
INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS II

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SPRING 2025

A-KAP, Π-Ω



I can't



I cannot



I do not currently
possess the ability
to can

TODAY'S TOPICS

- Sociolinguistics: Language and Social Variation
 - Social dialects.
 - Education and occupation.
 - Social markers.
 - Speech style and style-shifting.
 - Prestige.
 - Speech accommodation.
 - Register and jargon.
 - Slang.
 - Vernacular language.
- You can study these topics in:
 - George Yule: [Chapter 19.](#)

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION

SOCIAL DIALECTS

SPEECH COMMUNITY

- A speech community is a group of people who share **a set of norms and expectations** regarding the use of language.
 - The study of the linguistic features that are modulated by social factors in specific speech communities is part of **sociolinguistics**.

SOCIAL VS REGIONAL DIALECTS

- While regional dialects differ according to the geographical area the speakers come from, social dialects are distinguished according to the **social group** in which the speakers belong.
 - In other words, people use a language to signal their **membership** in a particular group.
- Both regional and social dialects relate to the **various levels of linguistic analysis**, including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar/syntax.
 - But regional dialects are studied in rural areas, whereas social dialects are examined **in urban areas**.

Five levels

1. Phonological variation
 - Speakers pronounce their words differently.
2. Lexical variation
 - Speakers use words that are specific to their varieties.
3. Morphological variation
 - Speakers use word endings differently.
4. Syntactic variation
 - Speakers use different syntactic constructions.
5. Pragmatic variation
 - Speakers behave differently in conversation.

The sociolinguistic variable

- Saying the same thing in two ways:

- phonology

- /kar/ vs. /ka:/
 - *tomayto* vs. *tomahto*

- morphology

- *I'm not* vs. *I ain't*
 - *it creates* vs. *it create*

- syntax

- *going to* vs. *gonna*
 - *I said okay* vs. *I was like okay*

one linguistic category



two (or more) different
realizations

SOCIAL DIALECTS

- Social dialects are defined according to the following **social variables**:
 - education
 - occupation
 - age
 - gender
 - ethnic background
- But perhaps the most prominent social variable is that of **social class**:
 - An example of a social dialect or **sociolect** is so-called ‘working-class speech’.

LINGUISTIC AND SOCIAL VARIABLES

- Social variables condition linguistic variables.
- Social variable:
 - Social class.
- Linguistic variable:
 - Pronunciation.

SOCIAL DIALECTS: EXAMPLES

- Pronunciation:
home as:
 - /heim/ (rhyming with *name*) by lower-working-class speakers
 - /houm/ (rhyming with *foam*) by lower-middle-class speakers in Edinburgh, Scotland.
- Word:
 - *vegetables* ('50s middle class) vs. *greens* ('50s lower-middle).
- Grammatical structure:
 - *I ain't finished yet* (working-class) vs. *I haven't finished yet*.

IDIOLECT VS SOCIOLECT

- The individual way of speaking is called **idiolect**.
 - Despite our individual way of speaking, our personal dialect (idiolect), our speech sounds **similar** to that of people of the same age, educational background and/or occupation.

William Labov's 1966 New York City 'fourth floor' study

- Does the use of post-vocalic [r] correlate with social prestige in New York City?

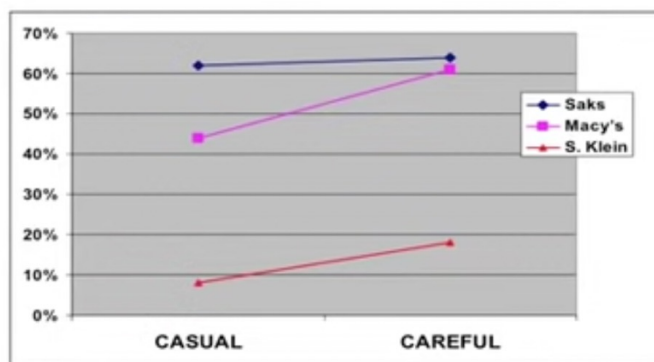


"Where are the ladies' coats? ... Excuse me?
... **Excuse me?**"

Percentage of [r] pronounced

	CASUAL		CAREFUL
Saks	63%		64%
Macy's	44%	↔	61%
S. Klein	8%		18%

Results of Labov's [r]-study



→ The articulation of postvocalic [r] in NYC is **socially stratified**.

- The higher the socio-economic status of the store, the more /r/ sounds were produced.
 - Saks – highest ranking (high fashion)
 - Macy's – middle-ranking (middle range in terms of goods and prices)
 - S. Klein – lowest ranking
- The lower the status, the fewer /r/ sounds were produced.

