American Indian English (AIE)

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Outline

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• Context and History of AIE
• Hollywood Injun English
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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)
[ʃ] often realized as [ts] => [ts₁kn]
[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
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”

Thank you for your attention