

Part V
Language and Societies

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We talk about language and society as if they are interdependent, but in fact the relationship is implicational. Societies can obviously exist without language, as witness the social organizations of carpenter ants and honey bees and great apes. But languages cannot exist without societies. Language \supset Society.

The difference between societies with language and those without it is not, however, a matter of degree but of kind. Quite rightly, when we learn about the lower animals coordinating their labors and distributing their duties, we marvel at them. We recognize these levels of social organization as crucial for their propagation and survival, but our admiration increases because we know that they manage to do what they do without language. Indeed, there is a venerable tradition in science fiction that imagines sub-human species gifted with language, often accompanied by the conceit that it accords them not just a human advantage but a superhuman one. Some ethologists indulge the same fantasies with scientific trappings instead of science fiction.

Before language existed, our hominoid ancestors organized bands for food-gathering and habitats for sheltering for their young. And probably, by analogy with the great apes, not much more. In the absence of language, finding daily sustenance and protecting yourself and your young from becoming sustenance for others are pretty much full-time preoccupations.

Since survival and propagation can be achieved in the absence of language, it was obviously not survival or propagation that called language into being. "Poetry is the mother tongue of humankind," said Johann Georg Hamann in 1762, reminding us by the power of his aphorism that language is the tool for virtually every human aspiration beyond plain survival and propagation.

We are just beginning to understand how language shapes societies and how societies shape languages. Discovering the roots of those relations stands as an ultimate goal for sociolinguistics. In this final section, we include three chapters that provide different perspectives on the relation between society and language.

Peter Trudgill's "Linguistic and Social Typology" takes a macro-sociolinguistic view, with typological characteristics such as phoneme inventories and paradigm complexity as points of departure. He suggests that certain types of linguistic features tend to accrue to languages in proportion to the amount of

social traffic and linguistic mixing they are exposed to, with cosmopolitan societies susceptible to phonological complexity, among other features, in contrast to isolated societies, which tend toward small phonemic inventories, and, between them, societies sharing linguistic traits of both poles of the continuum. Trudgill takes a cautious tone (he uses the words “possible/perhaps/may/might” 78 times), a persistent reminder that his proposal is intended as a source of hypothesis-formulation and that it awaits variationist testing.

Sali Tagliamonte, in “Comparative Sociolinguistics,” discusses methods for comparing linguistic processes from one community to another. She shows that quantitative methods, especially finely calibrated rule constraints, can establish probabilities of typological similarity and grammatical relatedness. Her case studies draw on evidence for African-American Vernacular English origins, perhaps the earliest major debate in sociolinguistics, and on British sources of North American English dialect features. Her discussion judiciously emphasizes the importance of accountability in comparative sampling.

In “Language Death and Dying,” Walt Wolfram discusses the complex sociolinguistic process of obsolescence. Though the most frequent pattern involves “dissipation,” defined as the constriction of social uses for the dying language and consequently of its grammatical forms, Wolfram describes five other attested patterns as well. He shows, moreover, that dissipation does not affect structural levels equally or synchronously. Variationists, for better or worse, have a special stake in the investigation of the death of languages and dialects because accelerated variation is its most conspicuous symptom.

Though linguistic obsolescence is rampant in our time, it is (in Wolfram’s words) “part of the life cycle of language.” Until a century or so ago, it went unnoticed, or nearly so, but increased mobility, urbanization, migration, and education, among other factors, are destroying enclaves and, with them, the languages (and dialects) that served them. Our sense of loss is tempered by the inevitability of it, but even more by the certain knowledge that language will continue to fill every vital social function, including new ones that might arise from radically changing conditions. Human speech is nothing if not adaptable. That was never as clearly appreciated before the advent of sociolinguistics.

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27 Linguistic and Social Typology

PETER TRUDGILL

A number of scholars have attempted to explore links between aspects of societies and aspects of the languages spoken by those societies. Much research of this type has focused on culture: one obvious site for the study of such links is in the reflection of aspects of a community's material and physical culture in its lexicon, such as large numbers of words for different types of reindeer in Sami; or in its deictic system, such as the Tenejapa Tzeltal uphill/downhill spatial orientation system (Levinson 1996). Another site lies in links between cultural values and some relatively peripheral aspects of grammar: Wierzbicka (e.g. 1986) has investigated links of this latter type, and points out that some aspects of grammar are more likely to have some connection with culture than others. She argues that optional grammatical categories are more likely to be connected to a society's culture than obligatory ones, as are "those parts of language, including grammar in the narrow sense of the word, which have to do with the relationship between the speaker and the addressee". She then produces a convincing sociocultural account of why Australian English favors "antidiminutives" such as *Shaz* (for Sharon) and *Tez* (for Terry) as terms of address. The explanation lies in the high value attached in Australian culture to solidarity, and anti-intellectualism. She contrasts the way in which "cultural ideas such as 'mateship', 'toughness', 'antisentimentality,' and 'congenial fellowship' have found their way into the grammatical system of the language" in Australia with the rich system of affectionate diminutives found in Polish.

In the present chapter, I want to suggest that, in the study of linguistic variation and change, there is a challenging and similar issue for us to focus on which has to do, however, with non-cultural attributes of societies. This involves the relationships which might exist between societal type generally, on the one hand, and non-lexical, core aspects of linguistic structure, on the other. There are good reasons to explore these issues. Linguistic-typological studies have provided us with a series of insights into the range of structures available in human languages; into what the constraints on these structures

might be; and into relationships between different typological characteristics. But we do not yet have explanations for why, of all the possible structures available to human languages, particular languages select particular structures and not others. A legitimate sociolinguistic viewpoint would be that some such explanations may nevertheless be available, and that some of these might be social in nature; that is, the distribution of linguistic features over languages may not be totally random when viewed from a social perspective. One challenge in the study of linguistic variation and change, therefore, has to do with whether there are indeed any social determinants of linguistic patterning, and, if so, what these determinants might be (Trudgill 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1992, 1996a). The issue at hand is whether it is possible to suggest that certain linguistic features are more commonly associated with certain types of society or social structure than others.

