Methodological considerations in the study of sociophonetic variation in an underdocumented minority language: Somali Bantu Kizigua as a case study

Method of Presentation
1. Research goals
2. Methodological issues
3. Adapting variationist methodology for the study of an underdocumented language
4. Assessment of methodology
5. Discussion/Conclusion and Future Research Directions

General Research Goals
- General goals of variationist sociolinguistics (Labov)
  - How and why do languages vary?
  - How is this variation related to social structure?
  - How does synchronic variation lead to diachronic change?

Goal of this presentation
- To present an example of how variationist methodology can be adapted to the study of phonetic variation in an underdocumented language (Kizigua).

Research Gaps
- Research focused on more than one language (Meyerhoff and Nagy 2008)
  - 11% of articles in Language Variation and Change
  - 28% of articles in the Journal of Sociolinguistics

Research Gaps
- Research focused on English (Nagy 2012)
  - 53% of articles in Language Variation and Change
  - 42% of articles in the Journal of Sociolinguistics
  - IN CONTRAST: 17% of articles in Phonology
  - Greater interest among theoretical and descriptive linguists in working on a greater diversity of languages
Most variationist sociolinguistics work focused on monolingual English speaking communities.  

1. Casual conversation  
   - To make interviewee feel more comfortable  
   - I.e. not feel like s/he is being interviewed  
   - Based on assumption that speakers less likely to consciously think about their pronunciation in this context  

2. Word Lists and Reading Passages  
   - Speakers asked to read a list of words and/or a reading passage  
   - Assumption that speakers more likely to be conscious about their pronunciation and use formal speech  
   - Included to compare formal and casual ("vernacular") speech styles  

Originally designed for a monolingual English context:  
- Casual conversation requires fluency in the language  
- In multilingual communities, another language may be the most "natural" choice in communicating with a researcher  
- Often lack of standard variety and writing system  
- Reading tasks not possible  

Can variationist methodology be adapted for the study of phonetic variation on Kizigua (an underdocumented language)?  
- Less documentation available than for Schmidt (1985) on Dyirbal and Dorian (1978) on East Sutherland Gaelic  

Focus of Presentation  
- Is there interspeaker variation in the production of certain sounds?  
- If so, can the different pronunciations be correlated with demographic factors?
3. Adapting Methodology for an Underdocumented Language

Pre-Interview Observations

- Comparison of two sources
  1. Field Methods class work with 21-year-old female speaker
     - Involved speaker coming to class twice a week
     - Students asked consultant questions about the language with the goal of creating a description of the language
     - Lexicon of 700 words collected, about half recorded
  2. Dictionaries of the Tanzanian Dialect (Kisbey 1906, Mochiwa 2008)
     - Differences in historic voiceless pre-nasalized stops (*mp, *nt, *nk) identified

- Linguistic Divergence?
- Mutual Intelligibility?

Modified Sociolinguistic Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modified Sociolinguistic Interview</th>
<th>Labovian Sociolinguistic Interview</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The Pear Film Elicitation task</td>
<td>Casual Conversation</td>
<td>To collect casual speech data</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Word list with pictures</td>
<td>Word list with test</td>
<td>To collect pronunciation data for selected words</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Semi-structured interview in English</td>
<td>Casual Conversation</td>
<td>To collect sociological information</td>
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Information about Speakers

- 3 speakers recruited
  - All male, 22-30 years old
  - Also speak Maay Maay, Somali, Swahili, and English

The Pear Film (Chafe 1980, Erbaugh 2001)

- Speakers asked to re-tell the story they see after watching film
- Originally designed for research on cross-linguistic differences and similarities in the way people talk about things they have seen or experienced
Word List Task
- Pictures used as stimuli
  - Words selected based on examination of data from previous work on Kizigua
  - Speakers asked to say each word 3 times, then in carrier phrase
  - Addresses problem of lack of standard orthography

Semi-structured Interview
- Included questions about language use, contact with speakers of other languages, thoughts about language variation, etc.
- Included to identify possible sociological factors to account for variation
- Conducted in English

The Pear Film Elicitation Task
- All speakers took about 2 minutes
  - Plenty of tokens of *nt, but lack of variation
  - Lack of *mp and *nk
  - Speakers generally seemed comfortable
  - Speaker 1 Example

4. Assessment of Methodology

Word List Task
- Speakers did not always produce intended target word
  - Pictures opened room for multiple interpretations
  - Not all words collected from all speakers
- Inter and intra speaker variation for *nk
  - *nk > q (voiceless uvular stop) — X (voiceless uvular fricative) — h (voiceless glottal fricative)
- Speaker 3 Example

Inter and Intraspaker Variation

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kusaka</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>kusaka</td>
<td>kusaka / kusaka</td>
<td>kusaka</td>
<td>“to give”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linko</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>qingó</td>
<td>qingó / qingó</td>
<td>qingó</td>
<td>“elbow”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkumbito</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>humbito / qumbito</td>
<td>humbito / qumbito</td>
<td>humbito / qumbito</td>
<td>“eyebrow”</td>
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<tr>
<td>nkunde</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>qande</td>
<td>“food”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkunde</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>hunde / qande</td>
<td>hunde / qande</td>
<td>hunde</td>
<td>“action of planting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkunde</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>qande</td>
<td>“red”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkunde</td>
<td>qande / qande</td>
<td>hunde / qande</td>
<td>hunde / qande</td>
<td>hunde</td>
<td>“bean”</td>
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**Interview Task**
- Speakers interviewed (ages 22-30)
  - Conscious of code-switching and code-mixing in their own speech
  - Describe their speech as influenced by Maay, Somali, and English
  - Consistently mention age as biggest source of variation in the language
  - Do not recognize variation based on gender, village of origin, or other social factors when asked
  - Appear to be a middle generation

**Younger and Older Speakers**
- Youngest generation
  - Born in the US or arrived in the US at a very young age
  - Rapidly shifting to monolingualism in English
  - Some unable to communicate with grandparents
- Oldest generation
  - Many lack proficiency in English
  - Described as speaking a more pure form of Kizigua (i.e. fewer words borrowed from Somali, Maay Maay, and English)

**Addressing Research Questions**
- Can variationist methodology be adapted for the study of phonetic variation on Kizigua (an underdocumented language)?
  - Yes, modified sociolinguistic interview successful, but room for additional modifications
- Is there interspeaker variation in the production of certain sounds?
  - Yes and also intraspeaker variation for /q/~/h/
- If so, can the different pronunciations be correlated with demographic factors?
  - At best, age seems most likely factor
  - Other factors possible, but more data needed

**Possible Modifications to Methodology**
- Casual Conversation
  - Larger sample needed for statistical analysis
  - Training native speakers to be interviewers?
  - Supplementing the Pear Film with other stimuli (i.e. other tasks)?
- Word List
  - Narrow list of words to elicit
  - Lack of interspeaker variation in many words
- Interview
  - May not be needed if native speaker interviewers recruited

**Conclusion**
- Variation can be studied at an early stage of research on an underdocumented language
- Though data not big enough for statistical analysis, specific phonetic variables and social factors worth further research were identified
- Additional modifications needed to data collection methodology for collecting more data
Acknowledgements

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Asante! Thank you! Merci!