Introduction to Phonetics & Phonology
Ježek Session 5

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History of English

Old English

- The language of Angles, Saxons and Jutes.

- First surviving documents date back to 8th C.

- Most famous work in OE: Beowulf (manuscript produced between 975-1025, the poem is older, but by how much?)

- Germanic language enriched by Latin and Greek words (the adoption of Christianity) and Old Norse (Vikings).

- The end of the period comes after 1066.

- See the page from Collins & Mees (2003: 174) in IS and listen to the short sample of OE there, too.

Middle English

- Anglo-Norman English (it starts after the Norman Conquest in 1066)

- Most famous work in ME: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (late 14th C)

- Massive influx of words from Norman French and Latin.

- The end of the period comes towards the end of the 15th C/ beginning of the 16th C (when English has finally re-emerged as the standard language in official environments).

- See the page from Collins & Mees (2003: 175) in IS and listen to the short sample of ME there, too.

Early Modern English

- Starts in 16thC (before Shakespeare).

- The end of the period comes during the 18thC (one oft-cited date is Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* in 1755).

- Since the 18thC we talk of modern English though some further division is clearly possible.

- See the pages from Collins & Mees (2003: 176-7) in IS and listen to the short sample of ME there, too.
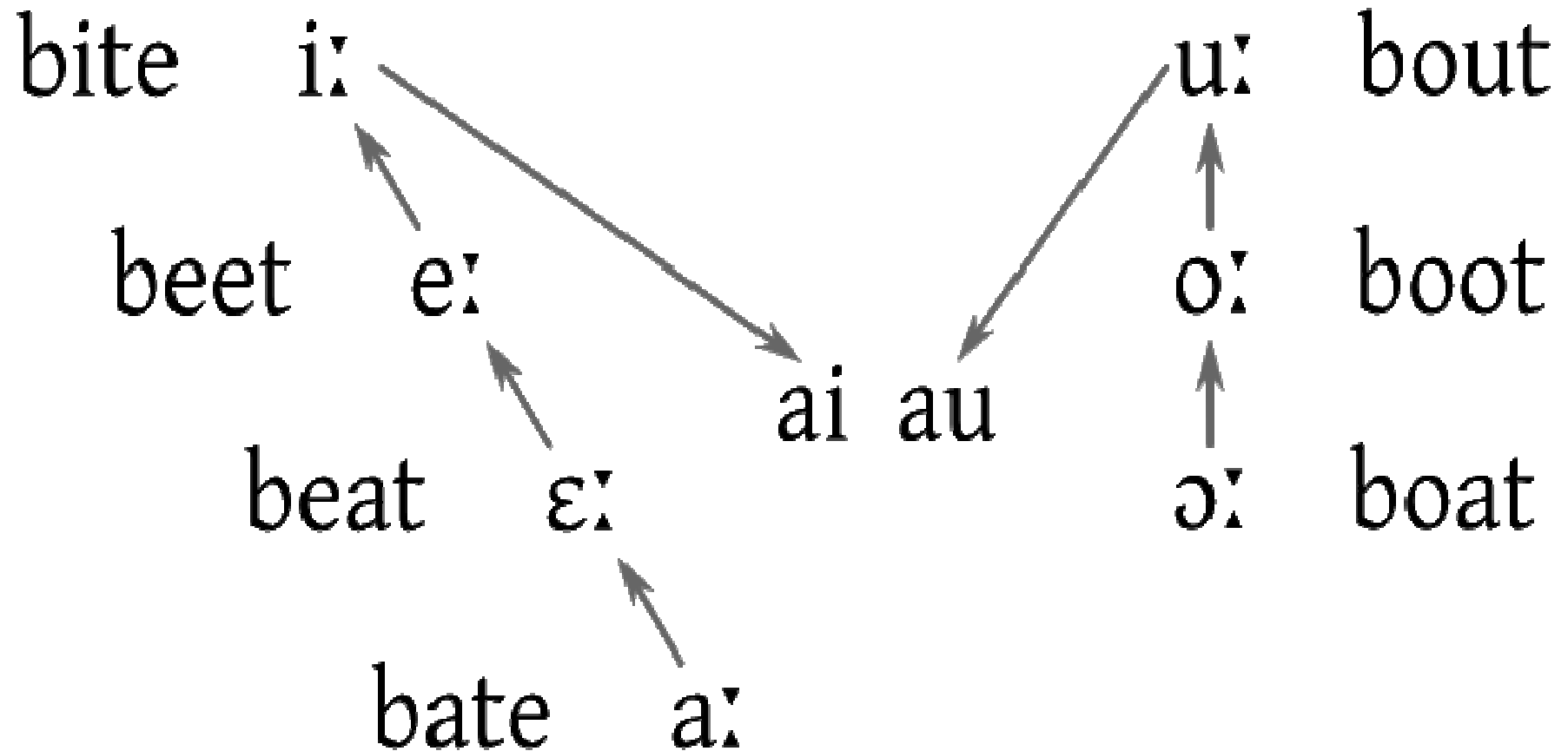
The Great Vowel Shift