In examining this issue, we need to decide what societal features it might initially be promising to look at. Here, it seems to me, we may be able to learn from what we already know about differences in the speed of linguistic change in different types of society, because it is very clear that social factors do impinge on language at this point; and it has been very clear since the work carried out by J. Milroy and L. Milroy (see below) what at least some of these social factors are. Linguistic change affects all living language varieties, but we know that the rate of linguistic change is not constant chronologically. In a remarkable claim, for instance, Jackson (1953) argues that nearly all the sound changes which converted Brittonic into Welsh, Cornish, and Breton took place between the middle of the fifth and the end of the sixth century, and that evolution was so rapid that “we can be fairly sure that Vortigern around 450 could not have understood Aneirin around 600” (1953: 690). Nor is rate of change constant across communities. In an often cited example, in the last thousand years Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Faroese, and Icelandic have diverged from a common source, Old Norse. This divergence obviously has taken place because different linguistic changes have occurred in the different places. It is clear, however, that many more of these changes have occurred in the continental languages, especially Danish, than in Faroese and Icelandic which have undergone fewer changes and thus preserved more of the structure of Old Norse than their continental counterparts.

This contrast between conservative and innovating periods (see Dixon 1997), and between conservative and innovating varieties, is very well-known, but it has not been a simple matter to come up with clear analytical, as opposed to intuitive, explanations for why it should exist. Happily, we now have explanations arising out of the pioneering work of Milroy and Milroy (1985), and Milroy (1992). The answers lie in social network structure; the point is that dense network ties lead to closer maintenance of community norms, and loose ones to lack of maintenance. The Milroys’ brilliant and surely correct claim is that “linguistic change is slow to the extent that the relevant populations are well established and bound by strong ties whereas it is rapid to the extent that weak ties exist in populations”.

We see now how this works. Ties have to do with contact, which is why lack of contact favors lack of change: Icelandic and Faroese have been much more geographically isolated than the continental languages. Weak ties have to do with lack of social stability: societal breakdown, such as that caused by the Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain – sixth-century Britain was a socially very unstable place indeed – accelerates change. Strong ties, which inhibit change, are more typical of dense social networks, which are in turn more common in small, stable communities: Faroese and Icelandic have always been spoken by small communities of speakers (there are today approximately 45,000 Faroese speakers and 250,000 Icelandic-speakers as opposed to 4.5 million Norwegians, 5 million Danes and 8.5 million Swedes).

In what follows, I explore these two features of human societies – contact, and social network structure and stability – in the expectation that what has proved relevant for an understanding of the speed of linguistic change may also prove relevant to the study of the type of linguistic change, and thus type of linguistic structure, also. First, I will consider that the degree of contact one language community has with another may have two different types of implication for linguistic structure. One is the increased complexification that may occur in languages as a result of borrowing, in situations of long-term contact involving child-language bilingualism. The other is the reverse type of process in which increased simplification may occur in languages as a result of pidginization, in those situations involving adult and therefore imperfect language acquisition on the part of speakers who have passed the critical threshold (Lenneberg 1967).

Second, I will consider that society size, network structure, and stability may also have two different types of implication for linguistic structure. One is that members of small, stable, tightly-knit societies are likely to share more information than members of larger, more dynamic loosely-knit communities. The other is that dense multiplex networks may lead to greater conformity in linguistic behavior, and to the stricter maintenance of group norms, since tightly-knit communities are more able to enforce continued adherence to such norms.

1 Contact, Complexification and Redundancy

1.1 *Phonological inventories*

Haudricourt (1961) addresses the issue of the relationship between societal type and size of phonological inventories (see Trudgill, 1998). He points out that the languages of the Caucasus are famous for their enormous phoneme inventories (citing Ubykh, which had 78 consonants). He argues that this language was spoken by a smaller population in a smaller area than related languages with smaller inventories. He also points to North America, where East Coast Amerindian languages have fewer than 20 consonants (e.g. Oneida with 10), while the further west one goes, the bigger the inventories get, *and*

the more languages there were per square mile. Is this, he asks, just a coincidence? Given that languages generally both lose and develop new phonemes, how do we explain this relationship between geographical language density and phoneme inventories?

Nichols has an answer. She writes (1992: 193): "It can be concluded that contact among languages fosters complexity, or, put differently, diversity among neighbouring languages fosters complexity in each of the languages." The contact of course will have to be of a very particular type, namely long-term contact situations involving childhood – and therefore proficient – bilingualism. Large inventories will be favored by stable contact situations because the long-term presence of many neighboring languages means that segments can readily be borrowed from one language to another, thus leading to increased inventories, such as the well-known borrowing of velaric-ingressive stops by some Bantu languages from the Khoi-San languages in southern Africa.

