• Language in society
• Regional variation in language

Background reading:
• CL Ch 1, §3 (review)
• CL Ch 13, chapter intro and §1-2
1. Language in society

• **Sociolinguistics** is the study of the relationship between **society** and **language** (*CL*, p 483)

• Every one of us is a member of (at least one) **speech community**
  
  - As infants, we began developing our mental grammar on the basis of the **language patterns around us** = our speech community
  
  - Sometimes, we move to a new place or learn a new language, and may learn (some of) the patterns of a new speech community
1. Language in society

A speech community may be defined by...

• **Place** — Language varies by region | today’s focus

• **Time** — Language varies by generation
  - We look at *historical language change* later in the course

• **Social factors** (discussed on Wednesday) —
  Language varies by
  - Class
  - Ethnicity
  - Gender
  - Situation/Identity
1. Language in society

- Different **speech communities** have different **sociolinguistic norms** (conventions about language use)
  - We can call the language system of a speech community its **language variety**
1. Language in society

• To understand how language varieties differ, we need to be able to analyze their...
  - lexicon (word choice)
  - phonetics/phonology (pronunciation)
  - morphology (word formation rules)
  - syntax (sentence structure)
  - ...

• CL Ch 13, §1 gives an overview of some of the methods that sociolinguists use to study the language variety of a speech community
2. Language attitudes

• How do you feel about the English spoken in the North Carolina Piedmont (around Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh)?  
  - I like it  |  No opinion  |  I dislike it  

(Zoom poll)

• Where did you mostly grow up?
  - NC Piedmont
  - Elsewhere in NC
  - Elsewhere in the US Southeast
  - US but not Southeast
  - Outside the US
2. Language attitudes

• From reader comments on an article in the *N&O* about Raleigh dialects (4/8/2013):

  “I was born in Durham in the 70’s and raised in tobacco country outside of Greensboro. my parents made sure I didn’t pick up the drawl. first day of high school I had a teacher ask me if I had moved to town from Chicago. never was a prouder moment in my early life than that.”
2. Language attitudes

• Auburn University students like Alabama English
  - From a 1999 study by Dennis Preston (info here)

Figure 5: Mean scores of the rankings for ‘pleasant English’ by Auburn U. (Alabama) students (‘1’ = ‘least pleasant”; ‘10’ = ‘most pleasant’)

Figure 5
2. Language attitudes

• A famous quotation* from George Bernard Shaw:

“It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him.”

*From the preface to Pygmalion, the play that was the basis for the musical and movie My Fair Lady
2. Language attitudes

• It is human nature to have opinions about different varieties of our language
  - We can find them pleasant or unpleasant
  - We are often aware of how similar they are to our own speech, or to the “standard” dialect

→ Research shows that people’s **attitudes** toward different dialects (or languages) are very strongly influenced by their attitudes toward the **speakers** of those dialects (or languages)
3. From the perspective of linguistics

• As we’ve seen: We can call the language system of a speech community its **language variety**
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• As we’ve seen: We can call the language system of a speech community its **language variety**

• There can be **social** differences among varieties
  - A particular variety may be more prestigious
  - It may be a **social advantage** to speak/write a particular way to reach a particular goal
3. From the perspective of linguistics

- As we’ve seen: We can call the language system of a speech community its **language variety**

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- But a “standard” or “prestige” language variety is just one that got lucky! (historically, socially, politically)
3. From the perspective of linguistics

- Remember: Linguists are fundamentally interested in **mental grammar**
  - **Every** language variety has a mental grammar that is **systematic**
  - The social prestige value of a language variety is **unrelated** to the mental and cognitive processes at work in language acquisition

- There is nothing “wrong” with any language variety, even if it is different from the “standard” variety
3. From the perspective of linguistics

• Some examples of Australian English:
  (1) *Feeding your cat is different to feeding your dog.*
  (2) ‘mate’ [majt]

• A question we considered at the beginning of the semester: Which is correct, American English or Australian English?
3. From the perspective of linguistics

• Some examples of Australian English:
  
  (1) *Feeding your cat is different to feeding your dog.*
  
  (2) ‘mate’ [majt]

• A question we considered at the beginning of the semester: Which is **correct**, American English or Australian English?

• ??? Is this question even meaningful?
  - Both AmEng and AusEng **have** mental grammars; they’re simply **different**
3. From the perspective of linguistics

• Which is **correct**, Midwestern American English or NC American English?
3. From the perspective of linguistics

• Which is correct, Midwestern American English or NC American English?

→ This is exactly the same kind of question!

• Midwestern AmEng and NC AmEng are simply two different varieties of English
  - Their mental grammars have some differences
    • Phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, ...
  - But both varieties have a mental grammar
4. Language, dialect, and variety

• Even people who speak the “same language” may have differences in:
  - lexicon (word choice)
  - phonetics/phonology (pronunciation)
  - morphology (word formation rules)
  - syntax (sentence structure)
  - ...

4. Language, dialect, and variety

• What is a **language**?
  - This turns out to be a hard question to answer!

• Are American English and Australian English part of the **same language**?
  - Does your mental grammar *match* that of the speakers in examples (1)-(2) from AusEng?
  - Do you *understand* those examples?

(1) *Feeding your cat is different to feeding your dog.*
(2) ‘*mate*’ [majt]
• What is a language?
  - This turns out to be a hard question to answer!

• One criterion that is sometimes used for identifying a language: mutual intelligibility
  - If you and I understand each other, we can be said to speak the same language
  - On this criterion, American English and Australian English are the same language
4. Language, dialect, and variety

- Linguists sometimes use the term **dialect** to refer to a **systematic sub-variety** of a language — roughly, those speakers within a particular language that (to a large extent) share a mental grammar and a mental lexicon.
  - Within English, American English and Australian English would then be distinct **dialects**.
4. Language, dialect, and variety

- In reality, the boundary between **language** and **dialect** can be fuzzy...
4. Language, dialect, and variety

• In reality, the boundary between language and dialect can be fuzzy...