TRUDGILL'S EXPERIMENT

- Took place in Reading, England, in 1974.
- Middle class speakers **dropped** post-vocalic /r/, whereas working class speakers didn't.
 - This finding is the **opposite** from what Labov found in NY.
- Working class people also:
 - (a) dropped initial /h/, e.g. in (h)ouse, (h)ello, (h)ungry, etc.
 - (b) substituted /n/ for final /g/ as in writin(g), playin(g) etc.
 - (c) used double negation as in “*They don't know nothing them kids*”.

SOCIAL MARKERS

- The use of a particular linguistic feature **marks** a speaker as a member of a particular social group, whether s/he realizes it or not.

[Exercises 1-3](#)

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION

SPEECH STYLE AND STYLE-SHIFTING

STYLE-SHIFTING

- Style-shifting refers to a **change** from one type of style to the other by a speaker.
 - Here, we must distinguish between **formal vs. informal** style.
- In general, writing **correlates** with more careful (formal) style than oral language, as suggested in the following examples:
 - *I should be grateful if you made less noise.*
 - *Please be quiet.*
 - *Shut up!*
 - *We were rather dismayed by his lack of response to our invitation.*
 - *We were upset that he didn't call us to say he wouldn't come.*

LABOV'S EXPERIMENT ON STYLE-SHIFTING

- Labov also studied style-shifting.
 - He found that **middle-class speakers** are much more likely to shift their style of speaking significantly **in the direction of the upper middle-class** style when they are using a careful style.
- When speakers from a middle-status group use a form associated with a higher-status group in a formal situation, they have a tendency to **overuse** the form.
 - 'More' is seen as 'better' in their formal speech style.

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION

PRESTIGE



OVERT PRESTIGE

- Some social dialects or styles are perceived as **being more prestigious**, that is, positively valued in the speech community.
 - Consider, e.g., the speech of highly educated people, formal style in general, etc.
- Such varieties are said to be characterized by **overt prestige**.
 - This is the case when individuals change their speech in the direction of a form that is more frequent in the speech of those perceived to have **higher social status**, or status that is generally recognized as ‘better’ or more positively valued in the larger community.
- Prestige forms thus provide a way of **explaining** the direction in which certain individuals change their speech.
 - Consider, e.g., use of postvocalic /r/ in the speech of middle-status speakers

COVERT PRESTIGE

- However, other varieties (regional or social dialects) may be characterized by **covert prestige** among their speakers.
 - For instance, among the members of a particular group the use of a particular variety serves as a marker of **group membership and social solidarity** (e.g., the language of the young, etc.).
- Covert prestige thus refers to the **‘hidden’ status** of a speech style as having positive value.
 - This explains why certain groups **do not exhibit** style-shifting to the same extent as other groups.
- For example, lower working-class speakers do not exhibit style-shifting as those belonging to middle class.
 - They value features of their speech in that they mark them as members of their social group; therefore, they value **group solidarity** more than upward mobility.

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION

SPEECH ACCOMMODATION

SPEECH ACCOMMODATION: DEFINITION

- Variation in speech style is a function of:
 - speaker's social status;
 - attention to speech; and
 - the speaker's perception of their listeners: known as 'audience design' or **speech accommodation**.
- Speech accommodation refers to our ability to modify our speech style **toward or away from** the perceived style of the person(s) we are talking to.

CONVERGENCE – DIVERGENCE: DEFINITION

- When speech accommodation aims at reducing social distance between speaker and addressee, it is described as **convergence**.
 - In contrast, when the speaker wishes to emphasise social distance, the process is called **divergence**.

DIVERGENCE: EXAMPLE

- Teenager: *I can't do it, sir.*

Teacher: *Oh, come on, if I can do it, you can too.*

Teenager: *Look, I cannae dae it so ...*

CONVERGENCE: EXAMPLE

- Teenager asking to see some holiday photos from his friend (1) and his friend's mother (2):

1. Teenager: *C' mon Tony, gizzalook, gizzalook.*

2. Teenager: *Excuse me. Could I have a look at your photos too, Mrs Hall?*

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION

REGISTER AND JARGON

REGISTER: DEFINITION

- A register is a **conventional way** of using language that is appropriate in a **specific context**, which may be identified as:
 - situational (e.g., in church)
 - occupational (e.g., among doctors or lawyers), or
 - topical (e.g., talking about economy, sports, etc.).

JARGON: DEFINITION

- One of the defining features of a register is the use of jargon, which refers to the **special technical vocabulary** associated with a **specific area of work** or interest and used by those **inside** an established social group of professional status.
 - e.g., *suffix, attachment style, nonsteroidal medication*, etc.

[Exercises 4-5](#)

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION

SLANG

SLANG: DEFINITION

- It is more typically used by those who are **outside** established higher-status groups.
 - Slang or ‘colloquial’ speech describes words or phrases that are used instead of more everyday terms among **younger** speakers and **other groups with special interests**.