1.2 *Syntagmatic redundancy*

Since languages can operate with very much smaller phoneme inventories than Ubykh, we have to suppose that such large inventories represent a considerable degree of paradigmatic redundancy. Another example of long-term contact leading to increased redundancy, though of a different sort, is suggested by Joseph (1983). One of the well-known features of the Balkan linguistic area is the loss of the infinitive in Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Rumanian, and certain dialects of Serbian. It is widely agreed that it was language contact which led to the spread of this feature; indeed, linguistic areas of the well-known Balkan *Sprachraum* type are obviously the result of contact-driven diffusion from one language to another of large numbers of features over a long period of time. However, more interestingly for our purposes, Joseph argues that contact is not only the cause of the spread of this feature but also of its origin. He points out that the use of forms such as Greek

thelo na grapso "I want that I write"

where the first-person singular present is marked on both verbs in the construction is easier for non-native hearers to process than forms such as English

I want to write

where the same information is given only once. He argues that the Balkan-wide loss of the infinitive arose and spread in part because of sensitivity on the part of native speakers in contact situations to the comprehension difficulties of nonnative listeners. We will see below how the learning difficulties of adult speakers in contact situations can lead to simplification (including loss of redundancy). Here we observe that, in the other type of contact situation, involving long-term, stable contact and child bilingualism, the needs of the

nonnative as listener may also have the opposite effect, namely the growth of syntagmatic redundancy.

2 Contact and Simplification

2.1 Morphological simplification

We have compared Faroese to the continental Scandinavian languages and seen that Faroese can quite legitimately be called more “conservative” than the continental languages in that it has undergone fewer changes than Norwegian, Danish, or Swedish. It is also of interest, however, that changes in the different Scandinavian languages over the last thousand years have led to a clear typological split between the insular and the continental languages at the level of morphology. Consider the contrast between the verbal morphology of Faroese and Norwegian Bokmål. Two examples will suffice:

“to throw”

Norwegian

kaster pres.

kastet past; past part.

Faroese

kasti pres. sing. 1

kastar pres. sing. 2,3

kasta pres. pl.

kastaði past sing.

kastaðu past pl.

There are five forms in Faroese (Lockwood 1955) corresponding to the two of Norwegian. More dramatic is the contrast in adjectival morphology:

“narrow”

Norwegian

smal sing. masc./fem.

smale pl./weak

smalt neut. sing.

Faroese

smalan masc. acc. sing.

smalar acc. pl.

smalt neut. nom./acc. sing.

smala fem. acc., weak masc.

acc./dat. sing., weak fem. nom.

sing., neut. nom/acc. sing.

smalari fem. dat. sing.

smali weak masc. nom. sing.

smalir masc. nom. pl.

smalur masc. nom. sing.

smøl fem. nom. sing., neut. nom./
acc. pl.

smølu weak fem. acc. sing., weak

fem. acc./dat. pl.

smølum masc./neut. dat. sing., dat. pl.

The contrast is very striking. This adjective has three forms in Norwegian, but two stems and eleven different forms in Faroese. Compared to Faroese, we can surely say that Norwegian has undergone considerable loss of morphological complexity.

If we acknowledge that Faroese has been a relatively isolated language over the last millennium, we can hypothesize that contact has played an important role in the developments in continental Scandinavian. Adult language and dialect contact, because of the diminished language-learning abilities of speakers who have passed the critical threshold, favor pidginization. (Notice that pidginization is a process which occurs wherever adult language acquisition takes place, and only in very exceptional circumstances leads to the development of a pidgin language.) One of the major components of pidginization (see Trudgill 1996b) is simplification; and loss of complexity on this scale can surely be described as simplification. Another of the major features of pidginization, seen at its most extreme of course in pidgin languages themselves, is the favoring of analytic over synthetic structures. Loss of morphology, as illustrated above in the case of Norwegian, often entails replacement of synthetic by analytical constructions involving, for example, pronouns to indicate person on verbs, and prepositions to indicate nominal case. (Note, however, that unlike the case of the Balkan infinitive, the growth of analyticity in pidginization is not accompanied by any growth in syntagmatic redundancy.) Many other examples could be given from the history of European and other languages. Analyticity is undoubtedly a feature which facilitates processing on the part of imperfect adult learners. It also of course has the effect of reducing memory load on the acquiring adult, a factor we shall have cause to return to shortly.

2.2 *Fast speech processes (1)*

It has not been very usual in linguistics to discuss in print whether some languages or dialects employ more fast speech phenomena than others, but it is at least possible that this is so (see further below). If so, then contact may play a role in this differential availability of fast speech processes. These processes of course make speech easier for the native speaker; the same message can be communicated more quickly and with less articulatory effort. However, they also make the task of the nonnative speaker in decoding and comprehending more difficult by reducing the amount of phonetic material available for processing. I would further suggest that, perhaps more surprisingly, they may also make the task of the nonnative more difficult *as a speaker*. Consider a low-level phonetic rule of lower-working-class Norwich English (Trudgill 1974), illustrated below converting /nð/ to /l/ in the pronunciation of *there* as [lɛ]:

[nã ə ɪ? bðã lɛ læi?li]

No, I in't been down there lately

The rule /Vn/##/ð/ → /V/##/l/ is not obviously motivated by universal or natural factors. It is variety-specific. Such rules constitute extra material for the adult learner in contact situations to acquire, remember, and implement (see Trudgill 1996a). It is therefore quite possible that low-contact varieties are likely to demonstrate more fast-speech phenomena than high-contact varieties with a history of adult second-dialect or second-language acquisition. In so far as these processes may become generalized (see below) to slower forms of speech through linguistic change, then we would expect this to occur more often in low-contact than in high-contact varieties. This is certainly true of high-contact pidgins, which have little or no stylistic variation in phonology.

