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Counting Trumps

The language of the card game Bridge and its status as a variety of English

B.A. Essay

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Summary

This essay discusses the sociolinguistic aspect of dialect variations in the English language, with the focus on spoken language. I briefly discuss various social influences and attributes of dialect variations such as social class, ethnicity, age and gender. Moreover, I discuss the sociolinguistic concepts of the language variations of registers, and styles, with a special emphasis on jargons, and the affiliation these concepts have with one another. I will discuss various aspects of these concepts and attempt to explain how they are defined within the field of sociolinguistics. Finally I examine the jargon of the card game bridge in some detail, presenting many examples from the jargon of bridge with explanations of those words and phrases. This examination of the jargon of bridge is accompanied by a brief overview of the mechanism of the game of bridge for the purpose of clarification in respect to the specialized words and phrases in the jargon of bridge.

Contents

Introduction

The focus of this essay is on the concept of jargons, with emphasis on the jargon of bridge. I discuss the concept of jargons in general, referring to several examples from various jargons such as poker jargon, football jargon and basketball jargon, before moving on to the jargon of bridge, where, among other material, I demonstrate and explain many bridge jargon words and phrases such as Yarborough, doubleton, hand hog, etc. However, in the first part of this essay I present a brief overview of several other language varieties. I discuss social dialects in addition to considering the concepts of the language varieties of registers and styles. I include these varieties, in addition to jargons, to establish the fundamental difference between varieties based on the "characteristics of the user" (Bell 1976:27), such the varieties based on social class, ethnicity, age and gender, and the varieties based upon the "use" or situational context, such as registers, styles and jargons (Bell 1976:27). The discussion of other language varieties also reveals that jargons are distinctive from the other varieties, which assists us in categorizing them as jargons. Consequently, we can more easily study the sociolinguistic features of the jargon of bridge.

Social dialects

What is a dialect? Although a language may on the surface seem to be homogeneous, it most certainly is not, for there is no such thing as a homogeneous language. A dialect is a language variety, mainly differing from other dialects by means of one or more of these features: pronunciation, morphology, syntax, semantics and even vocabulary. But what is it that controls the multiple ways in which these features appear in people's speech?

The most important group of dialects are called social dialects or sociolects. Social dialects are dialects that refer to differences in speech in relation to social groups or social classes. Social dialects are usually further subcategorized into groups according to the function of the sociolect. This categorization is due to the fact that social class is not the only determining factor of sociolects. There are other important categories such as gender, ethnicity and age, which can, to a certain extent, influence dialect variations. There are of course other types of variations such as registers, styles and jargons which I will discuss later in this essay.

Social class

According to a study by William Labov, performed in New York City (Chambers 1995:16-18), Labov confirmed the significance of social class in relation to pronunciation. He discovered that the higher social class people belong to, the better "Standard English" they would speak (Chambers 1995:16-18). "Standard English" is, for example, RP or Received Pronunciation, and GA or General American, the prestige form of the language. It is those and other standard variations of the language that are usually taught in classrooms and the variations that we normally see on the television news. Nevertheless, it is in no way the most popular or common dialect or variation spoken.

Given the fact that the standard varieties are the ones usually accepted by the school system, it is not altogether surprising that the better educated generally speak in a more prestigious form of English than the poorly educated or uneducated since the better educated have had more exposure to that standard variety. Nevertheless, one might assume that many individuals belonging to a

lower social class have the capability to adapt their speech in the direction of the more standard variety, and probably do so on many occasions depending on social situations. But when speaking with their peers in relaxed conversation they would speak in the dialect that is natural to them, which is usually predicated on the social background of the speaker.

People can usually speak better “Standard English” than they are accustomed to when being observed, as for example, in an interview, which certainly must be a nightmare for sociolinguistic researchers such as Labov. Labov referred to this problem as the “observer’s paradox” (Chambers 1995:19). This notion could also be applied to certain social situations where the individual is conscious of his surroundings and therefore speaks in an appropriate manner. This manner of speaking is likely to be somewhat straining for the speaker and it probably wouldn’t require much for the speaker to lose his concentration and subsequently drop his guard and commence speaking in his or her usual dialect. Labov mentions an example of this (Chambers 1995:19) in his account of an interview with a woman that pronounced the variables, which Labov was focusing on, with a near impeccable “Standard English” accent. However, when she was giving an account of a life threatening situation, she dropped her guard and subsequently her pronunciation, according to Labov’s variability criteria, altered dramatically (Chambers 1995:19).

Ethnicity

“Ethnic minorities may to some extent display the general patterns of the wider society but may also show significant differences” (Mesthrie er al. 2000:107). William Labov came across this ethnic diversity in his New York study (Preston

1989:86), which demonstrated that Puerto Rican speakers have some pronunciation variables that are different from those of other New Yorkers. Indeed, Labov found that the ethnic varieties were significant and he detected them in minorities such as the Jewish community, the Italian community and the African American community, in addition to the Puerto Rico community (Preston 1989:86). "Ethnic varieties such as Puerto Rican English in New York are called **ethnolects**. The factors that sustain an ethnolect are a sense of identity based on ancestry, religion and culture" (Mesthrie et al. 2000:107).

