

Chapter 7

Language Variation

Language variation is the study of those features of a language that differ systematically as we compare different groups of speakers or the same speaker in different situations. Rather than comparing features of two different languages (say, English and French), language variation studies **regional** varieties of the same language (e.g., English as spoken by natives of Mississippi and by natives of Massachusetts); **social** varieties of the same language (e.g., the English of upper-middle-class New Yorkers and that of lower-working-class New Yorkers); and **stylistic** varieties of the same language (e.g., how a speaker uses language during a job interview and during a casual conversation with a close friend). In this chapter we will look at some examples of these three types of variation: regional, social, and stylistic.

Within each of these categories, we can further note several sources of linguistic variation. Consider the following observations.

- (1) In some regions of the United States, a large container used to carry water is called a *pail*; in others, the same item is called a *bucket*.
- (2) In some regions of the United States, the word *greasy* is pronounced with medial [s]; in others, it is pronounced with a [z].
- (3) Among some groups in the United States, words such as *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* are pronounced with initial [ð]; among others, they are pronounced with initial [d].
- (4) For some groups of speakers in the United States, a sentence such as *He walks home every day* would be phrased as *He walk home every day*.
- (5) For some groups of speakers in the United States, the question *What is it?* would be phrased as *What it is?*
- (6) Men are more likely than women to use *ain't*.
- (7) A person being interviewed for a job might say *In which department will I be working?* The same speaker, in a more informal situation, might say *Which department will I be working in?*

Observations (1) and (2) illustrate the fact that particular lexical (i.e., vocabulary) items and phonological forms are associated with specific geographical areas of the United States. Observations (3), (4), and (5) illustrate the fact that particular phonological, morphological, and syntactic forms are associated with specific social groups. Observation (6) illustrates the fact that men and women use language differently. Observation (7) illustrates the fact that any one speaker commands a variety of styles appropriate for a variety of situations.

All of these phenomena involve language variation, in that they reflect the way language varies regionally, socially, and stylistically. Moreover, we will assume that the phenomena in observations (1–7) are governed by a system of principles. What we will do now is try to elucidate these principles. Bear in mind that what follows is a theory designed to explain observations (1–7).

Language Universals, Languages, Dialects, and Idiolects

In Chapters 3 through 6, we have looked at language from the perspective of different components of the grammar—semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology. From another perspective, the study of linguistics can be divided into a different set of domains, depending on what group of speakers we are looking at. One such domain is **language universals**, those properties (i.e., categories and rules) that all human languages, past and present, have in common. For example, all known languages make use of the categories noun and verb. Another domain concerns the properties of a particular **language** (e.g., Classical Latin, Russian, Modern English, and so forth). Still another domain is a **dialect**, a systematic variety of a language specific to a particular region or social group (e.g., American English, British English, Appalachian English, African American English, and so on). A final domain is the **idiolect**, the specific linguistic system of a particular speaker (e.g., the linguistic system of Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue, or Geraldo Rivera). All but the last of these domains are of primary interest to linguists, although different linguists tend to focus on different domains. The reason that most linguists are not especially interested in idiolects is that individual variations from speaker to speaker are thought to be idiosyncratic rather than systematic. Figure 7.1 summarizes the relationship among these different domains.

Since the topic of this chapter is language variation and since one domain of language variation is a dialect, we can start by differentiating a dialect from a language. One useful rule of thumb is that different languages are not mutually intelligible, whereas different dialects generally are. For example, if you are a monolingual speaker of English and you encounter a monolingual speaker of Norwegian, the two of you will have a great deal of difficulty communicating through language alone, since English and Norwegian are two different languages. On the other hand, if you are a native Texan and you encounter a native Bostonian, the similarities between your linguistic systems will far outweigh any differences; you will have (relatively)