2.3 *Phonological inventories (2)*

We saw above that large phonological inventories may be the result of borrowing. But what of small inventories? These might also result from relatively mechanical factors associated with language contact. In this case, however, it would have to involve, once again, adult language contact and acquisition. The point is, as we have just seen, that simplification, both in language contact and in dialect contact situations (see Chambers 1995: 160), is brought about by the imperfect language learning of adults and post-adolescents. Simplification may very well lead to loss of phonological contrast: the smaller the inventory, the easier it is to learn, which is why the most extreme products of pidginization, pidgin languages themselves, tend to have small phoneme inventories. Labov (1994) has also maintained that in dialect contact situations mergers tend to spread at the expense of contrasts. Isolated dialects are thus those which are likely to resist mergers most strongly (and thus have larger phonological inventories). Many examples of this could be given. For example, ME *o:* and *ou* which have for centuries been merged in most varieties of English, including RP and the central dialects of England, remain distinct as in *moan* and *mown* in peripheral East Anglia and South Wales. Similarly, the distinction between /*m*/ and /*w*/ has been lost in nearly all of England, and in the RP accent, but still survives as in *witch* versus *which* on the periphery in northeastern England and in Scotland. Obviously, other things being equal, mergers also lead to smaller inventories.

2.4 *Word length*

One would suppose on mathematical grounds that there might be a connection between phonological inventories and word length. Surely, the smaller the number of available syllables, the longer words will have to be? Maddieson (1984) has shown in fact that there is, perhaps surprisingly, no necessary connection at all between phoneme inventory size and word length. Languages nevertheless do differ enormously in the average length of even

monomorphemic words. In Trudgill (1996a), for instance, I showed that in the first 50 items on the Swadesh word list, Modern Greek basic vocabulary items are much longer than the corresponding English items. This cannot altogether be explained by phonotactic restrictions on syllable-final consonants in Greek, and not at all by case-endings or the like. Standard Modern Greek, in these 50 words, has an average of 2.06 syllables per word, 81 percent more syllables than the same items in English, which have 1.14 syllables, as exemplified in, for instance, *knee* versus *ghonato*; *big* versus *meghalo*; and *head* versus *kefali*. In terms of segments, too, there is a remarkable difference: English has 3.06 vowels and consonants per word, while Greek has 4.58, an increase of around 50 percent.

I have already referred to the imperfect language-learning of adults as an important factor in certain sorts of developments typical of contact situations. One of the biggest problems for adult language learners is surely memory load. The less there is to remember, the easier language acquisition is. This is particularly true of the acquisition of lexis, which is one of the reasons why pidgins have small vocabularies. Memory-load, though it is much less likely to be a factor in most aspects of the acquisition of phonology, is relevant, at the interface of phonology and lexis, to the quasi-phonological feature of word-length, in terms of syllables and/or segments. The longer a word is, the more difficult it will be, other things being equal, to remember. It is interesting to note, therefore, that there are dialects of Greek in which word length is greatly reduced in comparison to Standard Modern Greek. In the north of mainland Greece, the same 50 words have an average length much closer to English, namely 1.76 syllables. This is accounted for by a phonological change in these dialects in which unstressed /i/ and /u/ have been lost. We may observe, moreover, that northern Greece is precisely the area of the country which has been most exposed to language contact with Albanian, Slavic, Arumanian, and Turkish.

2.5 *Allophonic invariance*

Jim Milroy (1982) showed that in Belfast English there is a remarkable difference between middle-class and working-class accents in terms of allophonic complexity. In just one example, the TRAP vowel is consistently realized as [a] in middle-class speech, whereas in working-class speech it has a wide range of allophones (see below). Milroy suggests that lack of variance in the middle-class variety is typical of standardized varieties; standardization imposes invariance and standard varieties of languages are therefore more likely to show allophonic invariance than vernacular varieties (see also Chambers 1995: 241). I would like to look at middle-class Belfast English from a different perspective, however. I want to argue that it may not be standardization itself which imposes allophonic invariance but rather contact, in the form of koineization (see Trudgill 1986). Contact between adult speakers of different languages – speakers who have passed the critical threshold – is well-known to lead to pidginization,

and one essential component of pidginization is simplification (see Trudgill 1996b). The point is that simplification, which occurs both in language contact and in dialect contact situations, is brought about by the imperfect language learning of adults and post-adolescents. Two of the most important components of simplification are regularization and loss of redundancy, and loss of allophonic complexity can be regarded as simplification on both counts. It may not, therefore, be the “standardization” of the Belfast middle-class norm that has led to its invariance but its status as a koine – a city-wide variety which has arisen out of dialect leveling between various forms of northern Irish and British English. This also fits in with observations by other writers. For instance, Jakobson (1929) suggested that the geographically more widely used varieties of a language, particularly prestige varieties which, I would argue, tend to be most heavily koineized, tend to have simpler phonological systems than dialects with a more restricted function.

3 Community Size and Information

3.1 Fast speech processes (2)

There is some reason, as we have noted, to believe that fast speech phenomena might be more common in some types of society than others. Contact may not be the only explanation for this. Martinet (1962) argued that in spoken communication a dynamic equilibrium exists between the needs of the speaker to speak quickly and easily, on the one hand, and the needs of the listener to comprehend what is being said, on the other. This equilibrium, in other words, is usually conceived of as balancing the hearer’s need to understand as effortlessly as possible against the speaker’s need or desire to speak as effortlessly as possible. Dressler (1984) has similarly pointed out that phonological processes are concerned with pronounceability and perceptibility but that “the goals of better perception and better articulation often conflict with one another.”