Age

It is a fact that a person's age correlates with his or her speech, not just in regards to the obvious, such as voice quality and pitch changes, but also in regards to dialect variations. This would seem to coincide with the fact that languages and dialects are constantly changing, and the older speaker is normally not acquainted with the dialect of the new generation, not to mention the slang words that are in fashion. Wardhaugh (1998:192) asserts that age is an important factor in relation to many pronunciation variations. But Wardhaugh also advises caution, for we cannot be sure whether it is an actual linguistic change or something he refers to as "age-grading", signifying "speech appropriate to your age group". Wardhaugh furthermore states that certain linguistic variations found in adolescent speakers may disappear as the speaker reaches adulthood. Wardhaugh concludes that these linguistic changes must be surveyed over a long period of time, to see whether the innovations stick or whether they are just an example of "age-grading" (Wardhaugh 1998:192).

Gender

It seems to be a fact that, on average, women speak a less tainted variety of “Standard English” than men. According to Chambers (1995:102), practically every sociolinguistic study, which consists of both male and female examples of dialect variations, contains data that supports the assumption that women speak superior “Standard English” than men. Women tend to use “fewer stigmatized and non-standard variants than do men of the same social group in the same circumstances” (Chambers 1995:102). Why this is so is a fascinating question. Moreover, there are several interesting theories on the subject from sociolinguistic scholars, most of which adduce various social reasons such as isolation, social position and self-esteem issues.

Perhaps the most fascinating theory offered by Chambers, which he derives from neuropsychology, would correlate with the reason why men seem to have “superior spatial skills” in comparison to women. This hypothesis proposes that a different brain functions between the sexes is the reason for this disparity in verbal skills. The theory claims that “women’s brains appear to be more globally organized for specific functions whereas men’s brains are more highly lateralized with verbal functions in the left hemisphere and spatial functions in the right” (Chambers 1995:135), and is backed up with somewhat persuasive evidence provided by Doreen Kimura.

> Kimura provides striking support for the dimorphism in brain asymmetry with a very large sample of brain-damaged patients. In addition to the lower incidence of aphasia among women, she also identified enormous discrepancies between the sexes in the location

> of damage causing aphasia. Men were afflicted after damage to almost any part of the left hemisphere whereas women were usually spared unless the damage was extensive in the anterior region (Chambers 1995:135).

These results seem to indicate that the real reason for the verbal differences between the sexes is not due to any sociolinguistic or sociological factor but due to a neuropsychological attribute based on gender. This hypothesis, at least on the surface, seems dissimilar from many other theories on the subject in the manner of not having any tendencies that might be interpreted as sexism.

The subject of dialect variation in relation to social class, gender, ethnicity and age is indeed a fascinating issue in the field of sociolinguistics, and one which could easily be discussed in much greater detail. However, in this essay I will be focusing more on the sociolinguistic term of jargon which I shall discuss later in the essay.

Registers, styles and jargon

The concept of "register" is somewhat complex and one that is not easily explained. In fact it seems strikingly similar to the concepts of "style" and "jargon". O'Grady, Dobrovolsky and Katamba (1997:579) define the term "register" as "the form that talk takes in any given context" (O'Grady et al.1997:579). According to Robert T. Bell (1976:27), registers are the "variations caused by the *use* to which the individual is putting the language in the particular situation being investigated, rather than those caused by the relatively permanent characteristics of the *user* such as age, education, social class membership and so forth" (Bell 1976:27).

In other words, there are dialect varieties based on the individual's social class, age, gender and ethnicity, but the dialect variables based on the speech act itself, in regards to the context of the situation in which the speech act is made, is called a register.

Consequently, the sociolinguistic term "register" incorporates both the style of speech, such as formal and informal speech, and other specialized situational based varieties such as jargons. In fact, the sociolinguistic terms "style" and "register" are defined as being nearly synonymous in Fromkin and Rodman (1998:425). "Most speakers of a language know many dialects. They use one dialect when out with friends, another when on a job interview or presenting a report in class, and another when talking to their parents. These "situational dialects" are called **styles** or **registers**" (Fromkin and Rodman 1998:425). Jargon is also a situation-based dialect variation and as such it also falls within the parameter of a register according to Bell's definition of the concept of register. This definition of "register" is supported by Peter Trudgill (1983:100-101).

> Many social factors can come into play in controlling which variety from this verbal repertoire is actually to be used on a particular occasion. For example, if a speaker is talking to the people he works with about their work, his language is likely to be rather different from that he will use, say, at home with his family. Linguistic varieties that are linked in this way to occupations, professions or topics have been termed *registers* (Trudgill 1983:100-101).

Conversely, Wardhaugh (1998:48) seems to distinguish between styles and registers. Wardhaugh asserts that style is associated with the circumstantial style of speech such as formal, informal and casual speech, while, on the other hand, "registers are sets of vocabulary items associated with discrete occupational or social groups" (Wardhaugh 1998:48). This definition of style and registers is clearly contradictory to those offered by Trudgill, Bell and those presented by Fromkin and Rodman since Wardhaugh seems to classify registers in a way most would jargons. The reason for these opposing views is not entirely clear. Whatever the reason may be it seems that the concept of register is rather broad and perhaps some sociolinguists may wish to classify the concept with a more narrow definition, which is what Wardhaugh seems to be striving for.

Styles

There are different situations of a social nature that can determine in what manner a person speaks. For example, a person would normally speak very differently to his best friends than to his employer. This is an example of different styles of speech. Numerous different situations can arise that will influence a person's style of speech. People tend to speak appropriately depending on social situations. A person bidding good morning to Queen Elizabeth would probably say: "Good morning Your Majesty" instead of "Morning Liz". This is a rather crude illustration of the different speech styles reflecting the appropriateness of any given occasion. The formality of any given occasion seems to be an important aspect of speech styles. Social situations can range from; breakfast with the Queen of England to formal gatherings to business dinners to dinners with the

family to a night out with a best friend. These are examples of different social situations that will in all probability influence a person's speech.

