TRANSMISSION AND DIFFUSION


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LINGUISTIC TRANSMISSION

- The unbroken sequence of native – language acquisition by children
- Transmission of language is connected with the transmission of culture
- Language is transmitted culturally; that is, it is learned.
- The children very largely acquire their mother tongue by “grammar construction” from exposure to a random collection of utterances that they encounter.
Transmission of language (our thoughts, feelings, ideas) is carried out using three main methods: speech, writing and signing.
LINGUISTIC DIFFUSION

- Lost of a language pattern
- Lexical diffusion is both a phenomenon and a theory.
- Example: English /u:/ has changed to /ʊ/ in *good* and *hood* but not in *food*; some dialects have it in *hoof* and *roof* but others do not; in *flood* and *blood*
- Transfer across branches of the family tree...
FAMILY TREE AND WAVE MODELS OF CHANGE

- Linguistic family tree presents the relations between languages.

- There can appear the influence of distinct terminal branches of the tree on one another.

- Every language change arises in a specific region and then moves in very various directions because of migrations.
Language change processes are illustrated by the waves created when a stone is thrown into a body of water.
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRANSMISSION AND DIFFUSION

The transmission of linguistic change: within a specific (speech) society is described by an incrementation within a faithfully reproduced pattern characteristic of family tree model.

The diffusion: accross communities shows weakening of the original pattern and a loss of structural features.
EXAMPLES OF TRANSMISSION AND DIFFUSION AND FURTHER CONSEQUENCES

Two studies of Transmission and Diffusion:
1. the diffusion of the grammatically conditioned short-a split of NYC
2. the diffusion of the northern cities shift

1. and 2. are supposed to illustrate the phenomenon of linguistic transmission and diffusion which are the results of the difference between the learning abilities of children and adults.
THE DIFFUSION OF THE NEW YORK CITY SHORT-A SYSTEM

The diffusion of the NYC short-a system. *Almost all North American* dialects show a raising and fronting of some members of the historical short-a class. Phonetic conditioning is always present: in some cases as a continuum, in others as a discrete division into tense and lax distributions. In some cases the tense and lax classes are phonetically predictable by simple rules; in others, they are not.
There are five basic types:

(a) The nasal system, All short-a before nasal consonants are tense (man, manage, span, Spanish) while all others are lax.
(b) Raised short-a.
(c) Continuous short-a raising.
(d) Southern breaking.
(e) Complex short-a systems.
The dialect of New York City is confined to the city itself and several neighboring cities in northeastern New Jersey.

The NYC short-a distribution follows the same distribution throughout this area, and as far as we know, has been stable through most of the twentieth century.

the New York City short-a system is very far from whatever beginnings it had as a simple, phonetically determined sound change.

Research: an opportunity to see what happens to this complex structure when it diffuses to other communities.

The New York City pattern has diffused to four other communities, along the paths shown in Figure 7.
FIGURE 7. DIFFUSION OF THE NEW YORK CITY SHORT-A PATTERN TO FOUR OTHER SPEECH COMMUNITIES.
A very common utterance for all residents of this Northern New Jersey area was, ‘Did you say C-A-N or C-AN-T?’ since the vowel is tense in both words and the /t/ is often neutralized by a following apical obstruent (as in ‘I can’t tell you’).

Tense vowels are found in am, and, an as well. The whole change appears as an instance of the loss of structural detail in the diffusion of the NYC short-a system to dialects with which it is in contact.
DIFFUSION TO ALBANY.

- Albany was settled before New York City.
- The back vowel /oh/ in *law* and *coffee*: raised to upper mid back position AND shows the type of rounding (‘pursing’) that is specific to New York City.
- the Albany system shows some marked departures from NYC.
DIFFUSION TO CINCINNATI.

- The city of Cincinnati is represented by speakers analyzed acoustically.
- The analyze is focused on the basic division into tense and lax sets characteristic of NYC.
- The tense set includes short a before nasals (ham, aunt, chance, divan), voiceless fricatives (cash, hashbrowns) and voiced stops (mad, sad, dad).
FIGURE 11. SHORT-A SYSTEM OF LUCIA M., 58[1994], CINCINNATI OH, TS 120.
Cincinnati has general tensing before all voiced stops except /g/.