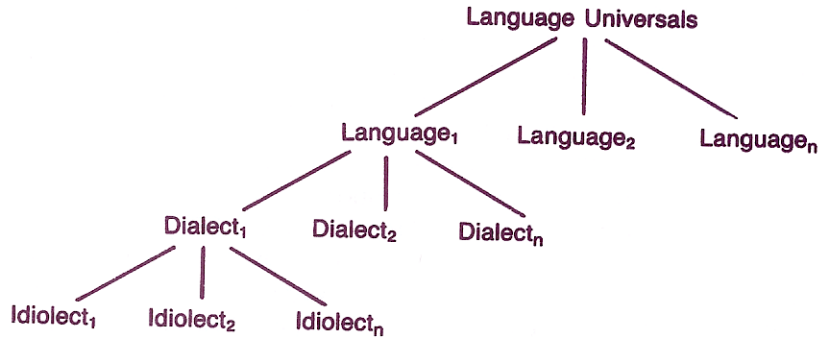


FIGURE 7.1 Domains of Language Study, by Groups of Speakers

little trouble communicating with each other, since Texan and Bostonian represent two different dialects of the same language. The relationship between languages and dialects is represented in Figure 7.2.

One point that must be made at the outset of our discussion is that a dialect is an abstraction, a theoretical construct hypothesized by linguists to account for subsystems of regularities within a particular language. Informally, we might say that each subsystem is a dialect. Keep in mind, however, that in reality every native speaker of a language speaks his or her own idiolect, one shading into another. When a significant number of idiolects share a common set of features not shared by other idiolects, then we might say that this group of idiolects forms a dialect.

Let's now take a look at three types of variation within a language: **regional variation** (or regional dialects), **social variation** (or social dialects—typically referred to as standard or nonstandard dialects), and **stylistic variation**.

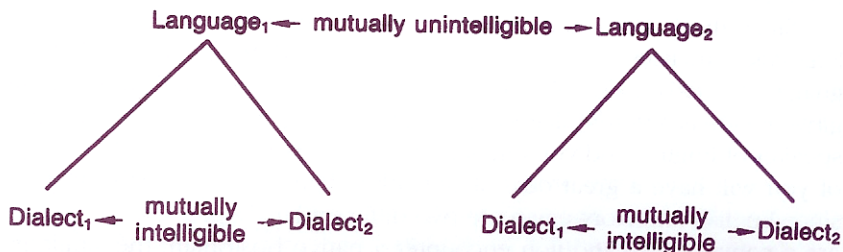


FIGURE 7.2 Relationships between Language and Dialects

Exercise A

1. The term *idiolects* refers to _____.
 - a. relic areas in which older forms of a language are still used
 - b. mutually unintelligible language variations
 - c. variations by individual speakers of the same dialect
 - d. Chomsky's innate constraints on language
 2. From time to time, cases are reported in the news of twins who have invented their own "dialect," which no one else can understand. Is such a case properly termed a language, dialect, or idiolect? Explain.
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Regional Variation

Regional varieties of a language result from a number of political, geographical, and cultural factors. First, the early population of an area leaves its linguistic heritage. For example, a paper napkin is sometimes called a *serviette* in modern Canadian English, because of the early French settlement of Quebec. Second, migration routes tend to demarcate dialect boundaries. For example, the United States has traditionally been thought to have three major dialect areas running horizontally from the east coast to the Mississippi River: Northern, Midland, and Southern. This pattern resulted because the east coast was colonized by settlers from different parts of England, who then migrated west rather than north or south. Third, political and ecclesiastical divisions contribute to regional dialect differences. For example, the equivalent of a county in Louisiana is called a *parish*, reflecting the early influence of the Catholic Church. Fourth, physical geographical boundaries can contribute to regional dialects by segregating groups of speakers. For example, the language variety known as Gullah or Sea Island Creole has not been absorbed into mainstream American English because its speakers live on islands off the coast of mainland South Carolina. In short, regional varieties of a language are primarily a function of settlement history and physical geography.

The study of regional variation, at least in the modern Western tradition, began in nineteenth-century Europe. By the early twentieth century, dialect dictionaries or regional atlases had been begun or completed for England, Germany, France, and Italy. A **dialect atlas** is essentially a series of maps, each of which plots the geographical distribution of a particular linguistic feature. Following the lead of the Europeans, a group of American linguists established the American Dialect Society in 1889, intending to develop an American dialect dictionary. Over the next 50 years they published their research in a journal called *Dialect Notes*. (The organization now sponsors *American Speech*, a quarterly journal about language variation.) In 1965 Frederic Cassidy was named chief editor of the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)*. Three volumes of *DARE*, covering letters A–O, have been published since 1985. The final volumes of *DARE* will not be published until the twenty-first century.

