

Homework 6, due March 29 via Digital Dropbox.

Part 1: Semantic change (3 points). In the Meyerhoff reading that was assigned this week (pp. 55-65), you were introduced to the concept of *semantic shift*, and to several examples of *derogation* in particular. There are other kinds of semantic shift that words undergo, including:

- **amelioration:** where a word connotation becomes elevated (opposite of derogation)
- **metaphorical transfer:** where a word is used to refer to a distantly related concept in a way that becomes conventionalized, e.g. referring to table supports as *legs*
- **widening:** extension of the semantic sphere, e.g. *dog*, which at one time referred to a particular breed of dog (cf. German *Dogge*) and now refers to the entire class of dogs
- **narrowing:** reduction of the semantic sphere (the opposite of widening)

You can do this part of the assignment by using the online Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which is available through the F&M Library website (http://library.fandm.edu/esources/es_english.html#refrm). You can also use an unabridged print dictionary as long as it has detailed word etymologies – the American Heritage dictionary is quite good.

Look up the etymology of any **three** of the following words (if you are working in pairs, choose **six** words):

- | | | |
|-------------|----------|-------------|
| a) assassin | d) nice | g) hospital |
| b) dunce | e) cloak | h) duke |
| c) silly | f) check | i) easel |

Using the terms you have learned in this class, discuss what types of **semantic and phonological** changes took place in the history of each word. Cite the earliest form and meaning you can for each word, plus any other forms that will help you discuss the changes the word went through. Write 3-5 sentences for each word.

Part 2: Address and reference(3 points). Do the second activity in the box at the top of p. 63 of the Meyerhoff reading. For the next week, you will take notes on the terms you observe people using to address customers in public places, e.g. stores, eating establishments, the library, etc. Make note of the setting and the speakers' sex, approximate age, ethnicity, and occupation (if known), as well as their apparent familiarity with each other (can you tell if the customer is a 'regular'?) Try to include observations from at least three different settings. You can include observations of how you were addressed as a customer. It will be best if you work in pairs and pool your observations.

Write a ½- to 1-page summary of your observations. Include as many specific examples as possible; use detailed descriptions instead of relying on vague terms like 'formal,' 'casual,' etc.

Part 3: *Cot-caught* merger (4 points). Download the spreadsheet **minimal-pairs-class.xls** from the class homepage. This spreadsheet contains your pooled data from the minimal pairs part of the interviews you conducted last month.

- Make sure that your own data is included. If it's missing, let me know.
- Eyeball the spreadsheet and decide how to fix any errors, inconsistencies, etc. (Data > Filter > AutoFilter is a good way to do this.)
- **Determine the overall frequency of '*cot-caught* merger' in this data set.** In other words, what percent of speakers pronounced *cot* and *caught* the same? (One way to do this is by using Sort, then CountIf.)
- Are there any discrepancies between Production and Perception in the *cot-caught* merger? If so, what are they?
- **Choose one independent factor** – either Sex, Ethnicity, Age, Occupation, or Hometown – and determine how it affects the frequency of the *cot-caught* merger. For example, you could compare the frequency of the *cot-caught* merger in Men vs. Women. If you choose a category like Age or Hometown, you should collapse the categories into two or three groups (e.g. compare speakers under 30 to speakers over 30, or compare people from Lancaster to everyone else).
- **Report your results in a table.** Include a brief (2-4 sentence) summary of your findings as well as a brief description of how you calculated your results in Excel.
- **Submit your written homework and your spreadsheet** via the class Digital Dropbox, by midnight on March 29.