

THERE ARE NO SUBJECTIVE DIALECTS

On the occasion of the first meeting of Kivung,
the Linguistic Society of New Guinea, November
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0. My proposition is that there is no opposition between subjective and objective dialects. The two concepts should be combined to establish dialects of a language.

1.0 To establish objective dialects linguists have studied the regional variation of linguistic features that constitute the language under enquiry, drawing isophones, isoglosses etc. on maps or have constructed intelligibility measures.

1.1 In the former case dialects have been determined by selecting, arbitrarily or intuitively, certain features to show the "dialect-boundaries". However, a full mapping of such features leads to a picture where "ein Sprachgebiet normalerweise in Allen Richtungen von Grenzlinien, die sich meistens nicht decken, durchquert" (1). Any statement about dialects is then, indeed, arbitrary. Such a geographically rather than linguistically determined dialect (2) has emptied the concept of most of its usefulness.

1.2 The intelligibility measure is another trick invented by linguists to sort idiolects into (languages and) dialects according to "exact criteria". It achieves no more than a rough intelligibility ranking (!) since it completely disregards the speaker's feelings about the matter. Wurm and Laycock discuss the application of this type of measure to New Guinea gammalects ("communalects") in their article "The Question of Language and Dialect in New Guinea" (3). They found "that in an area encompassing the greater part of the three Highlands Districts, the number of distinct languages encountered there could be said to be 48 or 26 according to what linguistic criteria were applied to distinguish between languages and dialects" (4).

4. The two approaches should be combined into a single model of dialect research. In brief, I suggest this procedure:
- (a) the linguist collects linguistic data, e.g. by tape-recording samples of speech from a random selection of localities in a given area.
 - (b) randomly selected native speakers from the same area listen to the collected tapes (or answer direct questions about localities) and indicate whether they can identify the origins of the speakers or at least discriminate between the tapes. This test orders the data into dialects. The identification of one sample with a particular locality may be more or less detailed and more or less certain, but this is exactly what we should expect. Thus, there is no "dialect of locality A" unless one refers to a particular group of evaluating speakers. A maximal dialect statement is obtained when the test is administered on such a scale that generalizations about the whole area are possible.
 - (c) the data, now grouped into dialects, is then fully described. Ideally there is nothing piecemeal about this (cf note 11).
 - (d) the dialect descriptions are contrasted and a set of differences extracted. Working under ceteris paribus conditions we must assume that all these differences have dialectal relevance, but they may not all be equally important. Also, it would be very difficult to approximate the ceteris paribus conditions and the practical importance of the following procedure is therefore great.
 - (e) the linguist constructs a number of hypotheses about the relative importance of these "raw" dialectal features (what, perhaps minimal, combinations of features have to be present to elicit the desired dialect identification, with or without certainty, perhaps after a specified time; how changes in these feature combinations elicit changes in dialect responses; etc) and tests these hypotheses by playing back "synthesized" tapes for the informants. The responses are checked against the previously obtained dialects, which now provide the criteria.

(this model also applies to sociolectal studies.)

5. In Australia, I have made a preliminary study of dialects in Victoria, applying only the first two steps above, namely the collection of short speech samples (from Nhill in the Wimmera, Melbourne and the Barossa Valley in South Australia (12)) and the evaluation by native speakers (a group of 28 university students). I did not devote any attention to explaining individual differences or possible dialectal hierarchies (13). The result was: a Victorian rural/urban dichotomy can be considered as demonstrated and the study also "seems to suggest, for (the respective informants), a connexion between their speech and their Wimmera origin. However, the study did not contain samples from other Victorian (or neighbouring) areas than Melbourne and the Barossa Valley that could oppose such an identification. These two districts were, however, identified." (14)

NOTES

- (1) Hammarström, U G E: Linguistische Einheiten im Rahmen der modernen Sprachwissenschaft, p.98; Springer-Verlag 1966
- (2) *Ibidem*, p.97
- (3) Wurm, S A and Laycock, D C: The Question of Language and Dialect in New Guinea; Oceania v.32:2 1961
- (4) Wurm, S A: Papua-New Guinea Nationhood: the Problem of a National Language; The Journal of the Papua and New Guinea Society 1966
- (5) Hammarström, U G E: op.cit. pp.95-98 and Inqueritos linguisticos II, Revista de Portugal, Serie A, 26 (in Swedish translation: Dialektologiska undersökningar, Nordisk tidskrift för tale och stemme 24, 1964) and Zur sozialen und dialektalen Funktion der Sprache, Zeitschrift für Mundartforschung 1967

- (6) Grootaers, W. A.: Origin and Nature of the Subjective Boundaries of Dialects; Orbis v.8 1959 and La Discussion autour des Frontiers Dialectales Subjectives; Orbis v.13 1964
- (7) Mase, Y: Une Nouvelle Tentative pour Tracer les Frontiers Subjectives des Dialectes; Orbis v.13 1964
- (8) Hammarström, U G E: Linguistische Einheiten, p.97
- (9) Jernudd, B H: Chorology and Linguistics, p.8; ANZAAS Congress January 1967. Unpublished.
Hammarström, U G E: Zur sozialen ..., Bild 4.
- (10) Jernudd, B H: op.cit.
- (11) "Objective" is only a label employed to refer to this kind of dialectology. The method depends fully on the linguist's description. In the best of cases the idiolect under study is described either by a native speaker or in close co-operation with a native speaker. However, I know of no case when a network of complete descriptions has been established. It would still be necessary to explore the speaker's reactions to other idiolects within the area according to the approach below.
- (12) Dr M Clyne, Monash, kindly lent me his Barossa Valley recordings.
- (13) Jernudd, op.cit. p.11
- (14) Jernudd, B H: A Listener Evaluation Experiment of Variants of Australian English; Unpublished report. 1967