In 1928, the Modern Language Association's Present-Day English Language group inaugurated a large-scale project entitled The Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada (LAUSC) under the direction of Hans Kurath. The work for this study was subdivided into a number of smaller regional projects. Research on the New England area was carried out from 1931 to 1933 and published in several volumes as the *Linguistic Atlas of New England (LANE)* from 1939 to 1943. This atlas included a handbook describing the informants and the method of data collection and a series of maps, each indicating the geographical distribution of one or more dialect terms. For example, the map in Figure 7.3 shows the distribution of *creep* and *crawl* (as in *The baby _____ on all fours*) in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa.

Such data can be used to define an **isogloss**, a line that demarcates the area in which some phonological, lexical, morphological, or syntactic feature can be found. For example, the isogloss in Figure 7.4 demarcates the southern limit, within the Upper Midwest states, of *(Devil's) darning needle* as a variant for *dragonfly*. Below this boundary, *snake feeder* is more common as a variant.

A **bundle of isoglosses** delineates a dialect area: a geographic region whose language is characterized by a distinct set of phonological, lexical, morphological, and syntactic features. For example, if you were to superimpose Figures 7.3 and 7.4, you would find that both *crawl* and *snake feeder* predominate over other variants in Nebraska and southern Iowa. If a number of other linguistic features were found to

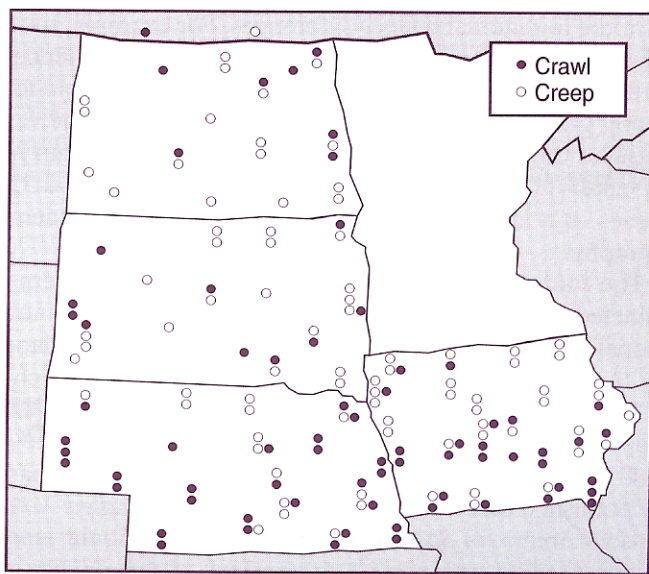


FIGURE 7.3 Geographical Distribution of *creep* and *crawl*

Source: From the *Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest*, Volumes 1 & 2, by Harold B. Allen. Copyright © 1982 by Gale Research Inc. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

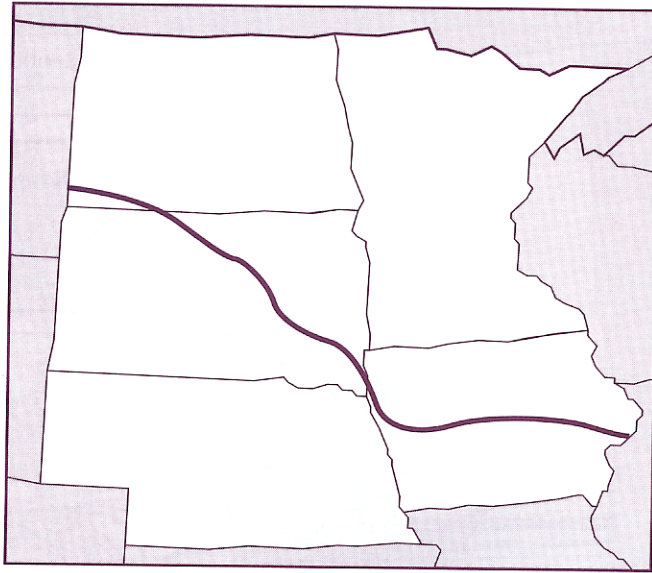


FIGURE 7.4 Isogloss for *(Devil's) darning needle* in the Upper Midwest

Source: From the *Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest*, Volumes 1 & 2, by Harold B. Allen. Copyright © 1982 by Gale Research Inc. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