Anecdotal evidence supports the view that some, often nonstandard, varieties are harder to learn to understand than others for precisely this sort of reason. In the context of this dynamic equilibrium, an insight of Bernstein’s suggests why this might be so. Bernstein, in his work in the 1970s, made a crucial and interesting observation: that people who spend most of their lives in relatively small social circles, who are part of relatively tight social networks, and who are used to communicating mainly with people with whom they share considerable amounts of background information, will tend to talk in what he (1971) called “restricted code,” this term implying, amongst other more controversial things, that they would take shared information for granted, even, perhaps, when this was not appropriate. On the other hand, those who moved in wider social circles and were more used to communicating with people they did not know well would be more likely to talk in “elaborated code,” a term which

implies the surely accurate observation that they would be more likely to supply background information to those without it.

It is interesting to suppose that this insight concerning background information could be extended to other linguistic levels. Just as less information, generally, needs to be imparted in small non-fluid communities with large amounts of shared background information than in larger, more fluid ones, I would argue that less phonetic information, in particular, is also necessary for successful communication in these small communities. Fast speech processes, obviously, reduce the amount of phonetic information available. In smaller communities, therefore, the dynamic equilibrium might be weighted somewhat in favour of the needs of the speaker, since the listener more often than in other communities may already have a good idea of what is going to be said, and fast speech phenomena might therefore as a consequence be more common.

Dressler and Wodak (1982), on the subject of the dynamic equilibrium, have further argued that formal speech situations are typically those where the needs of the speaker are subordinated to the needs of the hearer, while in casual situations the balance is tipped in the other direction. I would suggest (and Dressler, personal communication, agrees) that it is very probable that some societies and some social groups are more characterized by the occurrence of formal situations than others. If this is true, then we can suppose that the balance between the needs of the speaker and hearer will not necessarily be constant between one society and another. The balance may be swayed in one direction or another by the extent to which a society favors or disfavors formal situations, and fast speech phenomena are more likely to be prevalent in communities which do not favor formal situations.

In support of this thesis, we can cite the fact that Trudgill (1974) showed that the speech of the Norwich lower-working-class, a relatively isolated social group, was characterized by more phonetic reduction processes – one of them illustrated above – than upper-working-class speech. The Norwich research revealed examples of extreme phonological reduction in lower-working-class speech which were simply not found amongst other social groups.

3.2 Fast speech and linguistic change

The differential availability of fast speech phenomena in different types of speech community may also have implications, as mentioned briefly above, for linguistic change. One of the developments that occurs in linguistic change is that fast-speech phenomena become institutionalized; they may eventually become slow speech phenomena as well. According to Dressler (1984: 34): “a typical scenario of diachronic change consists in the generalisation of assimilatory processes which are first limited to casual speech into more and more formal speech situations until they become obligatory processes.” The community size and network factor will undoubtedly also be relevant. That is,

following our argumentation above, the institutionalization of fast speech phenomena into slow speech phenomena might be more typical of small tightly-knit communities where everybody knows everybody else and where there is a large fund of shared information – and fewer formal situations.

It is not impossible, for example, that the enormously greater degree of phonetic erosion that has taken place in French as opposed to, say, Italian, can at least partly be explained in this way. It may well be that the contrast between Latin /hominem/ > Italian /uomo/, > French *homme* /om/; Latin /augustum/ > Italian /agosto/, > French *août* /u/; Latin /unum/ > Italian /uno/, > French *un* /œ/ can be ascribed partly to the degree to which French had no formal role, under a Germanic-speaking Frankish aristocracy, until relatively late in its development.

3.3 Grammaticalization

The relative prevalence or absence of fast speech phenomena might have repercussions at other linguistic levels also. In Trudgill (1995) I argued that certain types of grammaticalization process might be more common in some types of community than others. The degree to which grammaticalization is the result of pragmatic, cognitive, discourse, semantic, syntactic, and/or phonological processes is very much an open question. To the extent that phonetics and phonology may be involved, however, I would suggest that grammaticalization may be a more frequent process in those communities which favor fast speech phenomena than in those which do not. I suggest, for example, that the rather remarkable development in East Anglian traditional dialects of a whole series of nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjuncts into conjunctions represents a more widespread and rapid process than might be expected in more widely-spoken varieties. This is precisely because grammaticalization has occurred as a result of – or at least accompanied by – the phonological reduction involved in fast speech processes, with eventual deletion of lexical material.

For example, *more* is used in traditional East Anglian rural dialects as a conjunction equivalent to Standard English *neither* as a result of contraction from an original *no more*:

The fruit and vegetables weren't as big as last year, more weren't the taters and onions

Similarly, *time* has become a conjunction equivalent to Standard English *while* as a result of the phonological deletion of lexical material such as *during the*:

Go you and have a good wash and a change, time I get tea ready

Similarly, *do* has become a conjunction equivalent to *otherwise* as a result of the deletion of material such as *because if* [Pronoun]:

Don't you sleep there, do you'll be laughing on the wrong side of your face

The argument here is not, obviously, that such processes occur only in village dialects. Rather, the proposal is that the large number of (in this case) conjunctions which have developed in this way in rural East Anglia suggests that grammaticalization processes which are due ultimately to phonological reduction and deletion may be more common in small, tightly-knit communities with relatively few outside contacts, i.e. the same sorts of communities which particularly favor fast speech phenomena.