Roger T. Bell (1976:189) introduces a very interesting and somewhat convincing theory which he calls "the principle of attention", which seems closely connected to what Labov refers to as the "observer's paradox". Bell suggests that "the more aware a speaker is of the language he is using, the more 'formal' it will be" (Bell 1976:189). This theory certainly seems to be consistent with the fact that people are usually much more alert and careful about what they say when in the company of someone distinguished or some authoritative figure such as a superior at the work place. There can be numerous other reasons for people to employ a more prestigious form of the language, for example, an attempt to impress their interlocutors such as in-laws. Even something as trivial as the company of strangers often makes people make use of their more prestigious form of the language. However, people are usually much more off guard while in the company of family or close friends, so they are much less aware of the language they are using, creating an informal or casual type of speech style, often employing non-standard variants.

The areas of speech that are most affected by speech styles are vocabulary and pronunciation. In a more formal situation people tend to use the full range of their vocabulary, occasionally utilizing bigger and fancier words than they would normally, being more concerned about appearing articulate than in a casual situation. Furthermore, they tend to enunciate the words much more clearly, even on occasion enunciating certain vowels and consonants that are normally not enunciated.

Usually, a person has many speech styles at his disposal and uses them in accordance with the social situation he finds himself in. However, a person may be unfamiliar with a specific style of speech. If a man finds himself in a higher social setting than he is accustomed to and is not able to speak appropriately, he will usually be frowned upon, and perhaps become the centre of amusement or ridicule for the high society or perhaps be considered rude and offensive in his manner of speech. If the situation is reversed and a man finds himself in a society below his normal standard and speaks in his usual high society speech style, he might be considered to be vain or snobbish. In effect, it is very useful to a speaker to be able to vary his speech style according to social situations, and most people can do this to some extent, often without even realising it.

Wardhaugh (1998:272) offers an interesting dimension to the discussion of speech styles. He proposes that "we can show our feelings toward others – solidarity, power, distance, respect, intimacy, and so on – and our awareness of social customs. Such awareness is also shown through the general politeness with which we use language" (Wardhaugh 1998:272). In other words, Wardhaugh is suggesting that the measure of formality is in essence the measure of politeness we extend when we speak. He furthermore suggests two kinds of politeness; "positive politeness leads to moves to achieve solidarity through offers of friendship, the use of compliments and informal language use. On the other hand, negative politeness leads to deference, apologizing, indirectness, and formality in language use" (Wardhaugh 1998:272).

There are a number of different speech styles that are available to a speaker. Martin Joos proposed and outlined five different speech styles based on a range or scale of formality: intimate style, casual style, consultative style, formal

style and frozen style (Mesthrie et al.2000:96). This formality scale proposed by Joos is a useful tool in assigning the range of formality extended by the speakers of a language. However, in many languages there is a clear indication through the choice of words regarding the formality of the utterance. "German *du* and French *tu* are to be used only with "intimates"; *Sie* and *vous* are more formal and used with nonintimates" (Fromkin and Rodman 1998:426). There are many examples in several different languages of such distinctions between words that refer to the same or similar meaning and it is often associated with the formality of speech the speaker wishes to achieve. This sort of assisting tool does not really exist in the English language, or is at least very rare and never utilized in normal conversation, where the context of the sentence must be observed in order to detect the range of formality.

Nevertheless, despite its usefulness, the formality scale proposed by Joos doesn't really take into account all the different varieties of speech styles. Still, an exact formality scale which included all possible level of conversation imaginable would be rather complicated and perhaps somewhat futile. Although there may not need to be any further categories than Joos proposes in his scale, there would have to be several sub sections to distinguish between, for example, different types of formal speech or different types of casual speech, etc. It would have to include distinctions between relationships, including gender line relationships, and even distinctions between different personality traits. These distinctions are many and perhaps too many in order to propose a reasonable formality scale using this criterion of sub sections within the formality scale. Similarly, age difference would be a factor in such a formality scale since conversations between people of

different age groups are likely to differ from conversations between people of the same age.

Jargons

One of the most fascinating subjects in sociolinguistics is that of jargons. It is an interesting actuality that different sects of people seem to develop their own specific sort of language using English words and phrases in a way that makes it difficult to understand and in some instances incomprehensible to other people. Occasionally, jargons even employ what seem to be entirely new words. This is an intriguing phenomenon of language. It is as if people tend to divide themselves into different groups and form their own culture within that group, and within that culture they form their own way of communication different from that of other culture groups. Moreover, one person is not defined by one culture group but can belong to several groups.

Jargon is dissimilar to other varieties such as registers, styles and social dialects. As I have pointed out, registers, styles and jargons are concepts mainly related to the use in which the language is being employed in different situations. The register or style can be determined by the features of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Social dialects pertain to the user of the language and can also be determined by one or more of these features of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Jargon is different in the way that it is only defined by its vocabulary. To determine a certain speech style or a social dialect one must observe the vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, all the features that can establish the speech act as that sort of speech style or that sort of social dialect. Jargons can be used with every speech style and social dialect. Jargons are not

influenced by pronunciation or grammar. The only determining feature in a jargon is its vocabulary. This can be established by the fact that a person with little or almost no knowledge of English may be able, at least to some extent, to speak in a particular jargon.