coincide in this region, but not in adjacent ones, then we would be justified in treating this region as a distinct dialect area. And, in fact, such a bundle of isoglosses does exist, as shown in Figure 7.5. As a result, this area has been identified as one of the boundaries between the Northern and Midland dialects.

Fieldwork on the Middle and South Atlantic States was begun in 1933 and completed in 1949. (World War II interrupted the collection of data.) From this fieldwork came a number of important studies. In 1949, Kurath published *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States*, which divided the east coast into the Northern, Midland, and Southern dialect areas. In 1953, E. Bagby Atwood published *A Survey of Verb Forms in the Eastern United States*, and in 1961 Kurath and Raven McDavid published *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States*.

These derivative works aside, however, the publication of the regional atlases has been slow and sporadic since the end of World War II. Even though countless hours of fieldwork have been invested in the Middle and South Atlantic States, the North Central States, and the Gulf States, most of the results still await publication. In fact, the only other atlas projects that have been published in complete and final form since *LANE* are the *Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest*, published in three volumes between 1973 and 1976, and the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States*, published in seven volumes in 1992. Nonetheless, even though progress on the regional atlases has been slow, dialectologists have a reasonably accurate picture of the major regional dialects in the United States, as illustrated in Figure 7.6. Note that Kurath's

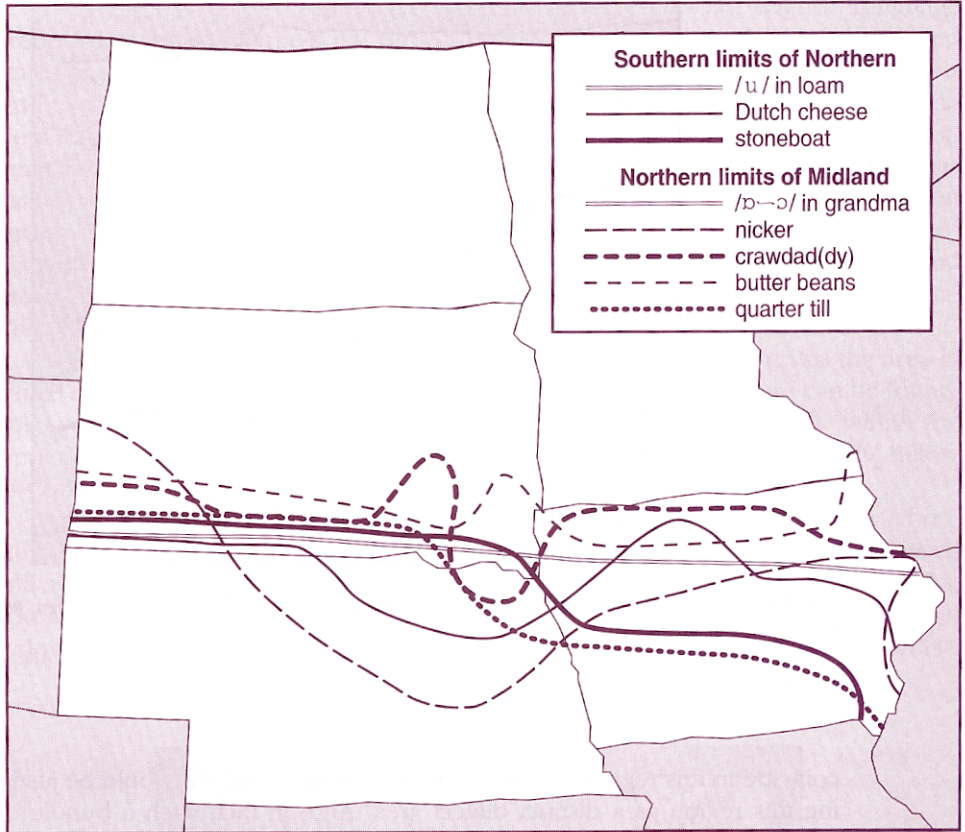


FIGURE 7.5 Bundle of Isoglosses, Reflecting one Boundary between the Northern and Midland Dialect Regions

