

REVIEW

After all, how coherent is the speech in the linguistic communities?

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ABSTRACT

Based on the works of Labov (2006), Becker (2016), Oushiro (2015, 2019), Mendes (2016; 2019), and Eckert (2008), Gregory Guy promotes in his speech a discussion about dialectal coherence in speech communities. First, Guy seeks to highlight how individual linguistic experience is used to build and perform social identities. Second, he takes as a premise the social and individual heterogeneity from the works of Labov and Becker in order to discuss the notion of dialectal cohesion through the investigations of Guy, Mendes, and Oushiro. Thus, founded on empirical data analysis, the lecturer predicts that globalization increases the contact between languages and the simplification of linguistic complexities provoking a decrease in linguistic coherence.

RESUMO

Fundamentado nos trabalhos de Labov (2006), Becker (2016), Oushiro (2015, 2019), Mendes (2016; 2019) e Eckert (2008), Gregory Guy promove em sua fala uma discussão acerca da coerência dialetal nas comunidades de fala. Em primeiro lugar, Guy procura evidenciar como a experiência linguística individual é usada para construir e performar identidades sociais. Em segundo, partindo dos trabalhos de Labov e de Becker, o conferencista toma como premissa a heterogeneidade social e individual da língua, para, por meio das pesquisas de Guy, de Mendes e de Oushiro, discutir a noção de coerência dialetal. Dessa forma, calcado em análises de dados empíricos, o palestrante prevê uma diminuição da coerência impulsionada pelo

contato entre línguas e pela simplificação das complexidades linguísticas promovidos pela globalização.

KEYWORDS

Coherence. Speech community. Social meaning.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Coerência. Comunidade de fala. Significado social.

To what extent do speakers in a community use the multiple variables available to them in parallel ways? Through this question, we can understand how Professor Gregory R. Guy constructs the hypothesis about dialectal coherence - a concept that seeks to investigate whether the distribution of coexistent multiple variables has extra and intralinguistic similarities in the speech community. The speaker presents some quantitative studies in order to answer if there is systematicity in the correlations between variables, specifically, if they simultaneously have social, linguistic, and stylistic stratification and concludes that coherence depends on the social structure. Therewith, from the results analyzed, his hypothesis holds that the greater the social differentiation, the more incoherent are the patterns of use of linguistic variables. From this premise, the final horizon of the speech seems to be coherence in relation to modern globalization. According to the argument, there would be a tendency for languages to become more incoherent since globalization expands linguistic horizons and increases the contact between languages, following a great social stratification. In order to present the talk to the reader, we will try to reconstruct the steps that the professor takes in his argument.

Firstly, we must ask ourselves: what is language, how to define it, and where to find it?

The concept of language underlying the speech is a set of linguistic elements embodied in the mind and verified in the use of speakers. This definition is in accordance with a descriptive view, the lecturer points out that the object of linguistic analysis must be complex speech communities, incorporated by different speakers. In this sense, the language is constituted by an orderly heterogeneity, in other words, it is inherently variable and inherently structured (cf. WEINREICH *et al.*, 2006 [1968]). Therefore, considering the diversity and variability, Guy wonders: is there coherence in the use of language?

However, it is necessary to understand what a speech community is. As stated by the professor, a speech community must: share the same linguistic elements; share norms and evaluations toward language; establish a relatively high internal communication density. In the sequence, Guy presents two types of speech communities. The first one refers to the “nested” communities, in which one is embedded in a larger one, such as a russian linguistic doll. The second type concerns the intersectional communities constituted by members who are simultaneously part of two speech communities. As the first dimension in which Guy approaches the conference’s focus, the speech

community refers to a social structure in which the linguistic variables assume a constituted and delimited function.

The second dimension concerns the internal variation of the speaker. More specifically, it concerns the heterogeneity in the speech of each individual, who uses different variables according to the style, the context, the interlocutor etc. Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog understand that the “mastery of a native speaker of heterogeneous structures ... is part of the monolingual linguistic competence” (WEINREICH *et al.*, 2006, p. 36). That stated, Guy says that language is the most expressive form of social behavior available to us. Hence, it is the central tool for building and performing our identities.

