

- **Language in society**
- **Regional variation in language**

Background reading:

- CL Ch 1, §3 (review)
- CL Ch 13, chapter intro and §1-2

0. University Research Week

Happy University Research Week!

- Research, to me, is...
 - Finding out new things about human language
 - Participating in a “conversation” with other researchers and making results available to *anyone* who’s interested
- Faculty and students in the Department of Linguistics are carrying out research in all sorts of areas
 - The “[Research](#)” page on the Linguistics web site
 - My page about [research projects](#)
 - Some of our TAs have web sites also — see Leah’s [[here](#)] and Jiefang’s [[here](#)]

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
 - Gender
 - Ethnicity
 - Situation

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)? *(Zoom poll)*
 - I like it | No opinion | I dislike it
- Where did you mostly grow up?
 - NC Piedmont
 - Elsewhere in NC
 - Elsewhere in the US South
 - US but not South
 - Outside the US

2. Language attitudes

- From the 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](#))

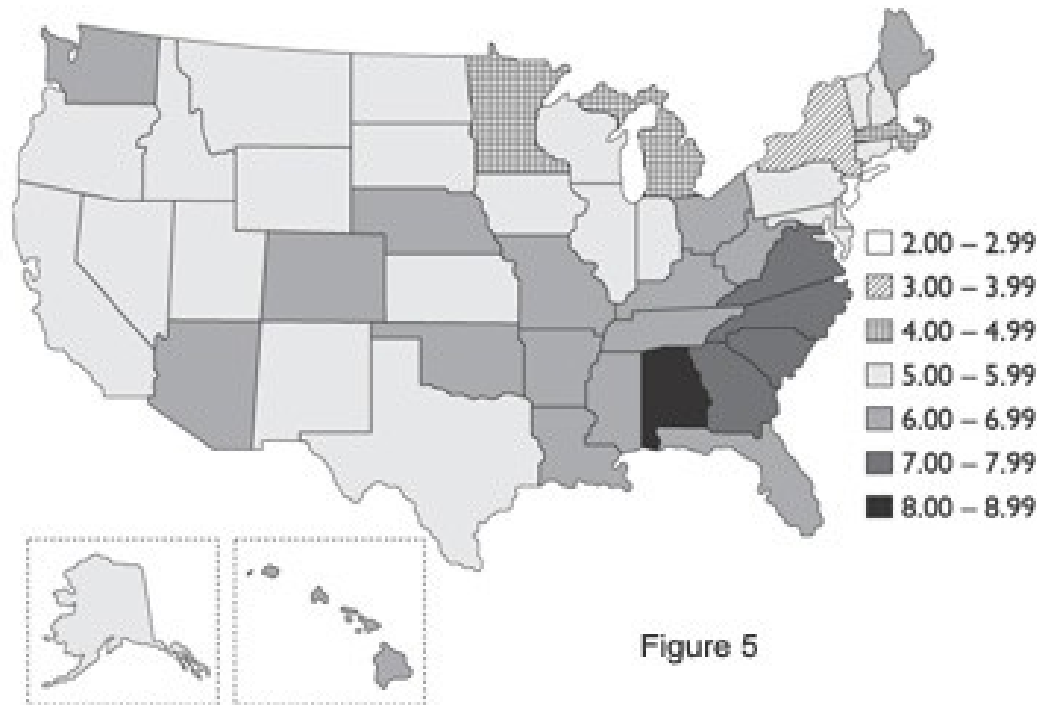


Figure 5

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

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

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- 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

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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
- 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

- As we have seen, 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]*

4. Language, dialect, and variety

- 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

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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'

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?

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- **Accent**, to a linguist:

The **phonological** system (phonemes and phonological rules) of a language variety
- Do **you** have an accent? | Yes — **everyone** does!

4. Language, dialect, and variety

- **Slang**, to a linguist:
 - 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 **variety** is the **language system** of a speech community
 - This has many more aspects than words

5. Regional varieties of American English

- Major dialect regions of the US ([*Encyclopædia Britannica*](#))
 - 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

I	we
you	you
he/she/it (etc.)	they
 - Southern American English

I	we
you	y'all
he/she/it (etc.)	they
 - Other varieties have: **you guys, youse, yinz**, etc.
- What is the *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?
[[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

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*✓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, you will look at
 - Factors beyond region that define language varieties
 - Language variation as identity
 - Linguistic analysis of language varieties
 - Some implications for education