Many activities require special technical terms or words that have little or no application elsewhere. In the field of medicine, doctors have many specialized words in relations to diseases and drugs used for treatment purposes. Although nearly every English- speaking person is familiar with words like *cancer* and *tumour*, there are many words in that field that few other than doctors and medical workers are familiar with. This is the case with many other fields of occupation. Thus we have many diverse jargons in relation to occupational fields such as medical jargon, aviation jargon, legal jargon, etc.

These is not the only types of jargons, for there are also jargons in relation to sports, hobbies and all sorts of groups that employ specialized languages of some kind, such as football jargon's "touchdown", basketball jargon's "triple-double", poker jargon's "heads-up", "all-in", "felt", "dead-money", "under-the-gun". These are examples of words and phrases that usually have little or no application elsewhere in the language. Consequently, an English speaking individual who has never seen or has no interest in basketball would probably not understand the phrase "triple-double", which signifies a player's achievement of scoring at least ten points, ten assists and ten rebounds in a basketball game. An individual who has never played or seen poker on television, would have no idea of the meaning of the phrase "dead-money", which means that when a particularly bad poker player sits down at a poker table, his money is considered to be "dead-money" , or relatively easy to take away from him. To "felt" is actually a brand new verb

relating to the cloth that usually covers poker tables. Therefore, to felt someone is to take away all their chips so that there is nothing left but the green felt where their chips used to be. Some of these phrases are of course idioms, but their meaning is often only known to people acquainted with each particular sport, hobby or group.

There are some social implications in relation to jargons. If, for example, two poker players were standing in line and started talking about poker, other poker players listening to the conversation would perhaps be inclined to participate in the discussion while non-poker players would stand idly by, probably not even understanding the discussion. This is true for many of these specific culture groups. Complete strangers can easily have a casual conversation when they have a common interest, hobby or even occupation.

Some words and phrases from many different jargons are widely recognized and understood as well as used by many outside a particular social group despite the fact that those people may not be familiar with the bulk of the other words within that particular jargon. For example, a person who does not play nor watch basketball may very well be familiar with the phrase “jump-shot”, or a person who does not play poker nor watch it on television might still be acquainted with a word or a phrase usually associated with poker jargon. “Many jargon terms pass into the standard language. Jargon, like slang, spreads from a narrow group until it is used and understood by a large segment of the population” (Fromkin and Rodman 1998:428). This could be connected to the recognition or popularity of these social groups, whether they are occupational groups, sport groups or hobby groups. For instance, until recently the jargon of poker was relatively unknown to most people outside of the poker community, possibly due to

people's negative opinion of the game in relation to its connotation to gambling. However, since the television program, *The World Poker Tour*, began only a few years ago, the popularity of poker has increased dramatically, spawning many other televised poker series, turning some of the best poker players into celebrities and introducing many more people to the game of poker. This expansion of poker has made its jargon much more visible and accessible and therefore many of the words and phrases of the poker jargon are much more widely understood than they ever were before.

Unsurprisingly, the number of jargons is vast, as they can apply to so many different groups. Some of these jargons can even be so extensive that special dictionaries are available to translate the specialized words or phrases within the jargon; for example, medical jargon and legal jargon. For other jargons there may be books or glossary sections in books that explain the various different terms of a particular jargon. For example, nearly 600 pages of a total of about 850 pages in *The Official Encyclopaedia of Bridge* are dedicated to the jargon of bridge and other bridge related terminologies (Francis et al. 1994).

A person may belong to several different social groups and be intimately familiar with several jargons. A doctor will use hospital or medical jargon while at work, easily understood by his peers and other people related to that field such as nurses and orderlies. But then on Friday night he plays poker with his buddies using a completely different jargon than at work. And then on Sundays he watches the football game with his brothers and afterwards participates in a discussion about the game. He is then probably intimately familiar with at least these three jargons: medical jargon, poker jargon and football jargon; and he is

probably familiar with many more. This is an example of a person that is familiar with several jargons.

Although many jargons have words and phrases that are unique, jargons also employ regular English words with a different connotation than the regular use of the word. Those meanings can, on occasion, be very dissimilar to the regular denotation. However, the jargonized meaning of many regular English words is often somewhat correlated with the regular denotation of the words and is often fairly obvious to people that speak that particular jargon. For example, the poker jargon word “donkey”, often shortened to “donk”, indicates a weak poker player, from which it is possible to assume that he does a lot of stupid things; one of the regular English connotations for the word “donkey”, though perhaps slang, can signify stupidity or someone who is stupid. Similarly, the basketball phrase “jump-shot” means jumping from the ground and whilst in the air attempting to score. The meaning of the word “jump” is lifted straight from the regular connotation of the word while one of the regular meanings for the word “shot” can be an attempt at something or, in relation to sports, someone trying to score. The bridge jargon word “auction” signifies the bidding of a particular deal of cards, during which the opposing players take turns announcing they will take a certain amount of tricks in a certain denomination[1], the denominations being; no-trump[2], spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs. If the players refuse to give up the bidding goes up with each side often announcing they will take more and more tricks until

[1] “Denomination” is a bridge jargon word signifying the five distinctive classes of: no-trump and the four card suits of spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs.

