• Language in society
• Regional variation in language

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

- 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**

• 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]
• 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’
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!
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  
      you  
      he/she/it (etc.)  
      y’all  
      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](https://www.telsur-project.org) 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

• 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
  - 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