



What Do You Say?

American Accents and Dialects

Week 4: *Grammar and Syntax*

The way you combine words into phrases and sentences is shaped by your dialect. We'll look at characteristic phrases of certain dialects (“might could” or “my car needs washed”) and who says them. We'll talk about gender differences, unwritten rules, idioms and sayings, and relate it all to your idiolect—your personal way of talking. And we'll explore whether there's a California dialect.

- Goals of Week 4's study of grammar and syntax
 - Learn to listen for grammar- and syntax-based dialect differences.
 - Be inquisitive about sources of dialect differences.
 - Identify unwritten rules of grammar and syntax.
- You're showing your age:
 - Lost words and phrases <http://verbivore.com/wordpress/old-words-and-phrases-remind-us-of-the-way-we-word/>
 - Ad slogans
- African American English (AAE)
 - AAE is a full-fledged dialect of English: not “bad” or “uneducated” English, not slang, not hip-hop.

- In some ways, AAE is more complex than Standard American English (SAE)
 - SAE:
 - Progressive shows continuous action (is working)
 - Participle shows that action is finished (has worked, had worked)
 - AAE:
 - Habitual action: She be workin' on weekends
 - Right now: She workin' today or she's workin' today
 - Intensity: He steady working
 - Indignation: He come talking that nonsense
 - Resultative: "If you love your enemy, they be done ate you alive"
 - Pastness: he done finished or he done did his homework
 - Been: I been bought this jacket (a long time ago), I been married (long ago & still)
 - Permanent state: He nice, she funny
- Teen English: Surfer dude, valley girl, and ways to use "like"
- Txtng: Is it ruining our language? Or is it another dialect?
- Dialect-specific expressions
 - "Y'all come back now!"
 - Might could
- Idioms and other expressions: The meaning of an idiom can't be deduced from the meanings of its words
 - Raining cats and dogs
 - Straight from the horse's mouth
 - Passing the buck
- Unwritten rules
 - The difference between "grammatical" and "meaningful"
 - Forming yes/no questions: The boy is running → Is the boy running?
 - Adjective order
 - "Garden Path" sentences
- Pragmatics: Understanding a conversational response in context
- Prosody: The "melody" of language
- Is there a California dialect? Are there pronunciations, words, and syntax that set old-time California residents apart from newcomers or visitors?
- If we have time: Yoda-speak

Thank You for sharing this linguistic journey!

Note: links to the videos used in this presentation can be found at tinyurl.com/OLLI-WhatDoYouSay .