- One of the most significant phonological changes (a series of changes, in fact) to have ever happened in English.

- It took place (very roughly) 1400-1700.

- All Middle English long vowels changes as a result.

- It affected long vowels at different rates (phases) in different parts of England and in different strata of society.

- Along with the standardisation of spelling in the 15th-16thC, the GVS is the major reason why spelling is so markedly different from pronunciation in modern English.

The Great Vowel Shift

- The cause of the GVS is still being determined by linguists (possibly the large-scale migration from the North following the Black Death in the 14thC?)

- The place of origin (which vowels were affected first) is also disputable though many linguists claim it were the open-mid vowels that changed first; they were raised so [ɛ:] and [ɔ:] became merged with [e:] and [o:] respectively.

- If that is so, the change is a combination of **push** and **drag** (**pull**) chain (see the chart on the next slide).

The Great Vowel Shift

bite   iː   uː   bout

beet   eː   oː   boot

beat   ɛː   ai au   ɔː   boat

bate   aː

The Great Vowel Shift- push and drag chain

- The open-mid [ɛ:] and [ɔ:] **pushed** the vowels above (the closer ones). Since there was no place for [i:] and [u:], they became diphthongised.

- Equally, the movement of [ɛ:] left a void to be filled, which was to be occupied by former [a:] -> [ɛ:]. We can thus say that [a:] was **dragged/pulled** up.

The Great Vowel Shift- initial lack of balance

- Notice the three voids left during the GVS: no open vowels, namely [aː], [ɑː] and [ɔː]. Such disproportionate functional load could hardly have existed for long; hence:
  - *law* [aʊ] gradually becomes [ɔː];
  - [a] in *father* is prolonged [aː];
  - /l/ is deleted and [a] is prolonged in *palm*;
  - loss of /r/ created new open long vowels in *north* and *park*.
- This is a prime example of what structuralism proposes: language as a "living" system where the internal pressure is to distribute the functional load equally across the entire spectre.
- For more info about the GVS, see the excerpt from Fennell (2001) in IS.

Prescription
&
Standardisation

Prescription

- Based on a set of beliefs that certain variants are better than others (sounds, words, grammatical forms, accents, dialects, languages).

- Such variants are often imposed from above by the authorities (educational institutions, media, business, marketing, etc.).

- Despised variants are often described as 'ugly', 'sloppy' or 'illogical'.

Prescription

- It is elitist and it may condemn a big part of society.
  - Prescriptive views treat variants <u>qualitatively</u> (either...or) rather than <u>quantitatively</u> (more or less) though users often make use of (are capable of using) all the variants involved (cf. sociolinguistic research discussed below).

Prescription

- No distinction made between language system (*langue*) and language use (*parole*)
  - The presence of a sound in the system is not such a problem, its actual use in real-life situations may be problematic as it may be endowed with a number of connotations.
  - So, to say that e.g. the glottal stop should be eradicated from the English language completely is rather unfortunate (it is, after all, a perfectly standard sound in Danish), though one may object to its use in certain contexts (i.e. certain real-life situations).

Prescription

- It may be an attack on one's identity and to ridicule one's use of certain variants may be equal to ridiculing their skin-colour or religious beliefs.
  - Cf. e.g. Middlesbrough research (Llamas 2007) which clearly demonstrates the link between the glottal stop and younger people's identity (their desire to be different from the other regions in the North).