[2] “Trump” is a word associated with several card games. Usually, a particular suit, spades, hearts, diamonds or clubs is called the trump-suit and is the most powerful suit in the deck. If clubs were trumps and the ace of spades is played, a player not holding any spades can play any club and trump the trick thus winning it. In the case of no-trump there is no trump suit.

either side concedes or when the bidding can go no higher with either side announcing they will take all the tricks in the highest denomination, that being no-trump. This could be correlated with the regular connotation of the word “auction” which signifies a sale of something where people make an offer or a “bid” to buy the merchandise in question and the merchandise goes to the one who made the largest offer, otherwise called the highest bidder, which also corresponds with the bridge jargon term of “bidder”.

The jargon of bridge

Of all the jargons, few are as interesting as the specialized language of the card game bridge. While most jargons have their special words and phrases, in bridge jargon, it is almost as if a brand new code is required for understanding. One is almost tempted to call this jargon the language of bridge instead of the jargon of bridge. There are perhaps not that many words an English speaker wouldn’t be familiar with, but the literal meaning of the words are, on many occasions, quite different. In fact, to understand this jargon perfectly, an intricate knowledge of the game is usually required, and even that is not enough for there are so many words and phrases in the jargon that are rarely used.

Another fascinating fact about the bridge jargon is that its native language just happens to be English, if it is possible to put it like that. This means that most bridge players tend to speak Bridge English, at least to some extent. It seems as if bridge players love to travel, for in addition to the world bridge championships and the Olympic bridge championships there is an abundance of international tournaments held all over the world. One of these international tournaments is even held here in Iceland: an annual tournament called “the Icelandair Open”. All

of these tournaments attract plenty of players from all over the world and in these tournaments the official language is, on all occasions, English.

Therefore, although a bridge player may be unable to speak English, he will, in all probability, be able to speak Bridge English, at least to some extent. This is perhaps a statement that is difficult to demonstrate, but I am convinced this is a fact, which I deduce from my own observations at numerous international tournaments. However, it must be emphasized that this only applies to bridge players who play competitive bridge, that is, bridge players who play in their local bridge clubs and perhaps occasionally attend larger international tournaments at home or abroad, and are consequently more exposed to the jargon. It does not apply to players who perhaps meet once a week in someone's home and play there for fun. A snobbish bridge player might even go so far as to say that those people aren't playing bridge in the real sense of the word, due to the often huge different level of skill. Even though such a statement is pretentious and certainly has no validity, it would probably still be a popular view among competitive bridge players.

As I have already pointed out, a full understanding of the jargon of bridge requires an intricate knowledge of the game. And in order to understand the definitions of some of the words and phrases in the jargon, knowledge of the mechanism of the game is also required. Therefore, a short review, although perhaps rudimentary, of the mechanism of the game of bridge is appropriate in order to provide a better comprehension of the definitions of several specialized bridge words and phrases.

The game of bridge is played by four people. Bridge is a partnership game, so there are always two players working together against the other two players at

the table. The two players working together are generally called partners and sit opposite each other. Each player is dealt thirteen cards. The goal is to take as many tricks as possible like in several other card games such as whist. However, the striking difference between the game of bridge and other card games like whist, where the objective is to take tricks, is what is called the “bidding”.

The bidding is a mechanism where the players attempt to describe the thirteen cards they are holding to their partners. The players attempt to communicate with the bidding as to roughly how many cards in each suit they are holding, a suit being one of the four denominations of spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs. Also, the players attempt to communicate how many “high card points” they are holding, “high card points” being a very popular method of evaluating the playing strength of any given thirteen cards, with the ace being valued as four points, the king as three points, the queen as two points, and the jack as one point. This information is crucial for it is normally the high cards, aces, kings, queens and jacks that win tricks. The players exchange this information about their cards and subsequently attempt to make an informed decision as to how many tricks they should attempt to take and what should be named as trumps - spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs or no-trump - based on the information they have exchanged as to roughly how many cards they have in each of the four suits and the strength of their cards in relation to the “high card points”.

The scoring system of bridge is built up like a bonus system. The more tricks you announce you will attempt to take, the higher bonus, points, or score you will get if successful. However, an unsuccessful attempt at taking the tricks you have announced loses points. The bidding, or the “auction”, is concluded when either side has announced they will attempt to win a certain number of tricks

in one of the five denominations, and the other side won't bid any higher. The number of tricks in any denomination is called a "contract"; hence the game of bridge is often referred to as "contract bridge". When the bidding is concluded and either of the partnerships has decided on a contract the play begins. If the contract is, for example, four spades, the "declarer", who is the player in the partnership that first bid spades, plays the contract. The player on his left starts the play by leading a card; the declarer's partner exposes his thirteen cards on the table for all to see. His participation in that particular deal is over and his partner, the declarer, declares the cards he wants to play from his partner's exposed hand. The play continues in a clockwise rotation and the player that wins each given trick is first to play on the next trick until all thirteen cards each player was originally holding have been played.

Nowadays, the bidding in competitive bridge is done by special bidding cards which are placed on the bridge table. The bids are made by the players in a clockwise order. The bids range from one club to seven no-trump, including special bids called "pass", "double" and "redouble". Pass is a neutral bid, but double is the reason players are reluctant to bid too much, because if either partnership ventures too high in the bidding, the other side can "double" the contract and extract an extra penalty, or score, for each trick short of the number of tricks required for the contract.

