

Today's topics:

- **Dialects, standard and non-**
- **Rules of mental grammar**
- **African-American English (AAE)**

Background preparation:

- *Kaplan (2016), Ch 2, “A dialect is a collection of mistakes” — sections 2.0–2.2*

0. Today's objectives

After today's class, you should be able to:

- Explain the difference between *descriptive grammar* and *prescriptive grammar*
- Explain the concept of *grammaticality*, and how it relates to *mental grammar*
- Demonstrate how judgments from speakers provide data for descriptive/mental grammar
- Distinguish linguistic facts about language varieties from social attitudes toward language varieties

1. Setting the stage

Group discussion

- What do you think about the following sentences?
Are they “correct”?
What does “correct” mean?

*Cats are **different than** dogs.*

*Cats are **different from** dogs.*

*Cats are **different to** dogs.*

1. Setting the stage

- An example of writing advice...
from [iTEP International](#) (link via the [UNC Writing Center](#)):

Skilled linguists[*] will insist the phrase “different than” is rewritten as “different from” when at all possible. For example, “that shirt is different than the others,” should instead be, “that shirt is different from the others.”

[*] ouch!!! Not if you ask an actual linguist. A main point today is that actually, “skilled **linguists**” will observe who uses “than” vs. “from”...

- in which language structures
- in which social contexts

1. Setting the stage

- An example of writing advice...
from the website [Australian Writers' Centre](#):
 - Typically we'll use the adjective “different” and follow it with a preposition such as “from”, “to” or “than”.
 - Most language purists are happiest with “different from”—“The coffee I drink at home is no different from a cafe's coffee.”
 - However, it's very common to insert “different to” or even “different than” into the same sentence and produce equally acceptable results. Boffins would grudgingly accept “to” over “than”, but “from” is the pick.

1. Setting the stage

- An example of writing advice...
from the website [Australian Writers' Centre](#):
 - “Different from” is fairly universal, but if you live in the UK or its buddies (including Australia), you’re more likely to also want to use “different to”—it taps into the “compare” end of contrasting things. Meanwhile, in America, they like to use ‘different than’ on a regular basis. **It can sound a bit odd to everyone else** (almost like ranking things): “Your shirt is different than his shirt”.

1. Setting the stage

- So which is **correct**, American English or Australian English?

1. Setting the stage

- So which is **correct**, American English or Australian English?
 - Is this question even meaningful?
 - Try instead:
In a **given situation**/for a **given goal**, which is **more appropriate**?

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- Another term that deserves some discussion:
rule as applied to grammar

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- **Prescriptive** rules:
- **Descriptive** rules:

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- **Prescriptive** rules:
 - What (someone says) you “***should***” say/write

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- **Descriptive** rules:
 - Characterize the systematic behavior of the speakers of some language variety: What kinds of structures are **grammatical** for speakers?
 - **Grammatical** = acceptable according to a speaker's mental grammar
- Every speaker has a **mental grammar** of the language variety (varieties) of their community
 - Mental grammars are complex, systematic, and usually not part of conscious awareness

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

Try it: Grammaticality judgments by *your* mental grammar

- Compare these examples:
 - 1 *The mouse devoured the cheese.*
 - 2 *Mouse the cheese the devoured.*
 - 3 *The cheese devoured the mouse.*
 - 4 *The mouse devoured.*

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- Compare these examples:

1 *The mouse devoured the cheese.*

Your mental grammar: “☺” (grammatical)

2 * *Mouse the cheese the devoured.*

Your mental grammar: “!!” (ungrammatical)

3 *The cheese devoured the mouse.*

Grammatical! (But implausible.)

4 * *The mouse devoured.*

Ungrammatical! (But meaning is clear.)

→ Ungrammatical / “doesn’t make sense” *not the same*

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- **Descriptive** rules:
 - Characterize the systematic behavior of the speakers of some language variety: What kinds of structures are **grammatical** for speakers?
 - Raw data for major goals of linguistic analysis
 - Collect descriptive rules for one specific language variety and build a model of speakers' mental grammar
 - Develop a theory of the *possible kinds* of descriptive rules/mental grammars that human languages can have

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- Whether a linguistic form (pronunciation, word, sentence, etc.) is **grammatical** depends on **whose** mental grammar is evaluating it
 - You have a mental grammar for your **native language(s)** = language(s) learned from infancy
 - You have a mental grammar for languages you learned later too, but there's a lot of controversy about how this compares to a native-language mental grammar (→Ch 6!)
 - **You don't know** whether something is grammatical in someone *else's* variety
 - This is why we need data from speakers!