Prescription in linguistics

- Prescriptive ideologies started especially in the 18th C.

- In the 19th C linguistics attempted to establish itself as a scientific discipline, hence issues of prescription were rejected as non-scientific.
    - In zoology, we don't study only those birds with beautiful plumage either…

- Despite many assertions that linguistics is a scientific discipline that does not tell people how they *should* speak, but merely describe how they *do* speak, many people open pronouncing dictionaries with the aim of finding out what the 'correct' sound is.
    - Linguistics is thus in some respect a <u>descriptive</u> discipline interpreted <u>prescriptively</u> by some users.

Prescription in linguistics

- Prescription entered the realm of linguistics with the advent of socially realistic linguistics (i.e. **sociolinguistics**) in the 1960's (its establishment is discussed below).

- There are 2 crucial questions asked by sociolinguists in relation to prescription:

Question 1

- <u>Why are arbitrary linguistic forms assigned social values?</u>

    - (arbitrary=there's no inherent reason why one form should be accepted and another one stigmatised; indeed, RP is non-rhotic whilst in GenAm /r/-less forms are considered vulgar)

- Relative social mobility (based on one's education, behaviour, manners, clothes, and, unsurprisingly, language as well) and the attendant raise of the middle class (from 18thC onwards) made linguistic variants subject to value-judgments.

- The next challenge immediately appearing on the horizon is <u>how</u> linguistic forms are assigned social values, but this is so complex that an entire sociolinguistic seminar may not be enough to answer the question in detail.

Question 2

- <u>Why do people persist in using stigmatised (non-standard) forms even though they clearly know what the standard is?</u>

- In the 1970's and 1980's, James and Lesley Milroy carried out a study in Belfast. Among other things, they introduced the notion of **overt** and **covert prestige**.
  - overt=open, not secret; such forms enjoy prestige supported by authorities such as school, media, employment, etc.
  - covert=hidden, secret; such forms are prestigious within a language community (among peers).
  - In <u>message-oriented</u> situations overt prestige prevails as we want to be clear, understood, present the content in as accessible a way as possible.
  - In <u>listener-oriented</u> situations covert prestige prevails as the main objective of the conversation is to establish and/or maintain a social relationship with the listener.
  - There are two opposing tendencies: <u>status</u> v. <u>solidarity</u>. (Milroy 1987: 208).

Standardisation

- Is closely linked with prescription as prescriptive attitudes are only possible if they are backed by a set of standardised forms (i.e. there needs to be a standard from which others deviate).

- Standard is 'an idea in the mind rather than a reality—a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent' (Milroy and Milroy 1991: 22-3).
  - It is thus disputable whether we can say that someone is an RP speaker or not (what we can say is that one is closer to RP than someone else).

- Standardisation of pronunciation appeared later (in the 19[th]C) than that of spelling/writing (18[th]C).

- In English, standardisation is not <u>institutional</u> (like it is in many other languages where language academies exist) but rather <u>natural</u> (awareness of the 'correct' forms is raised via various means such as publications, media, contact with the educated).

Standardisation-stages

- The process of standardisation can be divided into several stages. These certainly do not happen one after another; on the contrary, there are many overlaps:
  - **selection**;
    - RP was selected due to suitable social and cultural circumstances: it was the accent of the upper-middle class; plus it was supraregional.
  - **acceptance**;
    - crucially, RP was adopted by many influential institutions like public boarding schools, the army, the Church of England, segments of the private sector, etc.
  - **diffusion**;
    - RP was diffused via public schools' pupils as well as the media.
  - **maintenance**;
    - RP acquired prestige and became instrumental in moving up the social ladder. It became linked with a high social status, wealth, power, etc.
  - **codification**.
    - lastly, RP was (has been) codified in a number of nationwide as well as worldwide publications (teaching materials, dictionaries, etc.)

Standardisation- literacy

- Standard forms often come from writing (spelling) rather than pronunciation since spoken forms display far greater variability (typically, spoken discourse is where linguistic change originates).

    - *hotel*, *herb* reinstated /h/ after many centuries of /h/-less pronunciations. Similarly, *often* used to be pronounced without /t/ only. These changes were only made because of the pressure to make sure pronunciation and spelling conform.