There is a certain hierarchy to the bids and the four denominations of suits, spades being the highest followed by hearts, diamonds and then clubs as the lowest denomination; however, the fifth denomination, called no-trump, is higher than all the suits. Therefore, the lowest bid is one in the lowest denomination which is clubs, the second lowest would be one diamond and so on and so forth all

the way up to and including seven no-trump. In addition, when a bid is made, no bid below that one on the spectrum is permitted. For example, if a one spade bid is made, bids below the one spade bid, that is, one club, one diamond and one heart are now impossible. The levels one to seven refer to the number of tricks that will be attempted, so a contract at the first level must take at least seven tricks to succeed, while a contract at the second level requires eight tricks and so on all the way up to the seventh level which requires all thirteen tricks. However, the "pass" bid is the most common bid, for if you have no relevant information regarding high card points or a long suit you wish to pass on to your partner, then pass it the neutral bid. "Pass" conveys no information apart from the fact that the player has no worthwhile information to share, which, as a matter of fact, is often plenty to a good bridge player.

This exchange of information through the bidding is achieved by what is generally referred to as a "bidding system". The bidding is the most fascinating aspect of bridge for there are endless different ways of relaying the information about the hands to one's partner. Consequently there are numerous "bidding systems", some of which are extremely complicated. There are even systems built up so that one player, through the bidding, asks a series of questions about his partner's hand, and can pinpoint how many cards he has in each suit, the number of high cards and even the exact location of those high cards. However, although this might seem fancy to newcomers in the bridge community, such bidding systems don't always get their chance to shine since a lot of bidding space is required. The bidding spectrum must be exploited well, and therefore they are vulnerable to the opponents bidding which would squander the bidding space, which is the case on many deals. Frequently, all the players are bidding, which is

usually referred to as “competitive bidding”. On such deals where there is “competitive bidding” the bidding space often swiftly evaporates. Consequently, less information is exchanged and the result is that more guesswork is required and bridge players must exercise their deduction skills from the little information they have observed from the bidding to make a decision regarding a “contract”.

Guðmundur Páll Arnarson, a member of the Icelandic world championship team from 1991 in Yokohama, once made the remark that at one point he believed that the game of bridge was getting stale and that bridge players were doomed to the same repetition as chess players where new situations may not arise until relatively deep into the game. However, now he can foresee a new generation of bridge players inventing brand-new bidding systems with greater and greater accuracy in “competitive bidding” than has been seen before, thus improving the game and keeping it fresh (Guðmundur Páll Arnarson 2008).

The possibilities here are almost endless. Much has already been achieved in this variety of bidding and there are constantly fresh innovations. Bids of this sort are usually referred to as “conventions”. “Conventions” are bids with specialized meanings that immediately narrow down the hand type regarding either high card strength or location of a long suit or suits and sometimes even both. These specialized bids often relay a lot of important information in that one bid. The sheer number of such “conventions” is staggering and only recently a Swedish bridge player compiled most of the more popular “conventions” into a series of four books (Lindkvist 2001-2003).

It is a fascinating fact that bridge jargon is actually somewhat sophisticated. There is actually an *Official Encyclopaedia of Bridge* which, among other things, explains most of the glossary of words, both special bridge words and phrases that

are normally not seen elsewhere outside of the bridge world, and regular English words that are used differently than that of the common literal meaning (Francis et el. 1994). In essence there are three different types of bridge words or phrases. There are specialized words and phrases that would normally be unfamiliar to non-bridge players but still derive from the English language. There are new words which don't derive from the English language. And finally there are regular English words with a different meaning than that of the conventional connotation of the words.

Let us now look at examples of words and phrases rarely or never utilized outside of the bridge community but still derive from the English language and are all displayed in *The Official Encyclopaedia of Bridge*.

Here is a selection of bridge jargon nouns and as such all follow the rules of grammar pertaining to nouns:

Suit	A suit is one of the four denominations of spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs.
Doubleton	This term means holding exactly two cards in a suit.
Tripleton	Similarly, this term means holding exactly three cards in a suit.
Singleton	Similarly, this means holding exactly one card in a suit
Stiff	This term also means holding exactly one card in a suit and is a synonym for the word singleton
Vugraph	This term originated from the word "viewgraph" and is "a method of presenting an important match to an audience larger than can be accommodated around a bridge table" (Francis et al.1994:67).

Originally, this was done by having cameras over viewing the bridge table that projected the image to a large screen for an audience, but nowadays with advancing technology it is done by computers, where the deal is preset in a computer program as an image of the cards in the deck, and an operator, usually referred to as the "vugraph operator" types in the bidding and the play, so the viewer sees a virtual play of the hand.

Canapé — This term derives from French and refers to a "bidding method in which the long suit is usually bid on the second round" (Francis et al.1994:52). This method was originally conceived by a French bridge player, hence the French origin of the word.

Overtrick — This is a term which signifies "a trick taken by declarer in excess of the number of tricks required for his contract" (Francis et al. 1994:318).

Kibitzer — This term is used for people who sit by the bridge table, usually behind a player, in order to see his cards and watch the game. This word is close to being a synonym for "spectator".

Here is an example of a bridge jargon verb:

Coffeehousing — This term, to coffeehouse someone, means "indulging in unethical actions with full intent to mislead opponents" (Francis et al. 1994:67). Say that a player plays the king of clubs and either opponent now hesitates before playing a low club. To a bridge player, this indicates that the only reason for him to hesitate in

that spot is if that particular player is holding the ace of clubs and is deciding whether to take the trick or not. If a player were to think in such a spot without the ace it could be construed that he was deliberately trying to deceive the opponents as to the location of the ace. In bridge this is considered very bad etiquette.

