

Varieties of American English SS 2009

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# American Indian English (AIE)

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# Outline

- Linguistic Features of AIE
- Context and History of AIE
- Hollywood Injun English

# Table of Contents

- Linguistic Features of American Indian English
  - Sound Patterns
  - Inflection
  - Articles
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  - Tense/Aspect

# Sound Patterns

## Vowels:

[ə], [æ], [e] and [a] are often pronounced differently from SAE  
(*as in: cut, cat, bet, father*)

In Navajo, [i],[e], [iy] and [ey] are often replaced by [e]

In all varieties, vowel shifts occur, making AIE audibly distinct from Standard American English

Indians assign different values to vowel length (*village/people*)

# Sound Patterns

Consonants:

Tsimshian English:

[f] and [v] often realized as [b] => *Blank* (*Frank*)

[θ] and [ð] often realized as [d], [t] => *Nortland* (*Northland*)

[r] often realized as [l] => *Lut* (*Ruth*)

[tʃ] often realized as [ts] => [tsɪkn]

[ʃ] often realized as [s] => [su]

Consonants are substituted because the Ancestral Language does not have counterparts

# Sound Patterns

## Consonants:

### Cheyenne English:

- [θ] and [ð] often realized as [d] and [t] (*dem, tin*)
- Absence of [ŋ] sound, realized as [n]. Difference between *Singer* and *Sinner* only by means of vowel length
- Glottal stops as substitutions of [d] and [t] (*reʔ haʔ*)

### Some varieties:

Nasal consonants interchangeable ([m], [n], [ŋ]) =>  
*samwich/sangwich* – sandwich

Ute English substitutes [n] for [l]: *wank* - walk

# Inflection

Plural morpheme often deleted or replaced

- *There's two way of talking* (Lakota)
- *One of that word is* (Lakota)
- *Four book* (San Juan Pueblo)

# Inflection

Mass nouns pluralized like count nouns are :

- *Homeworks*
- *Furnitures*

# Articles

Navajo English:

Influences from Ancestral Language, which has no articles

- *He asked shopkeeper for sheep*

# Demonstratives

Tsimshian English: *them*

Indicates reference to named individual and associated people

- *Them Fred's having a party*
- *Don't play with them John.*

# Pronouns

Cheyenne English:

- Inconsistencies between gender of pronoun and noun
- Influence from Ancestral Language (gender/sex not important, reference to living or sacred things)

Mohave English: subject pronoun deletion

- *But then woke him up*
- *[ ] shot himself*

# Tense/Aspect

Example from Apache English:

- Action that does not occur before other activities in the discourse
  - *Then he will looking forward to the day when he will finish*
- Action with duration, before or after the main event of the discourse
  - *But he keep on going until he got to top of the hill*
- Action that has not yet begun (or irrealis)
  - *I will becoming a leader the people will be helping by me*

# *Get* as a verbal auxiliary

Usually used to form passive constructions

- *Fly got bitten by spider*

# Copula Deletion

In several varieties copula deletion is allowed when Standard English allows contracted auxiliaries

- *She a Red Corn people* (Isletan English)

# Context and History of AIE

# The origin of AIE

- 500 American Indian and Alaska Native languages
- today: 200 hundred spoken within native communities
- language families today: at least 20
- intertribal communication → 3 strategies
  - using one's own ancestral language
  - developing a guideline
  - lingua franca

# The origin of AIE

- European colonization: huge impact on tribal life in North America
- large variation in interaction and communication
- other indigenous languages contributed to language diversity

# The origin of AIE

- education in federal boarding schools
- end of 19th century = off-reservation boarding school → federal government's policy-of-choice
- AIE established in Indian student's home/tribal community
- Dawes Act of 1887

# The origin of AIE

- Merriam report affected English in Indian speech communities
- Employment Assistance Program
- 1970s: tribal self-determination Indian Education Act

# Hollywood Injun English (HIE)

Fictional American Indian speech as used by characters in movies, TV, etc.

# Overview: HIE

- (Grammatical) features
- Comparison with AIE
- Socio-psychological implications and associations

# Grammatical Features of HIE

- Frequent, longer-lasting, erratically placed pauses
- Lack of tense markers
- Deletion of pronouns, auxiliary verbs, determiners, plural morphemes
- Substituting subject pronoun with object pronoun
- Lack of contraction
- Lexicon

# Comparison with AIE

- Very simplified, homogeneous, and limited
- Deletion patterns in HIE are based on discursive factors, while AIE deletion patterns are grammatical
- Linguistic stereotypes that are allusive to, but not directly borrowed from AIE

# Implications and Associations

- Pejorative (non-fluent, ungrammatical, “foreign”, “baby talk”, incompetent)
- Ponderous, “archaic eloquence”
- (Noble) savage, pre-civilized
- Historicized, static image of Nativeness
- “Othering”

# Bibliography

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Thank you for your attention