

Today's topic:

- **Language varieties and reading education**

Background:

- Dialect survey

0. Key points today

- Review: Language varieties
- Some differences among US English varieties
- Potential effects of “non-mainstream” varieties on reading education

1. Review: Mental grammar, language varieties

Quick check-in discussion

- What is meant by the term **language variety**?

1. Review: Mental grammar, language varieties

Review

- What is meant by the term **language variety**?
 - the language system of a particular speech (or signing) community
- Do all varieties have equal **social status**?
- Do all varieties have **mental grammar** and **complex, systematic patterns**?
- Varieties of the **same language** are also called **dialects** of that language

1. Review: Mental grammar, language varieties

- Dialect Myths and Reality

(from Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (1998),
via “Do You Speak American”, PBS)

- See also: Lecture outline from Th Aug 22

- Section 3, *Linguistics and mental grammar*
- Section 4, *Linguistic diversity — language varieties*

2. Varieties of American (US) English

Full class discussion

- Try an online dialect survey:
Was your regional variety accurately diagnosed?
 - from the [New York Times](#) (prep questions; paywalled)
 - longer version: [Cambridge Online Survey of World Englishes](#) (NYT survey was drawn from this)
 - shorter version: from [PureWow](#)

2. Varieties of American (US) English

What kinds of questions do we see on these surveys?

- Varieties of English can differ in their...

2. Varieties of American (US) English

- Varieties of English can differ in their...
 - **pronunciation** (**phonology** and **phonetics**)
 - **vocabulary** (lexicon: **morphology**, **semantics**)
 - “grammar” in the school sense, meaning
 - **word forms** (**morphology**)
 - **phrase** and **sentence structure** (**syntax**)
 - and other factors, including politeness strategies, conversation structure, etc.

2. Varieties of American (US) English

- Which variety of American English is considered to be the “**standard**”?
 - Some discussions from
 - [“Do You Speak American?”](#) (PBS)
 - Wikipedia: [General American English](#)
- Terms used to refer to a standard(?) / classroom / socially prestigious variety include:
 - Standard American English (**SAE**)
 - Mainstream American English (**MAE**)
 - Standard Classroom English (SCE)

2. Varieties of American (US) English

Group discussion

- Fill in the blank, according to your mental grammar:
 - 1 Ernie likes to ___ down on the couch for a nap.
 - 2 Please ___ the baby down on the blanket.
 - 3 Yesterday we ___ out in the sun for hours.
 - 4 The fencers ___ their foils down when the match was finished.

3. Language varieties and reading education

Discussion

- What are some barriers to successfully learning to read that might face a student whose family speaks a **language other than English** at home?
- Consider a student whose family speaks a variety of English at home that can be classified as “non-mainstream American English (**NMAE**)”
 - How might this case be similar and different?

3. Language varieties and reading education

- Varieties of English can differ in their...
 - **pronunciation** (**phonology** and **phonetics**)
- Which of these words rhyme with each other?

dog *hog* *frog* *smog* *Ogg*

log *bog* *slog* *clog* *tog*

3. Language varieties and reading education

- Which of these words rhyme with each other?

dog hog frog smog Ogg

log bog slog clog tog

- Some AmEng varieties have the **same vowel** in all of these words: [ɑ] (*olive*)
- Varieties that have [ɑ] (*olive*) in some words and [ɔ] (*auburn*) in others may **differ by word**
- What are some possible implications of phonetic or phonological differences for reading education?

3. Language varieties and reading education

- What are some possible implications of phonetic or phonological differences for reading education?
 - What happens if **different** MAE sound categories are pronounced the **same** in a NMAE variety?
 - What happens if two different sound categories are **distributed** among words differently in MAE and a NMAE variety?
 - What if (some) kids in a classroom don't speak the **same** variety as their teacher?
 - Other potential implications?

3. Language varieties and reading education

- Varieties of English can differ in their...
 - **vocabulary** (lexicon: **morphology, semantics**)
- Consider this sentence:
The cake was quite good.
 - How good was the cake?

3. Language varieties and reading education

- Consider this sentence:

The cake was quite good.

- How good was the cake?
 - MAE: Really pretty good
 - British English: Somewhat good
 - Your variety: ???
- What are some possible implications of vocabulary differences for reading education?

3. Language varieties and reading education

- Varieties of English can differ in their...
 - “grammar” in the school sense
 - **word forms** (**morphology**)
 - **phrase** and **sentence structure** (**syntax**)
- Try this - [“A-Prefixing: Quiz!”](#)
(based on Wolfram (1993),
via “Do You Speak American”, PBS)

3. Language varieties and reading education

- Examples from African American English (AAE)
 - Also known as African American Language (AAL), Black English, Black English Vernacular (BEV)
- Experiment: 35 AAE-speaking 5th graders in Baltimore
Which of these sentences did they consider acceptable?

They usually be tired when they come home

They be tired right now

When we play basketball, she be on my team

The girl in the picture be my sister

James be coming to school right now

James always be coming to school

My ankle be broken from the fall

Sometimes my ears be itching

3. Language varieties and reading education

- Experiment: 35 AAE-speaking 5th graders in Baltimore
Which of these sentences did they consider acceptable?

32 *They usually be tired when they come home*

3 ~~*They be tired right now*~~

31 *When we play basketball, she be on my team*

4 ~~*The girl in the picture be my sister*~~

4 ~~*James be coming to school right now*~~

31 *James always be coming to school*

3 ~~*My ankle be broken from the fall*~~

32 *Sometimes my ears be itching*

- What is the AAE **rule** for using this form of *be*?