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- What does “correct” mean for language?

	<u>prescriptively</u> <u>approved</u> in US English	<u>grammatical</u> for US English speakers	<u>grammatical</u> for UK, Aus, NZ English speakers
<i>different than</i>			
<i>different from</i>			
<i>different to</i>			

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- What does “correct” mean for language?

	<u>prescriptively</u> <u>approved</u> in US English	<u>grammatical</u> for US English speakers	<u>grammatical</u> for UK, Aus, NZ English speakers
<i>different than</i>	~	✓	(✓)
<i>different from</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>different to</i>	×	×	✓

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- What does “correct” mean for language?

Linguists do not typically use the word *correct* in this way.

- Say *grammatical* to mean “acceptable to someone’s mental grammar”
- Say something like *prestige norm* or *prescriptively approved form* when talking about prescriptive grammar

2. Prescriptive / descriptive grammar rules

- Linguistics courses tend to emphasise that linguists are most interested in **descriptive** rules
 - Many **prescriptive** rules are actually arbitrary or artificial (like the rule against splitting infinitives) (*esse quam videri*)
- What are some contexts where prescriptive rules about language can be useful?

3. Language varieties (dialects)

Kaplan (2016, Ch 2: 9)

- What's interesting is that speakers often have the feeling that various dialects are not merely different from each other; some are actually better...
- Southern American English is stigmatized as uneducated, lazy, and backwards; New York English is said to be rude and 'nasal'.
- Many English speakers believe that there are correct and incorrect ways to speak, and there is a particular variety — 'Standard English'—that gets things right by obeying grammatical rules.
- Many of us have had these kinds of ideas reinforced by our schools and communities!

3. Language varieties (dialects)

Kaplan (2016, Ch 2: 10)

- If this assessment is right, then Standard English is the true embodiment of the language, and non-standard dialects are something less than language.
- If Standard English follows ‘the rules’ (whatever those are) and other varieties do nothing more than break those rules, then Southern English and AAE [African-American English] are just collections of mistakes.
- And if they’re just a collection of mistakes, then these non-standard dialects have no place in schools or other official domains.

3. Language varieties (dialects)

Kaplan (2016, Ch 2: 10)

- In this chapter, we will examine the belief that non-standard dialects don't obey grammatical rules. [...]
- We will see that all varieties of a language, whether standard or not, do in fact obey grammatical rules;
- non-standard varieties are just obeying rules that happen to be different from the rules of the standard.

3. Language varieties (dialects)

- Dialects of English that pronounce 'r' at the end of a syllable are called ***rhotic***

Is “standard English” rhotic or non-rhotic?

...park your r car in Harvard Yard

3. Language varieties (dialects)

- Is “standard English” rhotic or non-rhotic?
 - **Rhotic** in US, Canada, Ireland, Scotland, Barbados, India, Pakistan, ...
 - **Non-rhotic** in England, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, ...
- How did this happen? (see [Wikipedia article](#))
 - Interaction of colonization settlement patterns with historical language change in England
- This shows: It's **not** the linguistic characteristics of a variety that make it standard

3. Language varieties (dialects)

Discussion

- **Why are certain dialects considered standard** while others are considered non-standard?

4. Grammar rules (descriptive!)

- What is the point of the following examples (slightly modified) from Kaplan's discussion in sec 2.2.1?
 - What does the * symbol indicate?
 - a. The **blue** books are on the table.
 - b. *The **my** books are on the table.
 - c. A **blue** book is on the table.
 - d. *A **my** book is on the table.
 - e. ***Blue** book is on the table.
 - f. **My** book is on the table.
 - e. The book is **blue**.
 - f. *The book is **my**.

