

## Homework 1. Due January 30, 2008 at the beginning of class.

**Part 1: Your background** (1 point). Answer the following questions about yourself:

- a) Where did you grow up? List cities/regions and dates.
- b) What language(s) did you learn at home between birth and age 5?
- c) What language(s) have you learned since then, and in what context (school instruction, living in another linguistic community, etc.)?
- d) Have you studied linguistics previously? If so, list relevant courses, books, etc.
- e) How much experience do you have with Excel or other spreadsheet software? (rate on a scale of 0=none to 5=extensive)
- f) Any particular topics or questions that you'd like to learn about in this class?

**Part 2: Linguistic observations** (2 points). Over the next few days, make an effort to start paying more attention to the language you hear around you in your everyday life. Collect at least 2 examples of **ungrammatical** (\*) sentences – i.e., utterances that violate a **descriptive rule** of English grammar. Some likely sources for these kinds of utterances are speech errors (where a speaker makes a false start or gets confused), young children's speech, or non-native speech. For each example you collect:

- Write down the utterance exactly as you heard it, and mark it with a \*.
- Provide basic information about the context of the utterance (class lecture, informal conversation, business meeting, etc) and the speaker (sex, ethnicity, approximate age).
- Write 1-2 sentences explaining, to the best of your ability, what exactly made the utterance less than grammatical. What might be the **descriptive rule** that was violated?

If you're not a native speaker of English, you can either (a) ask a native English speaker to confirm your judgments; or (b) collect data on your native language. If you go for option (b), please provide a word-by-word English translation for each example.

### Part 3: Exercises

1. (2 points) Pick any sentence from the Week 1 class handout or assigned readings that contains at least 6 words, and transcribe it on a separate piece of paper using the IPA. Make another copy on a separate piece of paper. At the beginning of next week's class I'll ask for volunteers to write their sentences on the board and the rest of the class will convert them back to English orthography.
2. (3 points) Given the three segments [d], [b], and [ɛ], there are six hypothetically possible syllables that could be formed: [dbɛ], [dɛb], [bdɛ], [bɛd], [ɛbd], and [ɛdb]. As pointed out in the Aitchison reading, however, some of these possibilities are ungrammatical in English. Specifically:
  - [bɛd] and [ɛbd] are both well-formed English syllables that also happen to be words (*bed*, *ebbed*)
  - [dɛb] is a well-formed syllable that does not happen to be a word (unless it's used as a truncated form of the name *Deborah*)
  - \*[dbɛ], \*[bdɛ], and \*[ɛdb] are not well-formed English syllables.

- a. The problem with \*[dbɛ], \*[bdɛ], and \*[ɛdb] is that they violate a (*circle one*) prescriptive/ descriptive rule of English (*circle one*) phonology / morphology / syntax that prevents syllables from starting and ending with certain combinations of consonants.
- b. Is this rule **universal** – i.e., does this same rule apply in all human languages? Give an example that supports your answer.
- c. The following syllables are written in the IPA. Some of them happen to be existing English words and some do not. For each example:
- Write 'ok' or '\*' to the left indicating whether it is a well-formed English syllable or not.
  - If the example is well-formed and is also an existing word, write the word (using English spelling) to the right.
  - If the example is well-formed and does not happen to be an existing word, write an existing English word that rhymes with it.
  - If the example is ill-formed, briefly explain to the best of your ability what is wrong with it. (e.g. 'English syllables can't start with [bd]').

kep	_____	læmz	_____
step	_____	pop	_____
stamp	_____	skwiks	_____
sdamk	_____	fkwik	_____

3. (2 points) At the beginning of chapter 2, Meyerhoff argues that 'Linguistics has a great deal to gain by distancing itself from a notion like **free variation**.' (p. 10). She then describes Labov's **Martha's Vineyard study** as a study that 'fundamentally challenged the notion of free variation' (p. 17).

Skim pp. 16-21. Don't get bogged down with the technical terms or methodology; we'll discuss what exactly is meant by *centralizing*, *raising*, *backing*, etc. in the next class. Write a brief (1-2 sentence) response to each of the following questions:

- How did Labov's methods differ from those that had previously been used in dialectology studies?
- What were some of the main **linguistic** and **nonlinguistic factors** that were found to influence the pronunciation of /ay/ (pp. 19-21)?
- How do these findings challenge the notion of free variation?