Data from [Reaser & Wolfram \(2007\)](#), NC 8th grade dialects curriculum

3. Language varieties and reading education

- What are some possible implications of **word-form** and **sentence-structure** differences for reading education?

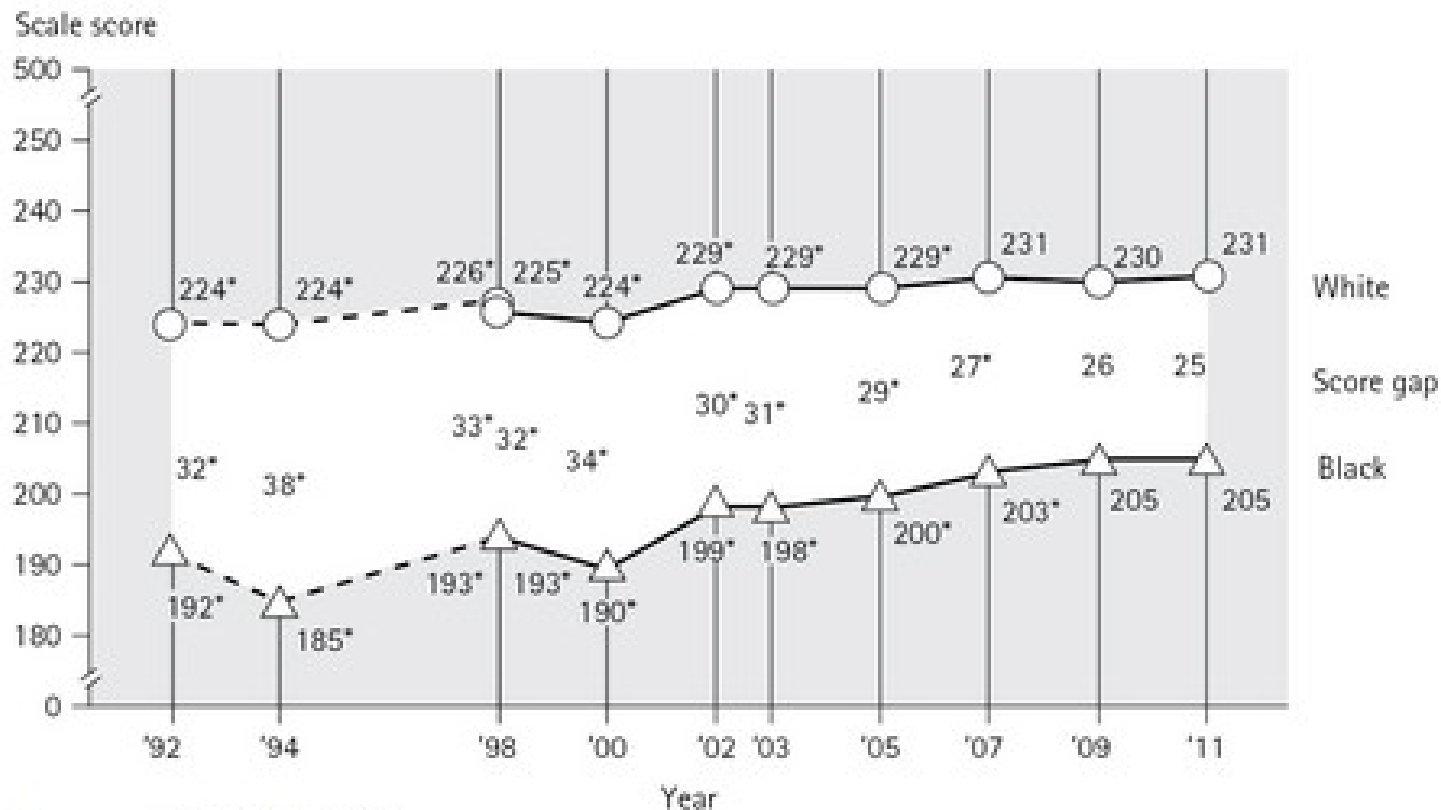
4. Achievement gaps in literacy

- [N. Terry & Scarborough \(2011\)](#) summarize past studies showing a “**literacy gap**” for speakers of:
 - Australian Aboriginal English
 - Hawaiian Creole
 - non-standard varieties in Sweden, Norway, Greece, and the Netherlands

4. Achievement gaps in literacy

- A US achievement gap (figure from [Labov & Baker 2015](#))

Figure 33.1 Fourth-grade NAEP reading scores, by race, 1992–2011.



Source: NAEP 2011.

NAEP = National Assessment of Educational Progress

4. Achievement gaps in literacy

- **Why** are there achievement gaps in literacy for NMAE (or other NM variety) speakers?
→ Complex question without clear answer(s)
- **Social factors:** History of discrimination leading to large differences in average socioeconomic status
 - Health, nutrition, safety
 - Home environment and resources for learning
 - Schools: teacher ratio, books, equipment, ...
- **Linguistic factors:** Children from non-MAE-speaking home environments are learning to read a **different language variety**

4. Achievement gaps in literacy

- Effect of student and teacher **attitudes toward language variety** on reading achievement (from Labov & Baker 2015)
 - “Considerable research has shown that children’s nonstandard dialect has more influence on **teachers’ expectation** of their performance than their writing skills, drawing skills, or appearance...”
 - “There is no doubt that negative attitudes toward nonstandard English can **alienate** AAVE speakers from the schooling process.”

5. Research at UNC!

- Recent work by J.M. Terry et al. (2022)
 - “African American English speaking 2nd graders, verbal –s, and educational achievement: Event related potential and math study findings” [[link](#)]
 - Neurophysiological effects (ERPs):
 - Predictions, p 5
 - Results, p 15