

A variationist look at Macrosociolinguistics

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Overview

- I. Macrosociolinguistics and
Microsociolinguistics
- II. Interaction as the empirical field
- III. The Production/Reception asymmetry
- IV. Linguaging
- V. Audience design
- VI. Variation
- VII. Variation in interaction

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MACRO- AND MICROSOCIOLOGICALS

Two kinds of sociolinguistics

- Fasold:
- The Sociolinguistics of Society (1984)
- The Sociolinguistics of Language (1990)
- Hudson (2001):
- Sociolinguistics and the sociology of language:
"The difference is very much one of emphasis"
(p.4), i.e. on language vs. society

Look it up!

- Swann et al.: *A dictionary of sociolinguistics* 2004: 196:
- **MACROSOCIOLOGUISTICS**: Sociolinguistics that studies language in society with a relatively large-scale perspective, concerned with the distribution of languages and their broader functions, rather than a close examination of the details of internal language structure and variation. Macrosociolinguistics covers topics such as LANGUAGE CHOICE, DOMAINS, LANGUAGE PLANNING, educational policy etc.

MICROSOCIOLINGUISTICS

SOCIOLINGUISTICS that studies language in society with attention to details of the internal structure of language, variation within a language and how language is used strategically in interaction and negotiations between individuals; contrast MACROSOCIOLINGUISTICS.[...]

There are many instances in which both micro- and macrosociolinguistics seem to be two sides of the same coin, and several topics like LANGUAGE SHIFT, BILINGUALISM, ACTS OF IDENTITY, and code-switching have been informed by both approaches.

Swann et al 2004: 205

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INTERACTION AS THE EMPIRICAL FIELD

The three layers of knowledge

- Knowledge about the **INDIVIDUAL**
- Knowledge about **INTERACTION**
- Knowledge about **SOCIETY**

Empirically tested knowledge

- Empirically tested knowledge about both the **INDIVIDUAL** and **SOCIETY** is ***inferred from studies of individuals in interaction.***
- ***Interaction is the only source of empirical knowledge that we have.***
- **NB Experiments: All experiments, willy-nilly, place individuals in interaction, viz. have an instruction and an experimenter and hence invite an interpretation in terms of a previously experienced (speech) event!**

III

PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION

The two sides of competence

The linguistically competent individual masters two different skills:

- Understanding (Reception)
- Producing (Production)

From the start in speech - later on also in writing

Reception and production are asymmetrical!

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LANGUAGING

From language to linguistic elements or features

- Thesis:** The notion of 'a language' has been developed for the purpose of science during the age of romanticism
- A moot question:** What was the ontology of 'language' *before* the birth of national languages?
- Daniel Nettle 1999: The human linguistic pool contains linguistic items. "A linguistic item is any piece of structure that can be independently learned and therefore transmitted from one speaker to another [...]" (Nettle 1999: 5)

Normann and Møller on Linguaging

“Linguistic features exist in the shapes of units and rules. We can comprehend and internalize rules, and this enables us to develop an extensive comprehension potential. The concept of comprehension potential is important when we discuss interaction. Our linguistic comprehension potential is the phenomenon which allows us to participate in interaction even when our interlocutors use linguistic features which we do not “know” or “have”.”

Normann Jørgensen and Møller 2009

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AUDIENCE DESIGN

Production for an audience

- Linguistic interaction always involves a producer and an audience (auditor(s))
- We produce linguistic items for a specific audience
- This means that we will *primarily* use linguistic items which we believe the auditors understand (but not necessarily items they themselves produce)

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VARIATION

Variation

- **Variation thrives on the asymmetry between production and reception.**
- Since our comprehension potential (or receptive competence) encompasses a lot more items than our productive potential (or competence), we are able to **decode** (or comprehend) features (or items) which we do not **use** (produce), or even want to produce, ourselves

Language attitudes

- Tore Kristiansen has shown how linguistic items invariably are connected with stereotypes of users
- Exemplar theory, or usage based theories in general, fit this conception perfectly in that they stipulate that the brain is a huge repository of **all items heard, stored in ways yet unknown, but still connected with (a representation of) the speech event they were used in**

Variation in and between languages

- What if microsociolinguistics had modify the notion of a language in the direction of the 'the human linguistic pool containing all possible linguistic items' in the society at hand?
- We would then be in a better position to explain the use of linguistic items connected with different 'languages' **on a par with** the use of variants within one and the same language: micro- and macrosociolinguistics would be one and the same discipline: variationist sociolinguistics

Variation in interaction

- Variation in interaction is **for** the audience and is always noted **by** the audience whether they are aware of this or not
- In this way a specific persona (or identity) is **projected to** the audience and **noted by** the auditors
- But how this persona is perceived depends on the auditor's previous experience

History

- Individuals are individuals simply as a consequence of their history, we are each of us unique in this sense
- History is sedimented in the individual as layers of experience, including linguistic experience
- Thus, our various histories determine which stereotypes we (are able to) produce and interpret

Integrating Micro and Macro

- When an individual in an interaction within a specific domain uses a specific linguistic item s/he projects an identity which evokes stereotypical attitudes
- The use of English in a domain such as e.g. the university is typically connected to internationalisation and success but it does of course depend on *which (kind of) English the linguistic elements trigger (the image of)*

Danish for international staff

- What kind of stereotypical identity is connected to the use of 'Danish' linguistic items in the domain of the university by international staff?
- I suggest that the concept of audience design and integration are both important so that this will depend on the knowledge of the user about the linguistic skills of the auditors as well as his or her wish to signal a wish to 'integrate'

Three possibilities

- Danish used by international staff to audiences with only bilingual Danes: **strong wish to integrate: I am like you guys!**
- Danish used by international staff to mixed audiences with bilingual Danes as well as more monolingual ones: **politeness: I try to speak Danish so that everyone may understand**
- Danish used to audiences with only monolingual Danes: **necessity: I want to be heard!**

Conclusion

- One way to integrate MACROSOCIOLINGUISTICS and MICROSOCIOLINGUISTICS is to focus on variation and to abolish the notion of a difference between variation *between* languages and variation *within* languages.

This is what I have tried to demonstrate in this lecture