Source: From *The Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest*, Volumes 1 & 2, by Harold B. Allen. Copyright © 1982 by Gale Research Inc. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

divisions of Northern, Midland, and Southern have been realigned into four areas: Upper North, Lower North, Upper South, and Lower South.

A number of factors account for the slow progress of the LAUSC since World War II. Any project covering more than half a century (1931 to the present), more than 3,500,000 square miles (the area of the United States alone), and involving hundreds of fieldworkers and thousands of informants is fraught with inherent logistical problems. The LAUSC also lost financial support and personnel to the Depression and World War II. Moreover, recall that American regional dialectology was modelled on the European studies, which dealt with relatively immobile populations and small, well-defined dialect areas. North America, on the other hand, is vast in comparison to Europe; and the population, especially since World War II, has become increasingly mobile. Regional dialect areas also become less well defined as we

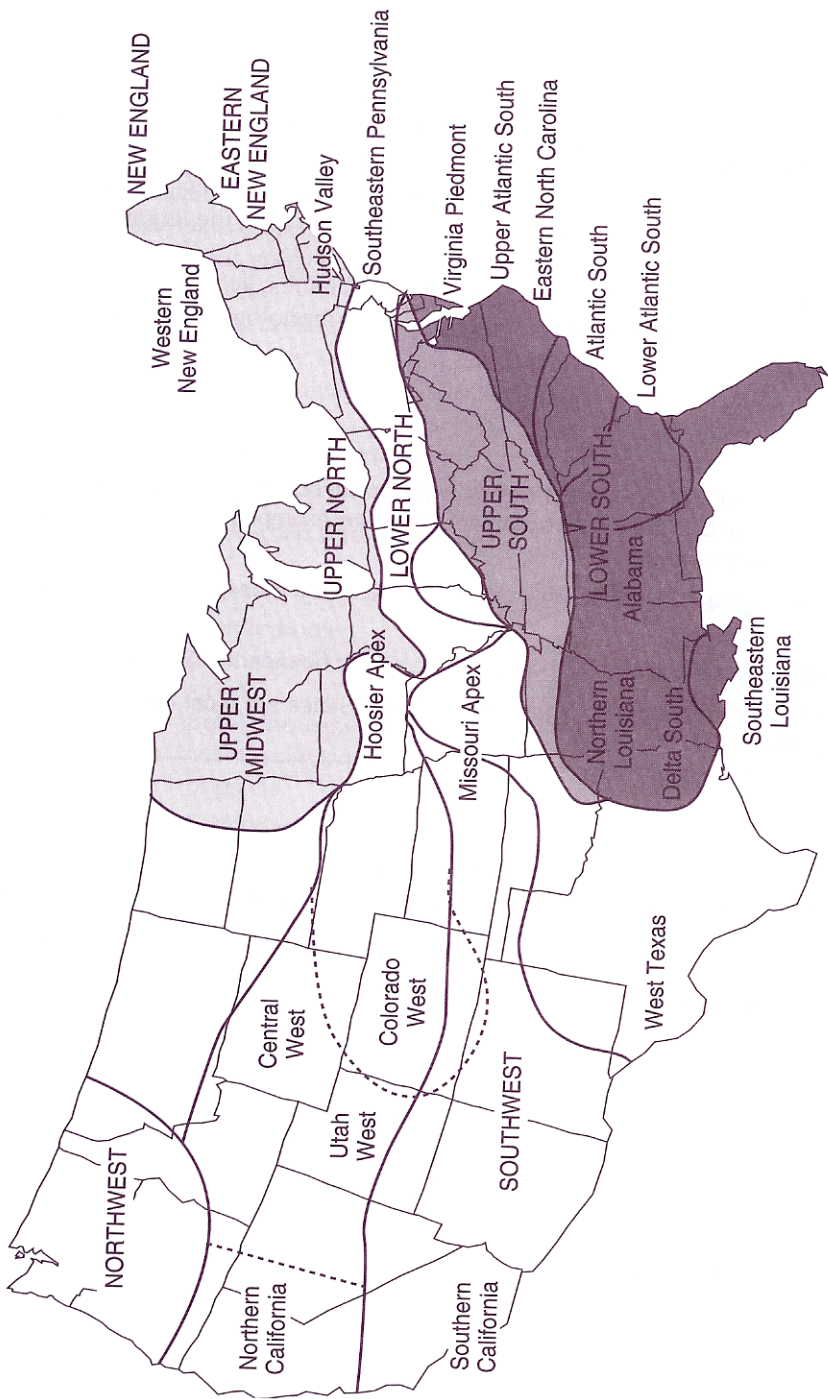


FIGURE 7.6 Dialect Areas of the United States, According to Carver (1987:248)

Source: From *American Regional Dialects: A Word Geography*, by Craig M. Carver. Copyright © 1987 by University of Michigan Press. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

move away from the east coast. Under such circumstances, massive regional studies become increasingly difficult. Finally, the arrival of Chomsky's generative grammar in 1957 attracted the attention of many younger linguists, as did the shifting emphasis within dialect studies from regional to social variation. Consequently, the study of regional dialects has experienced competition for people entering the linguistics profession.

Having briefly gone over some of these background issues, let's now take a look at a representative sampling of some of the lexical and phonological dialect characteristics of North America.

Exercise B

1. Identify three regions of the United States where neighboring or immigrating ethnic groups have influenced the local vocabulary, and give examples of words that have been introduced by each group.
- †2. True or False. Figure 7.3 indicates that *crawl* becomes more widespread as one moves north.