3.4 Phonological inventories (2)

We have seen that long-term contact involving child bilingualism may produce large inventories through borrowing; and adult language contact produces smaller inventories through simplification. Unfortunately, however, this cannot be the only explanation for small inventories, because we also find some well-known cases of small isolated languages with small inventories. One example which is often cited is that of Hawai'ian. It is worth looking at the history of the Hawai'ian consonantal inventory, in particular, in some historical depth, since it does seem to show an inexorable movement over the centuries in a minimalist direction. Hawai'ian is a member of the Polynesian sub-family of the Oceanic sub-family of the Malayo-Polynesian sub-family of the Austronesian language family. Proto-Austronesian (see Dutton 1992), which was spoken around 4000 BC and perhaps on the mainland of southeast Asia, had a phoneme inventory including 23 consonants:

m	n			ŋ		
p	t			k	q	ʔ
b	d	d̥	ʃ	g		
	ts					
	dz					
	s		ʃ			h
	z					
	l	ɭ				
	r				ʁ	

Proto-Oceanic, which was spoken about 2500 BC and probably in the area of the western Pacific, had a consonant system with 18 members:

m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
p	t	c	k	q
b	d	ʃ	g	
	s			
w	r	j		ʁ

In Proto-Polynesian, whose separate identity has to postdate the settlement of Tonga and Samoa at around 1000 BC, the consonant system was already rather reduced as compared to that of Proto-Austronesian and Proto-Oceanic. It had (see Clark 1976) a consonant inventory of 13 consonants:

m	n	ŋ	
p	t	k	ʔ
f	s		h
v			
	l		
	r		

This was somewhat reduced in Proto-Nuclear Polynesian (the ancestor of all modern Polynesian language groups except Tongic) by the loss of /h/, and the merger of /r/ with /l/, giving a system of 11 consonants. In Proto-Central Eastern Polynesian, which postdates the eastward expansion of the Polynesian peoples into the more remote areas of the Pacific, which in latest research is now believed to have begun around 200 BC, this was further reduced to 10 consonants, as a result of the loss of /ʔ/. This is already a very minimal consonant system, especially bearing in mind that there were only five vowels. Then, however, and remarkably, Hawai'ian, whose separation from the other eastern Polynesian languages obviously postdates the settlement of Hawaii from the Society Islands around 500 AD or later (see Sutton 1994), reduced the consonant system even further by merging /f/ and /s/ as /h/, and merging /ŋ/ with /n/. In addition to this, /k/ became /ʔ/ and /t/ changed to /k/:

m	n		
p		k	ʔ
			h
v			
	l		

Hawai'ian thus has only eight consonants and, according to Maddieson (1984), a total of only 162 possible different syllables. The question we can then ask is this: is it just a coincidence that the gradual centuries-long but dramatic and pioneering dispersal of the ancestors of the modern Polynesian Hawai'ians from mainland Asia into more and more remote areas of the hitherto uninhabited Pacific Ocean was accompanied by an equally gradual but no less dramatic reduction in the size of the phonological inventories of the languages spoken by these people?

Haudricourt (1961) attempts an explanation. Small inventories, he says, are the result of:

“impoverishment,” which occurs in situations characterized by monolingualism and isolation (the opposite of the situation obtaining in the Caucasus) – and/or by “non-egalitarian bilingualism.” Haudricourt suggests that in certain situations

the superiority of a dominant group in a diglossic bilingual environment may be “so obvious they no longer have any need to articulate well to be understood – they may confuse two different phonemes or no longer pronounce one – no one will dare to mock them. This is why we find fewer consonants in the language of the Iroquois who terrorised their neighbours, or in the languages of the people of Tahiti and Hawai’i who combine island isolation with significant demographic development as compared to other less favoured archipelagos.” (Haudricourt 1961: 10, my translation).

This is not an especially happy thesis, but it does perhaps contain the germs of an explanation. Maddieson (1984) argues that there is no actual evidence that languages such as Hawai’ian show signs that they “suffer from problems due to lack of contrastive possibilities”. Let us suppose, however, that a small number of available syllables, and therefore a relatively small amount of redundancy may, other things being equal, lead to greater communicative difficulty. If this is so, then we should probably turn away in this case from high vs. low contact as explanatory factors. (In fact, it is actually important to point out that Eastern Polynesian cultures are not now thought to have been so isolated from one another as ethnocentric Europeans unused to immensely long ocean canoe voyages might suppose (see Sutton 1994).) We should probably turn instead to our other major factor, community size and structure, as being the most important. My argument here is identical to one used above in connection with fast speech phenomena. The chain of inference in the development of the Hawai’ian phonological system, whose small size might in other types of society have led to communicative difficulties, is as follows: initial small community size (the number of people who could arrive on a relatively small number of relatively small boats) would have led in turn to tight social networks, which would have implied large amounts of shared background information – a situation in which communication with a relatively low level of phonological redundancy would have been relatively tolerable.

3.5 *Deixis*

Nearly all European languages have lost the dual number in the last 2,000 years or so. Some, like English, lost it long ago. Others, like Polish, lost it much more recently. Yet others still retain it. One striking thing about this development is that this loss has gone hand in hand with demographic expansion. This may be just a coincidence, but it is noticeable that those European languages which have retained the dual number are spoken by relatively small numbers of speakers, such as Slovenian, or by very small numbers of speakers, such as Sami. There are grounds for at least considering the proposition that the larger the community, the less likely dual number is to be retained. Why this might be is not easy to say, but some clues may become available from a consideration of “cultural complexity.”

Linguists are naturally sceptical about relating linguistic and cultural complexity. As Bickerton (1996) says, "if there were any link between cultural complexity and linguistic complexity, we would expect to find that the most complex societies had the most complex languages while simpler societies had simpler languages . . . We do not find any such thing." It does depend, of course, on what exactly we mean by complexity. Interestingly, though, I would like to point out that there is some information in the literature which could be interpreted as suggesting that there *is* a relationship but that it is the other way round: some aspects of linguistic complexity, or at least irregularity, may be more evident in simpler than in more complex societies.