Here are some examples of bridge jargon phrases:

Result merchant	This is a negative term illustrating a player who is constantly pointing out to his bridge partner after he has done something unsuccessful, that the proper or correct line of play would have yielded a better result. Second guessing would be an ideal synonym for this phrase.
Hand hog	This term stands for "a player who (often mistakenly) feels that he is the best qualified to manage the hands as declarer" (Francis et al.1994:169). This is quite common among bridge players for there is not always equilibrium between the two players in a bridge partnership, with either player often being, or at least considering himself, more skilful than his partner in playing the cards.
Simple-squeeze Double-squeeze Devil's coup Backwash-squeeze	These phrases are names given to certain extremely rare situations that can occur during the card-play.

Crisscross-

squeeze

These are a few examples of outlandish bridge words and phrases deriving from the English language. There is an abundance of these words and phrases, some of which would sound very bizarre to non-bridge players. Here below is a very simplified version of a “simple-squeeze” to demonstrate the meaning of a “squeeze”.

	North ♠AJ ♥K ♦--- ♣---	
West ♠KQ ♥A ♦--- ♣---		East immaterial
	South ♠x ♥x ♦--- ♣A	diagram: (Francis et al.1994:402)

There are three cards remaining when south plays the ace of clubs and west is helpless or “squeezed”. If he discards the ace of hearts, declarer will discard the jack of spades; consequently, both the ace of spades and the king of hearts are winning tricks. If west discards either the king or queen of spades, declarer will discard the king of hearts and automatically the jack of spades is now also a trick after the ace of spades has been played. This is what is called a “simple squeeze”. A “squeeze” occurs when an opponent must play a card but whichever card he chooses it will turn to his disadvantage; it is a lose-lose situation. There are numerous squeeze variations, much more than the examples

listed here above, some of which are extremely complicated, even to very experienced bridge players, and most are also so rare that a bridge player can play bridge regularly throughout his life without ever encountering most of them. All of these different and unique situations of the cards have been distinctly named and thus distinguished from one another.

Let us now look at bridge jargon words and phrases rarely or never employed outside the bridge community. There is an abundance of bridge words with origins not deriving from the English language. These words usually refer to bridge "conventions" and are either invented words or, more commonly, derive from the name of a bridge player who invented the "convention".

Acol — This term stands for a bidding system standard in Britain but rarely used elsewhere.

Blackwood — This term is close to being a universal bridge convention with a great majority of bridge players employing this convention. "Blackwood is a convention in which a 4NT bid is used to discover the number of aces held by [a] partner" (Francis et al.1994:35). The symbol 4NT is the common abbreviation for the bridge bid four no-trump. The bridge word "Blackwood" is also derived from the name of the bridge player, namely Easley Blackwood who invented the convention.

Yarborough — The bridge word "Yarborough" signifies "any hand at bridge containing no card higher than a nine, named after an English lord who customarily would offer to wager 1,000 pounds to 1

against the chance of such a hand being held by a player" (Francis et al.1994:557). Despite this definition of the word "Yarborough" the word is used much more loosely by bridge players nowadays; for instance a player holding very bad cards, consisting of very few or no high cards, will often refer to his cards as a "Yarborough".

Bergen raises — A bridge player playing "Bergen raises" is playing a very popular "method devised by Marty Bergen to give responder more ways to raise [an] opening bidder's major suit" (Francis et al.1994:30). A "major" suit refers to two of the higher suit denominations, spades and hearts, while diamonds and clubs are referred to as the "minor" suits.

Another fascinating aspect of bridge jargon is that it utilizes many common English words but in a meaning that is typically not understood outside of the bridge community. Let us now look at this third and final category of bridge jargon words.

Examples of nouns:

Dummy — If a regular English speaker were to hear the word "dummy" he might connect it with someone who is stupid, or perhaps a mannequin; but in bridge terminology, "dummy" is the player who exposes his cards on the table when the bidding is concluded and does not participate until the play of the "hand" is finished.

Hand — A regular English speaker might understand this word as an upper limb,

but to a bridge player this word can have two additional meanings. It can mean the cards each player is dealt, and accordingly a bridge player holding thirteen cards would refer to his cards as his “hand”. It can also signify a segment of the game which is finished when all the cards have been played and another “hand” or segment is dealt. This latter possible meaning for a “hand”, in the jargon of bridge, can alternatively also be called a “deal” or a “board”.

Strain This word has several conventional meanings in English, one of which would be an injured muscle, but to a bridge player it can signify “a term encompassing all four suits plus no-trump” (Francis et al.1994:423). “I let partner pick the strain”, would mean that I let my partner decide whether to play in spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs or no-trump. A bridge synonym for “strain” would be a “denomination”.

Crash This word would normally mean a collision of some sort, but to a bridge player the term “crash” represents a specialized bridge convention used in certain situations in the bidding. Actually, the bridge term “crash” is an acronym for colour-rank-shape, or c-ra-sh.

Mud This term is another example of a bridge acronym. “Mud” would normally refer to the wet soil of the earth, but to a bridge player it can signify a popular lead convention. A “lead convention” signifies certain rules that competitive bridge players use as to inform their partners of the length and strength of the suit they lead. A “lead” being the first card played against any given contract, played by the left hand opponent of the “declarer”. “Mud” is an acronym for middle-up-down. If a player

chooses to lead from three small cards, he would lead the middle card and subsequently, on further play of the hand, he would play the higher card first, of the two remaining, when possible.