- As a result, the focus is hugely on <u>formal</u> styles. A student may often be dismissed as incompetent speaker solely on the grounds that they fail in formal styles (though they might be very competent in <u>informal</u> ones, which are, sadly, never tested).

Standardisation- literacy

- Complaints from the public often highlight the fact that a certain variant is not in line with spelling (/h/-dropping, /g/-dropping, the glottal stop, etc.).
    - The fallacy is blatant: [ʔ] replaces /t/ in e.g. *fatter* so no letter is dropped. And there are other variants here apart form /t/ and [ʔ], e.g. [ɾ], which does not seem to carry any social stigma.
    - Likewise, /g/ is 'dropped' if the pronunciation is /n/ and not /ŋ/. Curiously, there is also a regional /ŋg/ variant in Scouse or West Midlands, which is, though it <u>perfectly</u> corresponds with spelling, stigmatised as much as /n/.

- The underlying logic (showing how dominant spelling is) is that if there is only one way to spell a word, there must also be one single way to pronounce it.

The story of linguistics-dialect geography

- **DIALECT GEOGRAPHY**: first impetus to study accents and dialects within linguistics was diachronic research trying to find dying-out forms that could shed more light on general principles of language change.
    - Neogrammarians, latter half of the 19[th]C, more info about Grimm's Law, Verner's Law and other phonological laws. Sound changes were deemed to be exceptionless.
- Focus on NORMs (i.e. Non-mobile, Old, Rural Males)
- Questionnaires, individual words (single-word responses to questions).
- Findings: a <u>hotchpotch</u> of forms, a chaotic mass that was explained awamaintained that which form was chosen could not be observed or analysed. y as **free variation** that could not be understood; it was

The story of linguistics-structuralism and generative phonology

- The hotchpotch of forms dealt a blow to the claim that phonological laws were exceptionless.

- In the first decades of the 20[th]C, the main focus shifted to synchronic issues (de Saussure, Prague Linguistic Circle, American structuralism: Bloomfield).
  - The only part of language considered worthy of linguistic enquiry, though, was abstract *langue* (language system), not *parole* (the use of language in a particular social environment).

- In generative phonology, Chomsky worked with the concept of *ideal-speaker* and *ideal-listener;* context-free forms that the linguist constructs in his own armchair.

The story of linguistics-the birth of sociolinguistics

- In the 1950's-60's, linguistics became influenced by sociology as the focus moved towards urban dialects (fieldworkers abandoned the green pastures of Dorset (and NORMs thereof) and swamped the busy streets of London, New York, etc.).

- A completely new methodological approach:
  - representative sample of respondents;
  - other methods of data gathering (aim to overcome the observer's paradox);
  - new technology (tape-recording);
  - classification of respondents (e.g. social class, age, gender);
  - the concept of **linguistic variable.**

Linguistic variable

- Sociological methods in linguistics enabled linguists to see that the hotchpotch of forms (variants) is not free at all; on the contrary, it is context-dependent and both <u>observable</u> and <u>analysable</u>; in other words, language variation is <u>structured</u>.

- Example case study: Trudgill in Norwich in the 1970's

(ng)-variable correlated against social class in four contextual styles;
 0=categorical use of standard /ŋ/, 100=categorical use of non/standard /n/
MMC-middle middle class
LMC-lower middle class
UWC-upper working class
MWC-middle working class
LWC-lower working class
WLS-world list style (most formal)
RPS-reading passage style
FS-formal speech
CS-casual speech (least formal)

Class	WLS	RPS	FS	CS	N:
MMC	000	000	003	028	6
LMC	000	010	015	042	8
UWC	005	015	074	087	16
MWC	023	044	088	095	22
LWC	029	066	098	100	8

Style

Linguistic variable

- In the study above, the scores increase as we move from left to right, top to bottom; they are perfectly structured.

- Such stratification would never have been discovered using dialect geography methods (single-word answers in a single style).

- Language variation is observable if the qualitative approach (either…or) is replaced by the quantitative one (more or less).

- (ng) in the study above is an example of a **linguistic variable**: 'a linguistic unit with two or more variants involved in covariation with other social and/or linguistic variables' (Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 50).

- For more information about the beginning of sociolinguistics, study *Linguistics and Sociolinguistics* by Labov (1972), uploaded in IS.

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