• In everyday language, politics and nationalism can affect how language varieties are classified
  - Many so-called “dialects of Chinese” are not mutually intelligible (such as Mandarin vs. Cantonese)
  - The “languages” Serbian and Croatian, or Hindi and Urdu, are mutually intelligible
  - So linguists probably wouldn’t use these terms this way — but popular usage does!
4. Language, dialect, and variety

• In reality, the boundary between language and dialect can be fuzzy...

• Sometimes even mutual intelligibility is hard to determine — are these ‘languages’ or ‘dialects’?
  - One-way intelligibility: More Danish speakers can understand Norwegian than vice-versa
  - Dialect continuum: A & B are mutually intelligible, as are B & C, and C & D, but not A & D

• This is why the term (language) variety is useful — we don’t have to specify language vs. dialect
4. Language, dialect, and variety

- Two other terms that are sometimes used by non-linguists when talking about language varieties (especially non-“standard” varieties)
  - accent
  - slang

- In linguistics, these terms both have meanings that are much more specific than ‘language variety’
  - Do you have an accent?
4. Language, dialect, and variety

• From the comments on an article in the *N&O* about Raleigh dialects (4/8/2013):
  “Northeastern accents are just mostly from the large cities with most of the rest of the Northeast not having that much of a accent.”

• **Accent**, to a linguist:
  The *phonological* system (phonemes and phonological rules) of a language variety

  - Do *you* have an accent?
4. Language, dialect, and variety

• From the comments on an article in the N&O about Raleigh dialects (4/8/2013):
  “Northeastern accents are just mostly from the large cities with most of the rest of the Northeast not having that much of a accent.”

• **Accent**, to a linguist:
  The **phonological** system (phonemes and phonological rules) of a language variety
  - Do **you** have an accent? | Yes — **everyone** does!
  - If you mean **morphology/syntax**, it’s not ‘accent’
4. Language, dialect, and variety

• **Slang**, to a linguist: (see Connie Eble’s book on UNC slang)
  - New **words**
  - New meanings for existing **words**

Usually spoken by younger speakers and usually only ‘in fashion’ for a short time
(Basically, the kind of thing you find on Urban Dictionary!)

• But a **language variety** is the **language system** of a speech community
  - This has many more aspects than words
  - If you mean **morphology/syntax**, it’s not ‘slang’
5. Regional varieties of American English

• Major dialect regions of the US ([Encyclopædia Britannica](https://www.britannica.com))
  - Related to settlement and migration patterns
5. Regional varieties of American English

• Varieties can differ in...

**Lexicon**

- “What word(s) do you use to address a group of two or more people?” [map]

- “What do you call the act of covering a house or area in front of a house with toilet paper?” [map]

(maps from the Dialect Survey by B. Vaux & S. Golder)
5. Regional varieties of American English

- Non-standard varieties are not “illogical”!
  - Mainstream (formal) American English
    \[
    \text{I} \quad \text{we} \\
    \text{you} \quad \text{you} \\
    \text{he/she/it} \quad \text{they}
    \]
  - Southern American English
    \[
    \text{I} \quad \text{we} \\
    \text{you} \quad \text{y’all} \\
    \text{he/she/it} \quad \text{they}
    \]
  - Other varieties have: \textit{you guys, youse, yinz, etc.}

- What is the \textit{advantage} of the non-standard systems?
5. Regional varieties of American English

• Varieties can differ in...

**Phonology**

- Do you pronounce *cot* and *caught* the same?

- Do you pronounce *pin* and *pen* the same?
  What about *bit* and *bet*?
5. Regional varieties of American English

• Varieties can differ in...

**Phonology**

- Do you pronounce *cot* and *caught* the same? 
  [map of the so-called “/o/–/oh/” (IPA /ɑ/–/ɔ/) merger]

- Do you pronounce *pin* and *pen* the same? 
  What about *bit* and *bet*? 
  [map of the so-called “/i/–/e/” (IPA /ɪ/–/ɛ/) merger before nasals]

  (maps from the **TELSUR project** at U Penn; note the non-IPA symbols used by some sociolinguists)
5. Regional varieties of American English

• Non-standard varieties are not “mumbling” or “sloppy pronunciation”
  - Speakers with the *pin*-pen merger still have distinct vowels in *bit* [ɪ] and *bet* [ɛ]
• The merger is the result of a phonological *rule* that applies before nasals
  - Some speakers who have merged only *cot*-caught think the *pin*-pen merger is surprising (or “lazy”, or “mumbling”) — and vice versa
5. Regional varieties of American English

• Varieties can differ in...

Syntax
   - “Modals are words like can, could, might, ought to, and so on. Can you use more than one modal at a time?” [map]

(map from the Dialect Survey by B. Vaux & S. Golder)
5. Regional varieties of American English

• Non-standard varieties are not “without rules”!

• ‘Double modal constructions’
  - Ungrammatical in Mainstream American English and in some other varieties (see map above)
    *I might could do that | *I could might do that

  - How do these examples compare in varieties that do allow double modals?
    ? I might could do that | ? I could might do that
5. Regional varieties of American English

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- ‘Double modal constructions’
  - Ungrammatical in Mainstream American English and in some other varieties (see map above)
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  - How do these examples compare in varieties that do allow double modals?
    √I might could do that | *I could might do that
  - The rules are complex — but there ARE rules
6. More on language variation

• On Wednesday, we will look at
  - Factors beyond region that define language varieties
  - Language variation as identity
  - Linguistic analysis of language varieties
  - Some implications for education