Why..?

- Westward migration from New England, 19th century

Effective diffusion:

- Cincinnati dialect resisted leveling with other Midland dialects to the end of the 20th century.

Therefore, the British broad-a class was transformed early in the formation of the American English of the two major cities of the Mid-Atlantic states; does not diffuse to others.
DIFFUSION TO NEW ORLEANS

- Commercial relationships with NYC.
- New Orleans has the palatalized form of the *r*-less mid central vowel [´l] (*work*, *thirty*)
- It forms the main stereotype of older New York City speech.
- However, the *r*-colored form used by many New Yorkers today shows a continuing trace of palatalization.
Figure 12 displays this phonetic characteristic of New Orleans in two mid-central vowel nuclei as pronounced by one of the oldest ANAE speakers from New Orleans, Sybil P, 69, of German-Italian background.
19th century, the New Orleans port of shipment for the cotton trade financed by New York bankers.

Among the bankers closely related to New Orleans were many representatives of the large Sephardic Jewish families.

The relations between the Jewish population of the two cities were intimate, which deals with social and business relations from 1718 to 1812.

There is no longer a difference between [Cardinal] /mæniN/ and /mæhn#iN/ [the pumps].

The main agents in diffusion are adults who are less likely to observe and replicate abstract features of language structure.
DIFFUSION ACROSS COMMUNAL GROUPS

- **So far:** the diffusion of linguistic structures from place to place.
  - white mainstream population

- Most American cities include three major communal groups, in the sense defined in Blanc’s 1964 study of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish dialects of Baghdad.

- Contacts between such communal groups are primarily among adults, and when linguistic patterns diffuse from one group to the other we can expect the same loss of structure that was observed in geographic diffusion.
THE TRANSMISSION AND DIFFUSION OF MERGERS AND SPLITS.

- Adult language learning must be focused on the acquisition of new grammatical constraints.
- They can be faithfully transmitted across generations through children’s language learning abilities.
- But: this complexity cannot be learned as a second dialect, even by children.
- Children of parents from regions with allophonic short-a distributions of type (a-c) above showed the opposite tendencies, favoring phonetic generalization.
- This strongly suggests that the NYC families had acquired their own short-a pattern as a lexical list rather than as a rule-governed distribution.
So… what does happen in the cities?

- An unbroken sequence of parent-to-child transmission

- If speakers from other dialect areas enter the community in large numbers, their children will dilute the uniformity of the original pattern.
The incrementation of change: children learn to talk differently from their parents.

Children align the variants heard in the community with the vector of age: the younger the speaker, the more advanced the change.

On the other hand, contact across communities involves learning, primarily by adults, who acquire the new variants of the originating community in a simplified form.
Analyze: adults are capable of changing their language, but at a much slower rate than children.

Adult learning loses much of the fine structure of the linguistic system being transmitted.

The diffusion of specific linguistic structures: spring from adult language contact.

**Observation**: common marks of adult language learning: the loss of linguistic configurations that are reliably transmitted only by the child language learner.
The main thrust of the paper is to explain the difference between the learning abilities of children (unbroken sequence of parent-to-child transmission) and adults (the major effects of diffusion).
Adults do participate in ongoing change, more sporadically and at a much lower rate than children.

When language forms are transmitted by contact of single adults or individual families, less regular transmission can be expected.

THE CASE: the basic reason why structural borrowing is rare:

the adults who are the borrowing agents do not faithfully reproduce the structural patterns in the system they are borrowing from.
OVERVIEW

- Expectations:
  - From where the differences between languages are coming out in general
  - Why some people product *clicks sound* and other *sch, u, ü, ą, ż, ć.*

- This paper: tensing and laxing the vowel – a …
But…

- More details of the paper work are cut, more interesting things can be seen!
- NYC short –a system as an example of many other social networks, language changes, dialects.
- Not typical explanation of the differences between adults and children language learning skills.

- …finally, I was satisfied.