

Re: prestige dialects Re: Why is Hindi perceived as being more refined than Punjabi?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-12/msg01884.html>

- *From:* "Seán O'Leathlóbhair" <jwlawler@xxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 22 Dec 2005 13:17:06 -0800
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Peter T. Daniels wrote:

> Seán O'Leathlóbhair wrote:

>>

>> Peter T. Daniels wrote:

>>> Seán O'Leathlóbhair wrote:

>>>>

>>>> Peter T. Daniels wrote:

>>>>> Brablo wrote:

>>>>>>

>>>>>> Brilliant answer! Thanks for your time and dedication to enlightening

>>>>>> us all!

>>>>>>

>>>>>> An analogy would be why Southern Dialect English (spoken in Alabama,

>>>>>> for example) is perceived as being less refined than Washington DC

>>>>>> English.

>>>>>>

>>>>>> What do you mean by "Washington DC English"?

>>>>>> —

>>>>>> Peter T. Daniels grammatim@xxxxxxx

>>>>

>>>> I would guess that it was an attempt to indicate a prestige AmE

>>>> dialect. In many countries, the dialect of educated speakers from the

>>>> capital is, or is close to, the most prestigious dialect. The writer

>>>> may have supposed that this applies to the US. Can you suggest a

>>>> convenient short label for the most prestigious AmE dialect(s)?

>>>>

>>>> "General American." I.e., "accentless" American. Americans recognize

>>>> varieties as regional, not social.

>>>>

>>>> I didn't realise that "General American" was regarded as a prestige

>>>> dialect. Over here, "General English / British" would be an unlikely

>>>> name for a prestige dialect. "General" and "prestige" are more likely

>>>> to be antonyms than synonyms. Consider cars, are "general" cars and

>>>> "prestige" cars the same?

>>>>

>>>> Sorry, what's a "general car"? A Lexus would, I suppose, be a

>>>> prestigious car — because it's expensive.

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I only meant general in its common meaning, as far as I know, "general car" is not an idiom. I meant one that does not stand out. Over here BMWs used to be prestige cars but I heard recently that the BMW 3 series now outsell Ford Mondeos so that may be about to change.

>> Is there really no dialect snobbery in the US?

>

> What do you mean by "snobbery"? People aren't "proud" of their accents, > except as they're a badge of regional solidarity (such as the Down > Easter of Maine, the South Philly heard in *Rocky*, or the plethora of > accents found in New York City or Chicago).

Neeraj's response is closer to my experience.

> "Speech therapists" don't claim to be teaching their victims any > particular accent; they claim to be "getting rid of" their victims' > accents.

So what does a person with no accent sound like? If your "no accent" American comes here then he suddenly will have an accent. Around London, I have no accent but if I travel north then suddenly I do. I acquire an accent somewhere before reaching Birmingham.

> About 10 years ago, Walt Wolfram (preeminent dialectologist and > sociolinguist) showed a documentary he'd been involved with at an > LSA/ADS meeting. The narrator was Polly Holliday (who had achieved > considerable prominence playing Flo, a TV waitress character derived > ultimately from the movie *Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More), who has a > natural Ozarks sort of accent; but throughout the film you can hear her > trying to suppress it. Wolfram said they kept asking her to talk > naturally, but she either couldn't or wouldn't do it in the context of > narrating a film on dialect diversity.

>

> Which reminds me of something St. Louisans say: "Far enough south to be > cultured, far enough north not to be hick."

>

>>> The variety heard in the speech of such as Katharine Hepburn, William F. >>> Buckley, Jr., Nelson Rockefeller, George Plimpton, Jacqueline Kennedy >>> Onassis, and (until recently; she may have been working at suppressing >>> it since she has started making public appearances) Caroline Kennedy >>> Schlossberg is the dialect of arguably the "most prestigious" Americans, >>> i.e. the wealthiest old-money families, but it's definitely not a >>> prestigious dialect; it's apt to be either unrecognized or mocked.

>>>

>>>> We have had a similar discussion on BrE before. Many use RP but some, >>>> such as you, reserve this for a very small and rather artificial >>>> dialect. "The Queen's English" used to be a popular term but seems to >>>> have fallen out of favour. "BBC English" is a moderately good term but >>>> not as clear as it used to be since there is much more dialect >>>> variation among BBC presenters than there used to be.

>>>>

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>>>> Note, there is no intended suggestion that "prestige dialect" is a
>>>> linguistic concept.
>>>
>>> It certainly is one!
>>
>> Do you mean that linguists specify what are and aren't prestige
>> dialects? That would surprise me.
>
> It's part of observing language use!

Which is what I meant by my following paragraph.

>> Or do you just mean that since, for non-linguistic reasons, some
>> dialects are considered more prestigious than others, linguists study
>> the phenomenon? That I would expect.
>
> There is, obviously, nothing inherently prestigious about any particular
> feature of any particular dialect. If I'm to believe Dorothy Sayers, in
> the early part of the last century, upper-class English had a number of
> features that are also associated with lower-class English --
> h-dropping, IIRC, and [N] > [n] in <-ing>, for instance.

Which is an answer to the question in my previous paragraph. Languages
change, I expect that you know that.

> --
> Peter T. Daniels grammatim@xxxxxxx

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Seán O'Leathlóbhair

• *Follow-Ups:*

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◇ From: Peter T. Daniels

• *References:*

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