SLANG: EXAMPLES

- Slang expressions for “really good”
 - *groovy, hip, super*
 - *awesome, rad, wicked*
 - *dope, kickass, phat*
- Slang expressions for something being “really bad”
 - *the pits*
 - *a bummer*
 - *that sucks!*

www.slang.gr

TABOO TERMS: DEFINITION

- Words or expressions that are considered offensive, shocking, blasphemous, or indecent (by certain people) and are not supposed to be used are **taboo** words, i.e. swear words.
- Examples:
 - *What the f... are you doing?*
 - *You little b...!*
 - *You, stupid, f... a.....!*

[Exercise 6](#)

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION

SOCIAL BARRIERS: THE CASE OF VERNACULAR LANGUAGE

VERNACULAR: DEFINITION

- It is a general expression for a kind of **social dialect**, typically spoken by a **lower-status group**, which is treated as ‘non-standard’ because of marked differences from a socially prestigious variety treated as the standard language.

SOCIAL BARRIERS

- Social barriers such as **discrimination and segregation** serve to create marked differences between social dialects.
- A prime example is **African American English** (AAE) or Black English or Ebonics:
 - A variety used by many (but *not all*) African Americans as well as other speakers (e.g., Puerto Rican groups in NY) which has a number of features which taken together form **a distinct set of social markers**.

THE USE OF AAE

- The features of AAE have been **stigmatized** as ‘bad’ language.
 - There is a general pattern whereby the social practices, especially speech, of dominated groups are treated as ‘abnormal’ by **dominant groups** who are in charge of defining ‘normal’.
- However, AAE has **covert prestige** among younger speakers in other social groups, especially with regard to particular genres of music such as rap and hip hop.
 - Consider, the lyrics of African American artists (such as Kendrick Lamar) as well as Caucasian American artists (such as Eminem).

AAVE

- The form of AAE which has been most studied is usually described as **African American Vernacular English** (AAVE).
 - Notice that nowadays AAVE seems to have spread to different ethnic communities **beyond** the African American ones under the influence of rap and hip hop music.

FEATURES OF AAVE

- Consonant cluster simplification:
 - *Tes* for *test*, *des* for *desk*, *gol'* for *gold*, *lef han* for *left hand*, etc.
- Substitution of initial dental consonants with alveolar stops:
 - *Tink* for *think*, *dat* for *that*, etc.
- Dropping the /s/ in possessive genitive and third person singular of simple present tense:
 - *John girlfriend* for *John's girlfriend*, *she love him* for *she loves him*, etc.

FEATURES OF AAVE (CONTD.)

- Absence of plural marker /s/ when plural is indicated otherwise:
 - *Two guy for two guys, one of my friend for one of my friends, etc.*
- Double negative:
 - *He don't know nothing, I ain't afraid of no ghost, etc.*
- Omission of the copula verb *be* when referring to current situation, action, etc.:
 - *You crazy, she working now, etc.*
- Use of *be* in expressing habitual action:
 - *The beer be warm at that place, she be late, etc.*

[Exercise 7](#)

SUMMARY I

- **Sociolinguistics:** the study of the linguistic features that have social relevance for participants in those speech communities.
- **Social dialects:** whereas the study of regional dialects focuses on people in rural areas, social dialects deal with people in towns and cities.
- **Education and occupation:** occupation and socio-economic status affect our sociolect (social dialect).
- **Social markers:** how the use of a particular linguistic feature marks a speaker as a member of a particular social group, whether s/he realizes it or not.

SUMMARY 2

- **Overt prestige:** When individuals change their speech in the direction of a form that is more frequent in the speech of those perceived to have higher social status, or status that is generally recognized as 'better' or more positively valued in the larger community.
- **Covert prestige:** the 'hidden' status of a speech style as having positive value. It explains why certain groups do not exhibit style-shifting to the same extent as other groups.
- **Speech style and style-shifting:** A change from one type of style to the other by a speaker.

SUMMARY 3

- **Register:** it is a conventional way of using language that is appropriate in a specific context, which may be identified as situational (e.g., in church), occupational (e.g., among doctors or lawyers), or topical (e.g., talking about language, sports, etc.).
- **Speech accommodation:** Our ability to modify our speech style toward or away from the perceived style of the person(s) we are talking to.
 - When speech accommodation aims at reducing social distance between speaker and addressee, it is described as **convergence**.
 - When the speaker wishes to emphasise social distance, the process is called **divergence**.

SUMMARY 4

- **Jargon:** it is special technical vocabulary associated with a specific area of work or interest and used by those inside established social groups of professional status.
- **Slang:** slang or 'colloquial' speech describes words or phrases that are used instead of more everyday terms among younger speakers and other groups with special interests.
- **Social barriers:** social barriers such as discrimination and segregation serve to create marked differences between social dialects.
- **Vernacular language:** a general expression for a kind of social dialect, typically spoken by a lower-status group, which is treated as 'non-standard' because of marked differences from a socially prestigious variety treated as the standard language.