Some suggestive work which bears on this point has been carried out by Perkins (1980). He investigates certain aspects of linguistic complexity, concentrating on deixis generally. He takes as the starting point for his research a suggestion by Keenan (1976) that deictic systems are better developed in non-literate communities with fewer than 4,000 speakers. In this work we can witness observations being made by linguists which remind us of the points made by Bernstein, cited above, and which also seem to be in agreement with my own suggestions concerning, for example, fast-speech phenomena. Kay (1976), for instance, says that "in small, homogeneous speech communities there is a maximum of shared background between speakers, which is the stuff on which deixis depends. As society evolves toward complexity and the speech community becomes less homogeneous, speakers share less background information, and so one would need to build more of the message into what was actually said." Givón (1979), too, observes that people in more complex cultures are more frequently required to interact with other people who they do not know.

Perkins' (1980) argument is that "deictics identify referents by connecting them to the spatial-temporal axis of speech events". Deictics in his terms include persons, tenses, demonstratives, directionals (*here, there*), inclusive vs. exclusive etc. The point about deictics, he argues, is that they "involve the requirement that the spatio-temporal context of their use be available for the interpretation of the intended referents." Perkins thus conjectures that deictics will be more salient in less complex than in more complex cultures, and are therefore more likely to appear in the central inflectional systems of the languages concerned than more peripherally in the lexis or periphrastically. This is in turn because the more frequently free deictic morphemes occur, the more likely they are to be subject to grammaticalization processes which turn them into bound morphemes through coalescence and morphologization.

Perkins investigated 50 languages and their usage of seven deictic affixes: tense, person on verb, person on nouns, spatial demonstratives on verbs, spatial demonstratives on nouns, inclusive vs. exclusive on person markers, and dual in person markers. Communities are ranged for cultural complexity from 1 (e.g. Andamanese) to 5 (e.g. Vietnamese). The measurement of cultural complexity that Perkins uses is based on the work of anthropologists such as Carneiro (1973) and computed in terms of factors such as type of agriculture, settlement

size in terms of population, craft specialization, and numbers of levels in political and social hierarchies.

Perkins shows statistically that there is a correlation between complexity and the presence of deictic affixes. For example, languages associated with the most complex cultures – those scoring 5 – have on average 1.22 deictic affixes, while those scoring 1, the lowest, have on average 3.28. Perkins concludes “deictic affixes . . . are lost as cultures become complex.” Our guess about the loss of the dual number, above, is confirmed.

Most linguists are likely to feel a little uncomfortable about the notion of cultural complexity. I am therefore happy, at least for the time being, to leave this issue to the anthropologists, and to point out that we probably do not need to look any further, for our own linguistic purposes, than actual community size. As I suggested above in connection with fast speech processes, what is probably crucial here is simply how many individuals are involved in a particular speech community, and how much shared information is available.

4 Social Networks and Conformity

4.1 *Allophonic complexity*

We noted above Milroy’s (1982) observation that in Belfast English there is a difference between middle-class and working-class accents in allophonic complexity. As we saw, the TRAP vowel is realized only as [a] in middle-class speech. In working-class speech, however, this vowel has allophones in different phonological contexts which cover an astonishing range from [ɛ] through [æ], [a] and [ɑ] to [ɒ]. Interestingly and crucially, moreover, front [ɛ] occurs before back (velar) consonants, while back [ɒ] occurs before front (alveolar) nasals, so that we are clearly once again, as with the Norwich fast speech rule, dealing with dialect-specific rather than universal assimilatory processes.

I would argue that it is not absence of standardization, as Milroy suggests, which has led to this allophonic complexity. Andersen (1988) has argued that socially peripheral communities in general are more likely to favor the proliferation of low-level pronunciation rules. We now have an explanation for this. It is the tightly-networked working-class Belfast community structure described by Milroy (1980) which sustains the allophonic complexity of the vernacular as opposed to the standard. As Grace (1990) has written:

A language exists in the people who speak it, but people do not live very long, and the language goes on much longer. This continuity is achieved by the recruitment of new speakers, but it is not a perfect continuity. Children (or adults) learning a language learn it from people who already speak it, but these teachers exercise considerably less than total control over the learning process.

(Grace 1990: 126)

There will always be limits on how far an individual can diverge linguistically from the group (Chambers 1995: 100). But my thesis is that in some communities the “teachers” may have more control over individuals than in others. Small, tightly-knit communities are more able, it seems, to encourage continued adherence to norms from one generation to another, however complex they may be, and it is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that the maintenance of allophonic complexity, just like the acquisition of non-natural fast speech rules, will be favored precisely in such communities (see Chambers 1995: 67).

4.2 *Fast speech phenomena (3)*

Tightly-knit networks may also be a factor in the proliferation of fast speech processes, already discussed. We saw above that some of the reduction processes investigated in lower-working-class Norwich English are not universal. Neither are they haphazard. They are the product of rules which are peculiar to the local speech community. The particular /nð/ > /l/ rule cited above, once acquired, does make production easier for speakers – there is only one segment to pronounce instead of two – but the point I would wish to make here is that its acquisition will also constitute a difficulty of learning during the child language acquisition process. The rule is complex, even if it simplifies speech production. A reasonable hypothesis, arising from the observations of Milroy and Grace, would be that the learning of complex and non-natural rules for such reduction processes is facilitated by membership of more tightly-knit social groups demonstrating close inter-generational contacts, and therefore more likely to be found in such social settings.