Examples of verbs:

Huddle The word “huddle” would probably most commonly be associated with football players in a close circle or to gather or crowd. But to a bridge player it means when a player takes an unusually long amount of time to make a decision during the bidding or the play of the hand

Cash The word “cash” would normally be referred to as money in the form of hard currency. But to a bridge player it can signify “to play a winning card and win the trick” (Francis et al.1994:56).

Duck A duck would normally refer to either the noun bird or the verb to bend down. But to a bridge player it can mean “to play a small card, and surrender a trick which could be won, with the object of preserving an ENTRY”[3] (Francis et al.1994:119). An “entry” is a bridge jargon word which signifies a means of communication between two hands. Let’s say that “dummy” is holding five tricks to cash but with no means of getting there to cash the tricks then there would be no “entry” to cash the tricks. A player might also duck with the objective of cutting the communication between the opponents. Let’s say that a player leads a king from a holding of KQJ10 in a suit and his partner is holding two small cards in the suit. If the declarer were to “duck” the king and take

[3] The capital letters in “ENTRY” indicates that “entry” is also a word included in the bridge jargon glossary in *The Official Enclyclopaedia of Bridge*.

the ace on the second round instead then the communication between the two opponent hands is cut. This could be crucial if the hand holding KQJ10 had no other "entry". If declarer takes the trick on the first round then the player originally holding two small cards in the suit would have one card remaining and if he were to win a trick later he could play that card and his partner would have some tricks in that suit to cash.

Finally here is an example of an adjective:

Cold In bridge terminology this word has nothing to do with low temperature but signifies a contract in which it is possible to take the required number of tricks for it to succeed. Similarly, "ice-cold" would signify a contract in which it is very easy to take the required number of tricks.

This aspect of bridge jargon, regarding the many regular English words it employs in an unorthodox meaning, is fascinating. Jargons often employ phrases of regular English words in an unfamiliar meaning, and some jargons also employ regular English words in an unconventional meaning. But I am not familiar with any other jargon that includes such an abundance of regular words with strange meanings as in the jargon of bridge. If one were to categorize jargons into occupational jargons and jargons pertaining to sports, hobbies, etc; it is perhaps fair to assume that there are very few jargons, if any, pertaining to sports and hobbies that come close to the jargon of bridge as regards the magnitude of unfamiliarity of the language to speakers outside of the bridge world. This assumption is mainly based on my own observations and knowledge of several other jargons in the field of sports and hobbies.

The reason for this is perhaps the fact that the bridge community is somewhat isolated and the game of bridge isn't really that appealing to people, in contrast to the game of poker which has in recent years become very popular. If non-bridge players were to hear bridge player speaking in this jargon, they would normally be flabbergasted and have absolutely no understanding of what was being said, as if they were listening to an alien language, despite understanding most of the individual words. This is a fact that many bridge players are familiar with and have experienced on a number of occasions.

Conclusion

Sociolinguistics is an exploration into the nature of the English language. But can we then say that all English speakers do indeed speak the same language? How can the same language be so greatly diverse in so many ways? How could English have evolved to such an extent?

Indeed, it is a fact that English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Few, if any, languages have adopted as many words from other languages as English. When viewing these facts, it is no wonder why the English language is so rich with language variations.

But what does it mean to speak the same language? What is it that defines a language, is it the language's phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics, vocabulary, or something entirely different? Whatever one's personal preference is in relation to this question, it is a fact that nearly all speakers of English would agree that they are speaking the same language. Why else would we call it English? Even though, the pronunciation may greatly differ, and the vocabulary is not always similar, with greatly flexible connotations of many words, most of the

other features, at least to the casual observer, are usually comparatively similar, like the rules of syntax and morphology. One could argue that it is just the nature of languages to be diverse and colourful. English is though probably more diverse than most other languages mainly due to cultural and geographical reasons.

But what conclusions can one reach about the nature of registers, styles and jargons in relation to the language? For instance, can one say that the jargon of bridge, a specialized language so different in regards to vocabulary and semantics, is similar to other varieties of the language? Of course one can; after all, the same rules of syntax and morphology apply to other jargons and dialect variations. There is a constant pattern of similarity between variations. However, the most important thing to keep in mind about the concepts of registers, styles and jargons, is, as Bell (1976:27) points out, that they are all established by a situational context. As opposed to social dialects which are defined by the "characteristics of the *user*" (Bell 1976:27).

The possibilities for language variations are immense. Recently I became aware of a language variation or rather a certain speech style which I had never before considered as a speech style. This is a speech style associated with politicians. Doubtlessly, this idea occurred to me due to the current state of our society. I am referring to the speech style of speaking endlessly without really saying anything and constantly answering questions without giving any real answers. In my opinion this is indeed a real speech style given that politicians surely speak differently in cabinet meetings than they do with the press. This immediately reminded me of an episode of the television program *Yes Minister* when the minister was asked a difficult question in a television interview and he

responded in this vain: “I am glad you asked me that question because, it’s a question a lot of people are asking, and why, because a lot of people want to know the answer to it. And let’s be quite clear about this without beating about the bush, the plain fact of the matter is that it’s a very important question indeed and people have a right to know” (*Yes Minister* 1980).

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