



What Do You Say?

American Accents and Dialects

Week 1: Dialects

What is linguistics?

- The study of language as it is spoken or written

What is sociolinguistics?

- The study of language and its social contexts and effects

What can someone's speech tell you about them?

- Gender
- Nationality
- Native speaker
- Education
- Age
- Casual/formal
- Ethnicity
- Emotional state: nervous, excited, friendly, calm?

What is a dialect?

- A variety of a language, differentiated by...
 - Pronunciation (accent)
 - Word choice (semantics, lexicon)
 - Sentence structure (syntax, grammar)
- Dialects are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong
 - Linguistics is Descriptive, not Prescriptive.
 - Standard and non-standard English are all dialects.
 - Dialects have rules.
- Dialect vs accent vs slang
 - Dialect = Linguistic variation: conscious or unconscious choices that you make. Not “bad English” or slang.
 - Accent is one part of a dialect
 - Slang is a temporarily popular word (though some of them stick)
- Dialects can be distinguished...
 - Regionally
 - Socially
 - Historically
 - Occupationally
- Style refers to *change in the relative formality of communication*. It is marked by:
 - Differences in vocabulary (full negatives vs contractions, formal vs informal terms)
 - Modulation of vocal quality (deep, breathy, falsetto, rough)
 - Phrasing (number/duration of pauses)
 - Loudness
 - Sentence construction (compound vs fragments)
- Attitudes about dialects
- Dialects: Language and Gender
- Ways that language changes
 - Rule extension (“Bob and me went to the party”)
 - Analogy: irregular forms are made more regular (dived vs dove)
 - Reducing redundancy (since “three” indicates plural, “dollars” doesn’t need the “S”)
 - Sound production: vowel pronunciations that define your dialect (e.g., the “O” in “Minnesota”)
 - Metathesis: changing the order of sounds (prescribe/prescribe, nuclear/nuclear)
 - Sound simplification (“probably” becomes “prob’ly”, “going to” becomes “gonna”)