4. Grammar rules (descriptive!)

Debriefing | Comparing *my* with *blue* shows:

- *my* doesn't behave like an adjective in the mental grammar of speakers of English
 - ... even though possessive words like *my* are often called “possessive adjectives” in school
- Speakers are typically **not consciously aware** of the rules that their mental grammars follow
 - Linguists discover them by examining language data

5. African American English

- Kaplan (2016, Ch 2: 9); emphasis added
 - It's common to describe dialects in terms of geography, but dialect differences can be associated with any number of social dimensions.
 - In the United States, for example, one very salient variety is **African American English (AAE)**.
 - AAE is associated with differences based on race: it is spoken by many African-Americans (though **not by all**, and it is spoken by people of **other racial backgrounds** as well).

5. African American English

- Some negative attitudes toward AAE

Kaplan (2016, Ch 2: 10)

- AAE is highly stigmatized, and many people believe that it does nothing more than disobey the rules of Standard English.
 - Raspberry (1996) refers to it as ‘a language that has no right or wrong expressions, no consistent spellings or pronunciations and no discernable rules’.
- Note: William Raspberry was a Pulitzer-winning, African American journalist (who apparently just didn't know much about linguistics)

6. AAE rules: Consonant deletion

- Speakers of AAE 'leave off final consonants' — ???
(Raspberry 1996, quoted by Kaplan 2016: 14)
- Which words **will** / **will not** undergo consonant deletion, according to Kaplan's discussion?

<i>mask</i>	<i>friend+ly</i>	early suffix:	<i>accept+able</i>
<i>adopt</i>	<i>soft+ness</i>		<i>expect+able</i>
<i>bold</i>		late suffix:	<i>cold+er</i>
<i>paint</i>			<i>spend+ing</i>
<i>jump</i>			<i>soft+er</i>

7. AAE rules: Aspectual *be*

- Kaplan (2016: 17) gives this example (from Ross 1997):

T: Bobby, what does your mother do?

S: She be at home.

T: You mean she *is* at home.

S: No she ain't, 'cause she took my grandmother to the hospital this morning.

T: You know what I mean. You aren't supposed to say, 'She be at home.' You say, 'She is at home.'

S: Why you trying to make me lie? She ain't at home.

- What's going on here?

7. AAE rules: Aspectual *be*

- What did we find in Raspberry's parody of AAE?
 - “What you be talkin’ ‘bout, my man?” he said. “I don't be offerin’ you my grub; I be sayin’ hello. You know, like, *what’s up?*”

7. AAE rules: Aspectual *be*

(examples adapted from Kaplan (2016: 18))

- How are yes/no questions formed in Standard English? AAE works similarly...

SAE/AAE *They were running.* →

SAE/AAE *They run.* →

- ...but what happens with aspectual *be*?

AAE *They be running.* →

7. AAE rules: Aspectual *be*

(examples adapted from Kaplan 2016: 18)

- How are yes/no questions formed in Standard English? AAE works similarly...

SAE/AAE *They were running.* → *Were they __ running?*

SAE/AAE *They run.* → *Do they run?*

- ...but what happens with aspectual *be*?

AAE *They be running.* → *Do they be running?*

- Is aspectual *be* a form of the auxiliary verb *be*?

8. AAE rules: Stressed *BIN*

- Kaplan (2016: 18) gives this example (from Rickford 1983):

Someone asked, 'Is she married?' and someone else answered, 'She *BIN* married.' Do you get the idea that she is married now?
- Presented to 25 Black participants, 25 white participants
 - Most Black participants: 'yes'
 - Most white participants: 'no'

9. Responding to William Raspberry

Let's unpack Raspberry's statements...

- no 'right or wrong expressions' / 'discernable rules'
 - Is it true that "anything goes" in AAE? (What **evidence** from the reading **debunks** this claim?)

9. Responding to William Raspberry

Let's unpack Raspberry's statements...

- no 'consistent spellings'
 - Let's help Raspberry out here and consider the more reasonable claim that AAE has *some* variability or inconsistency in spelling.
 - Is this evidence that AAE has no grammar/is not a real language?

9. Responding to William Raspberry

Let's unpack Raspberry's statements...

- 'no consistent pronunciations'
 - Do standard language varieties ever have variable pronunciations?

10. Looking ahead

- Next time:
 - We will look at the “case study” section of the chapter, which presents research results summarized from primary sources
 - To prepare: Focus on **Österberg (1961)** and **Yiakoumetti (2006)**, and try to identify for each:
 - What questions were the study asking?
 - What results were found?
 - How can we read the charts/tables?
 - Implications for the questions of interest?