4.3 *Non-natural sound change*

Andersen (1988) discusses a series of sound changes – fortitions – which he regards as at least “slightly unusual.” He points to the development of parasitic velar consonants after high or mid vowels in a number of isolated European varieties, including dialects of Provençal, Danish, German, and Flemish. In Romansch, he points out that three non-contiguous isolated high Alpine dialects of the already rather isolated Romansch language share, presumably as separate and independent developments, fortitions such as /vos/ > /voks/ ‘you’, and /krefʃta/ > /krekʃta/ ‘crest’.

I have suggested that small isolated communities might be more able, because of their network structures, to sustain complex norms such as allophonic complexity and complex fast speech rules from one generation to another, than more loosely networked societies. This kind of consequence of tight social network structure might also have implications for aspects of linguistic change. For example, small, tightly networked communities might be able to push through, enforce, and sustain phonological changes which would have a much

smaller chance of success in larger, more fluid communities. These would be phonological changes of a relatively non-natural or at least unusual type, and/or changes that are relatively complex in some way.

There is some evidence to support this speculation (Trudgill 1996a). Faroese, as we saw above, has clearly undergone fewer changes in general than the continental Scandinavian languages. A number of the sound changes it has undergone, however, do seem to be good candidates for the labels “complex” and/or “unusual.” First, it is clear from reading the works of experts in the phonological history of Faroese that they feel perplexed by its complexity. Küspert (1988: 197) writes (my translation) that “the development of vowels in stressed syllables from Old Norse to modern Faroese is clearly a complex and opaque one.” Arnason (1980: 81) shares this view: “to give a simple and reliable picture of the history of Faroese vocalism is difficult, partly because the development seems to have been so complicated.” Secondly, Faroese does demonstrate a series of changes involving fortitions, which many historical linguists seem to feel are perhaps less to be expected than lenitions: thus /kigv/ has developed out of earlier /ku:/ cf. modern Danish /ku:/, and /nʊdʒ/ has developed out of earlier /ny:/, cf. modern Danish /ny:/. Many other examples could be given: for instance, while mainland Greek dialects, as we saw above, are characterized by the consequences of diachronic segment deletion, fortitions are a feature of the more remote southeastern island dialects of Greek. For example, in Cypriot, the plural *matia* of *mati* “eye” is pronounced /matka/. And amongst the Polynesian languages, a number of fortitions such as the remarkable Marquesan change of /l/ to /ʔ/ (Harlow 1982) tend to arouse attention.

5 Caveat: Time Lag

5.1 Gender

One problematic category not dealt with by Perkins in his discussion of deixis is grammatical gender. Corbett (1991) posits a likely origin for grammatical gender in “nouns with classificatory possibilities such as ‘woman’, ‘man’, ‘animal’”, followed by diachronic processes involving the grammaticalization of such nouns as classifiers (see also Lee 1988). Classifiers can then in turn either come to be used anaphorically and turn into demonstratives – and subsequently pronouns and other gender markers – or they can be repeated within the noun phrase and give rise to gender agreement in that way (see also Harris and Campbell 1995: 341–2).

If grammaticalization is more common in some types of community than others, as we argued in the case of East Anglian conjunction-formation, then we might suppose that grammatical gender would be more common in smaller societies than larger. Similarly, given that deixis plays a bigger role, as we saw, in smaller communities than larger, this would give us another reason to

expect to find grammatical gender more frequently in smaller than in larger languages. Obviously this is not the case. The reason for this must be that gender marking occurs with a very high degree of frequency in languages which have it, and is thus a feature with a high degree of *entrenchment* (Langacker 1987: 59). It is thus very readily maintained in the speech of individuals; and because of the language learning abilities of the human infant, even languages spoken in large communities readily maintain this complex historical baggage across generations (see Trudgill 1999). Having perhaps arisen in small tightly-knit communities, it can therefore persist for many centuries even if community size increases enormously. No doubt this will not be the only feature of which this may be true.

The correct generalization in fact seems to be that gender marking reduces or disappears only in high-contact adult-learning situations. The standard koineized forms of Swedish and Danish, for instance, have only two genders, while many non-standard dialects of these languages still have three. English and Afrikaans, the Germanic languages with the greatest history of contact, have lost grammatical gender altogether. It is also typical of creoles that they do not have it: French creoles, for example, having lost gender during pidginization, have never redeveloped it, unlike other categories, during creolization.

6 Conclusion

We have discussed three different types of community:

- 1 High-contact language communities where contact is stable, long-term and involves child bilingualism. In languages spoken in such communities, there may be a tendency to develop large phonological inventories through borrowing, and to develop other types of complexity and syntagmatic redundancy.
- 2 High-contact language communities where contact is short-term and/or involves imperfect language learning by adults. Languages spoken in such societies may tend to develop small phonological inventories through mergers, and to manifest other aspects of pidginization such as loss of morphological complexity, loss of redundancy including grammatical gender, and regularization. Linguistic change will tend to be relatively rapid.
- 3 Isolated low-contact language communities. Languages spoken in such communities may develop small phonological inventories as a result of the balance of the dynamic equilibrium of communication being swung heavily in favor of the speaker as opposed to the hearer. Such communities will also favor the retention of deictic and allophonic complexity. Linguistic change will be slow but will involve greater institutionalization of fast speech phenomena, a relatively high level of grammaticalization, and the greater likelihood of marked changes.

This brief survey of a small range of linguistic phenomena of different types points to the conclusion that it may well be profitable for students of linguistic variation and change to attempt to explain the distribution of at least some typological linguistic characteristics across languages sociolinguistically, that is to say in terms of certain of the social characteristics of the societies in which they are spoken, of which community size, social network structure, and amount of shared information available may turn out to be only some of the most important.

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