

Lecture #3 : Cultural identity part 1: language, dialects and email

Assignment

Some questions to think about: What do we need to know about the other person in order to converse with them? What are the things we learn about another person through their use of language? How does this migrate to the online world - given the sparse identity cues, what aspects of conversation become especially problematic? Given that in conversational forums (such as email lists, etc) all we know of a person is through their words, what are the identity cues we can discern via language? How is language evolving online?

Observe two conversations, one in the immediate world and one online (can be email, chat, newsgroup, bulletin board etc., but should be something that is conversational - people interacting with each other - rather than more publication-like media). Watch for:

- ways in which the participants reveal their identity through their language (including non-textual/non-verbal aspects)
- ways they use their knowledge of each other's identity to modify their language
- ways they try to assess the other's identity

Write up your observations. Keep the Saville-Troike reading in mind as you frame your description - are you finding interesting phenomena in greetings? In contextually motivated language or stylistic shifts? Etc.

Please submit your essay by Sunday morning, and spend some time before class reading over the other essays.