intersect. He conducted one study in New York City in which he visited three different department stores, all catering to different social classes: one was a lower-class store, another middle-class, and a third higher-class. In this field research, he asked shop attendants for assistance and made note of their usage of the New York accent in their responses. His findings were that the lower-class the patrons of the store, the thicker the accent. This shed light on the negative social stigma that the New York accent carries and how speakers might alter their speech depending on the audience. Sociolinguistics research is best conducted on participants who are not aware that their speech is being monitored, as their awareness can lead to the observer's paradox, in which participants will alter their speech to sound "smarter" when they are aware of being observed. Sociolinguistics raises questions such as: Why do certain dialects carry a negative social stigma? Why do we associate certain linguistic features with intelligence or wealth and others with ignorance and poverty? How can we reduce the negative stigma associated with certain linguistic trends?

Historical linguistics is the study of the origin of languages, especially in relation to the search for common language ancestors and the mapping of language families. Historical linguistics tells us about the ways in which language changes over time and how it might continue to change in the future. Historical linguists like Grimm and Verner examined Proto-Indo-European, an ancient language that was potentially the common ancestor of most European and some Asian languages. Grimm discovered that the First Germanic Consonant Shift occurred in all places except for immediately after a voiceless consonant. Verner expanded upon this, noting that voiced stops were employed when a consonant was not initial and not preceded by the Proto-Indo-European accent. Together, linguists such as these two pieced together the Neogrammarian Hypothesis, or the idea that sound change is absolutely regular

and follows patterns and rules that can be documented. Historical linguistics raises questions such as: What led us to have the languages that we have today, and do they have common ancestors? How can the trends of the past predict the language change we will see in the future? Why did language change occur?

2. Discuss two concepts from this class that were new to you. Make sure to define the terms and provide an example for each of them.

Hyperforeignism is a concept that was new to me in this course. Hyperforeignism is when words from other languages are taken and are pronounced and used in exaggerated forms. For example, English often does this with Spanish words and phrases. Colloquialisms like “Hasta mañana!” or “Tu casa es mi casa” spoken in a hyper-anglicized way are examples of hyperforeignism. Hyperforeignism can lead to mock forms, which are not loan words, but fake forms of another language that are exaggerated or overgeneralized. Dr. Joshua Brown showed us an example of a Spanish mock form in “Cinco de Drinko”. “Drinko” is not a Spanish word, but is a mock form of Spanish in its overgeneralization of the -o suffix. Mock forms can lead to negative stigma for the actual language and can be harmful to its speakers, as hyperforeignism can.

Another concept that was new to me is folk linguists, as noted by Preston (2011). Preston’s study, which asked people to circle on a map of the U.S. the areas that they believed spoke “bad” and “good” English essentially revealed this phenomenon. Folk linguists are everyday people who believe themselves to be experts on a language just because they speak it, despite having no formal training in the area. When these participants were asked to make generalizations about English speakers in the U.S., they believed themselves to be experts in this context. Unfortunately, this phenomenon can lead to discrimination by these folk linguists against other varieties of English. Because they think that they know what “proper” English is, they marginalize other dialects or varieties. Folk linguists are quite common, as more information needs to be spread about the validity of multiple dialects/varieties of English.

3. Discuss three examples of how research in linguistics aims to help reduce the social effects of linguistic stereotypes.

Research in linguistics is vital in reducing the negative social effects of linguistic stereotypes. A great example of this is the research into African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which has been continuously corrected, put down, and marginalized, despite its linguistic validity. Research like the documentary “Talking Black in America” reveals the deep historical roots of AAVE and its development from slavery to urban city life and black neighborhoods. Trends like the use of the habitual “be” or the omission of “is” in the third-person present progressive tense are not random. These are trends that are systematically employed, have developed over centuries, and follow a predictable pattern and set of rules. Linguistic research can reveal these things, arguing for the recognition of this dialect and for its linguistic validity. Such studies can help reduce the negative stigma around AAVE.

Research can also reveal the importance and positive effects of bilingualism, which in the U.S. has often been thought to be harmful to children, causing them to be “confused” or have some sort of language impairment or delay. However, research like the documentary “Speaking in Tongues” reveals the positive effects of bilingual education. Children who grow up speaking another language and then are taught at school that their mother tongue is somehow uneducated or inferior can be harmed by these notions. Linguistic research shows that bilingualism is good for children, increasing their metalinguistic awareness and resulting in higher language scores in both languages. The positive effects revealed by research can help combat the English-only movement and allow bilingual children to get education in both of their languages. This access to education can greatly help children, rather than teaching them that they need to abandon one of their languages in favor of English. Research here aims to reduce the negative stigma associated with bilingual education and advocate for the positivity of bilingualism.