Subsequently, Guy grants us with a friendly example of his own son's linguistic experience. As a child, Jesse had contact with English from three different countries: the United States, Australia, and Canada. In the first two, there is a phonemic distinction between /ɔ/ and /ɑ/, while in Canada these two vowels have no distinctive value. In his life course, Jesse acquired this differentiation before moving to Toronto and maintained it in the initial years he lived there. However, at some point, he stopped producing the distinction. When his father interrogated him about the phenomenon, he returned that, yes, he manages to differentiate, but wonders why would he wants to do it. Guy understands this moment as crucial and, refining his son's question, he asks: why would you say something in one way and not in another? In this specific case, it was about the desire for acceptance and belonging to the new group in which he was inserted. Jesse learned the Canadian pronunciation and adopted it from a personal choice to build and express a social identity. And as a result of that adoption, he increased the group's consistency.

When we look at Jesse's behavior individually, we can see this episode as unsystematic. In this sense, to explain the linguistic variations of individuals, it is necessary to understand the community in which they are inserted. Speech communities are sources of indexical associations, in which speakers evoke to make choices and, as a result, to perform identities. It can be noted that these associations are multidimensional, as they comprise a series of social stratifications. Considering this, Guy wonders what is the level of agentivity of the speakers on their speech, how fluid are the individual choices regarding the variables and how coherent is the behavior of the community in relation to their linguistic evaluations and social meanings.

For illustration, Guy discusses the work of Mendes (2016) about nominal agreement in São Paulo, a variable that is salient and has a crystallized norm in the community. In this research, the author used four male voices and applied the matched-guised technique (LAMBERT, 1967 *apud* LABOV, 1972) used to observe the subjective evaluation of the subjects concerning a variable. Three main components were observed in the responses (linguistic competence, friendliness and effeminacy) in order to investigate the perception of masculinity. Mendes' results showed that the production of the zero mark is understood as originated in less educated and less effeminate people. For all subjects, education was the most relevant variable. Therefore, as the most significant factor,

education has effect on the evaluation of individual speech. Hence, the more salient¹ a variable is in the speech community, the more related to the conception of right and wrong it is.

At this moment, Guy turns to Labov to show a classic example of a salient variable: the stratification of (r) in Lower East Side. In this investigation, Labov found that the incidence of /r/ increased alongside with the formality of the context, which establishes it as a prestigious variable. In continuity, Guy makes use of a second study in New York City, fifty years after the first (Becker, 2016). The latter shows the correlation between the rise of vowels in BOUGHT and BAD and the presence/absence of (r). The results revealed a change in the variables previously predominant for Labov, showing that there was a strong correlation between the three variables, especially between the vowel of BOUGHT and the /r/.

In a study conducted by the lecturer himself in Rio de Janeiro, Guy (2013) also examined the correlation of four variables: two phonological (deletion of /s/ and denasalization in final unstressed syllables) and two syntactic (nominal and verbal agreement). However, it is interesting to question the result of the correlation of the pair of phonological variables with each other, as they present little correlation it can be understood that both are more abstract and, therefore, their social meanings are less evident. Either way, Guy's conclusion demonstrates that speakers tend to correlate similar variables.

In another research, now in the city of São Paulo (GUY *et al.*, 2019), the investigation focused on six variables, three phonological and three syntactic. The results of this research demonstrate the effects of the speaker's awareness regarding the correlations operated: for example, the three syntactic variables and the /r/ retroflex are salient and, therefore, correlate above the level of consciousness, whereas, the deletion of (r) in coda, as it is a non-salient phonological variable, unconsciously correlates with syntactic variables. Likewise, the two phonological variables - deletion of (r) and alternation of /r/ - also correlate below the level of social awareness.

Finally, Guy proposes some conclusions about dialectal coherence. The general framework of the problem seems to be the changes in the social structure caused by globalization. Through the growth of L2 and D2 speakers and the contact between languages, linguistic complexities are being restrained in Western languages. Social diversities and contact between languages indeed promote the growth of incoherence, restricting the preservation and transmission of linguistic complexities. However, through intergenerational transmission, Gregory Guy predicts that languages will maintain their coherence, even if they are not as coherent as their previous stages.

¹ It is interpreted as a variable above the level of consciousness of speakers and crystallized as a norm in the speech community.

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