

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

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Structure 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

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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?

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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).

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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*

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Research Gaps

- Research focused on English (Nagy 2012)
 - > 53% of articles in *Language Variation and Change*
 - > 62% 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

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Overall picture

- Most variationist sociolinguistics work focused on monolingual English speaking communities

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2. Methodological Issues

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Structure of the Sociolinguistic Interview (Labov 1984)

- 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
- 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

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Problems with application on an underdocumented language

- 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

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Focus of Presentation

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

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Questions methodology designed to address

- Is there interspeaker variation in the production of certain sounds?
- If so, can the different pronunciations be correlated with demographic factors?

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3. Adapting Methodology for an Underdocumented Language

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Language of interest: Kizigua

- Bantu language spoken by the Zigua people
- Two major migrations:
 - > 1840's (slavery): Tanzania → Somalia (slavery)
 - > 1990's (Somali Civil War): Somalia → Kenya → US and other countries
- Descendents of slaves collectively known as the "Somali Bantu"
- Linguistic Divergence?
- Mutual Intelligibility?



<http://www.supressedhistories.net/matrix/zigua.html>

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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 prenasalized stops (*mp, *nt, *nk) identified

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Modified Sociolinguistic Interview

Modified Sociolinguistic Interview	Labovian Sociolinguistic Interview	Purpose
1. <i>The Pear Film</i> Elicitation Task	Casual Conversation	To collect casual speech data
2. Word list with pictures	Word list with text	To collect pronunciation data for selected words
3. Semi-structured interview in English	Casual Conversation	To collect sociological information

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Information about Speakers

- 3 speakers recruited
 - > All male, 22-30 years old
 - > Similar migration histories: All born in Somalia → Kenya (1990's) → US (in 2004)
 - > Also speak Maay Maay, Somali, Swahili, and English

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The Pear Film (Chafe 1980, Erbaugh 2001)

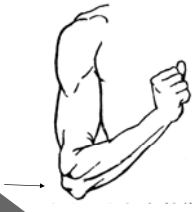
- Speakers asked to re-tell the story they see after watching film
- Originally designed for research on cross-linguistic differences and similarities in the way people talk about things they have seen or experienced



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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



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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

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4. Assessment of Methodology

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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

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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) ~ χ (voiceless uvular fricative) ~ h (voiceless glottal fricative)
 - Speaker 3 Example

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Inter and Intraspeaker Variation

(Kisbey 1906)	Speaker 2 (b. 1982)	Speaker 1 (b. 1984)	Speaker 3 (b. 1989)	Consultant (b. 1991)	English
kuinka	N/A	kuinqa	kuinqa / kuinha	kuinqa	'to give'
kinko	N/A	cinqo	cinxo	cinqo	'elbow'
nkumbito	N/A	humbito / qumbito	humbito / qumbito	humbito / qumbito	'eyebrow'
nkande	qande / χande	qande	qande / hande	hande	'food'
nkonde	qonde	qonde	honde / qonde	honde	'action of planting'
-nkundu	-qundu	-hundu / quнду	-hundu	-hundu	'red'
nkunde	qunde / χunde	qunde / hunde	hunde	hunde	'bean'

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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

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Younger and Older Speakers (as described by interviewees)

- 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)

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5. Discussion / Future Research

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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

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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

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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

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Asante! / Thank you! / Merci!