Baugh’s study on linguistic profiling is also very illuminating in the context of linguistic stereotyping. Baugh conducted a study where he called potential landlords seeking housing and read from a script, changing only the accent or variety of English spoken in between calls. His findings were that linguistic profiling was afoot, and that AAVE and Chicano English were more likely to be discriminated against versus Standard American English. He found that when he called with a non-standard accent, the landlords were more likely to say that the housing was unavailable. Often, when he called back speaking Standard American English, Baugh was told that the housing was available. Studies such as this one show that linguistic profiling is, in fact, a very real and prevalent phenomenon. The proof is definitive, as the only difference between the calls was the variety of English spoken. If we are aware of this information and have proof of it, we can work to combat it. Often, we make assumptions about the speaker based on how they talk. While this is not always discriminatory, it can become so in the case of linguistic profiling. Research like this shows how common this is and can provide a basis for fixing this issue.

4. As a linguist-in-training, which reading did you find most relevant from a linguistic perspective? Why did this article personally resonate with you? Argue in favor of the reading by providing three concrete references to its content.

For me personally, I have taken many linguistics classes and have heard much about sociolinguistics. However, something that was new to me and thus most relevant, particularly because of my own personal experience with Norwegian and my family background, was Haugen’s discussion of Norwegians in America, particularly the 1953 article “The learning of English”. I had heard little about the actual reality of Norwegian-American life in the U.S. and was unaware of the fascinating linguistic trends that this group displayed. The Norwegian-American identity is so often overgeneralized and/or caricatured by many so-called “Norwegian-Americans” that I have met, who are more often than not elderly white folk who know little of the actual culture. However, Haugen’s study revealed to me the reality of what this identity was like, and surprisingly, the deep shame that once came with it. One striking quote from Haugen (1953) reads:

Concerning a Norwegian neighbor she reports: My father and John would stand for hours down by the road talking politics and crops in Norwegian, or in English that was

also Norwegian. But if a “Yankee” drove up they would stop at once and become withdrawn and awkward. They were ashamed to display their native speech and ways, with him looking on.

I was struck by the desire of the Norwegians to hide their language, the shame that they carried. Haugen’s reading is littered with anecdotes like this one, which reveal how life was actually like for these immigrants. It also mirrors the crisis of today in which modern immigrants and/or refugees are shamed, considered less-than, and linguistically marginalized. It would seem that this is a long-standing trend in this country.

Another interesting quote involves the persistent “Norwegian accent” that could once be found throughout the Midwest. Today, the accent has lived on in certain trends within the Midwestern accent, which is fascinating to me. Haugen’s quote reads:

The most persistent difficulty of Norwegian Americans is the inability to pronounce a proper z, especially at the ends of words. But even these lingering traces are disappearing, and we may expect that they will be overcome in time.

Here we see that just as entire Norwegian-speaking communities could be found, so could communities with the accent, even if these people did not speak Norwegian. This accent has dissipated, but traces remain within the Midwestern accent. I was unaware that these immigrants had an impact such that the accent would persist far past the language itself. It seems as though so many are proud of this heritage, they are unaware of the ways in which their ancestors have influenced the present Midwest we see today. This pride is something new, something that certainly has not always been present. Perhaps the ignorance of Norwegian culture displayed by these individuals is due to a negative social stigma that forced their ancestors to let go of most of their native culture.

Finally, a quote from Haugen shows how saturated some communities were with the Norwegian language:

I often had to pinch my arm to realize that I really was in America. One heard nothing but Norwegian speech, and it never occurred to me to address people on the road except in Norwegian. I actually started when they answered, “What do you say?”- but of course, you’re in America now.

I was unaware that entire communities operated in Norwegian. This is fascinating, as today, no communities like this exist in the U.S. It begs the question: What happened? Was it the shame or the pressure to learn English? This reading shows the reality of what being a Norwegian-American was like, a reality that is somewhat hidden under layers of colloquialisms and false Norwegian culture in the Midwest today. This was both personally relevant and fascinating to me.