3. True or False. Figures 7.4 and 7.5 both illustrate dialect boundaries. Explain.
4. Figure 7.6 illustrates that dialect areas of the United States are most clear-cut on the east coast. Why is that the case?

Regional Lexical Variation

As mentioned earlier, Northern and Southern varieties constitute two of the main regional dialects in the United States. Following are some of the characteristic lexical (i.e., vocabulary) differences between these two varieties.

Northern United States

pail
bag
faucet
quarter of four
sick to my stomach
(cherry) pit

Southern United States

bucket
sack
spigot
quarter till four
sick at my stomach
(cherry) seed

Lexical differences also exist between United States and Canadian English. The following are representative.

United States

sofa
napkin
huh?
faucet

Canada

chesterfield
serviette
eh?
tap

Frederic Cassidy, in his research for the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, found thousands of examples of more exotic regionalisms: for instance, *eaceworm* 'earthworm' (Rhode Island); *democrat bug* 'box-elder bug' (Kansas and Iowa, Republican strongholds!); *snoose* 'snuff' (Wisconsin and Minnesota); *hooftie* 'hippie' (Pennsylvania; from *hooft* 'hip' in Pennsylvania German); *black Christmas* 'Christmas without snow' (Alaska); and *peach-limb tea* 'a whipping administered to a child' (Arkansas).

Lexical differences between British and American English are so numerous that we can cover only a few examples here. Some common British terms, with their American equivalents, include the following:

American English

photo
pedestrian underpass
exit
7-Up (or other lemon-lime drink)
mobile home
ground beef
stove
public housing project
costume/masquerade
popsicle
passing lane
traffic circle
dead end
advice columnist

British English

snap
subway
way out
lemonade
caravan
mince
cooker
council estate
fancy dress
ice lolly
crawler lane
circus/roundabout
close
agony aunt

Exercise C

- Look up the terms *bluenose*, *choppies*, and *choupique* in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.
 - What does each term mean?
 - Where is each term most common in the United States?
- The terms on the left are used in the United States, while those on the right are used in other English-speaking countries (e.g., England, Australia). Try to match each term on the left with its non-American counterpart.

UNITED STATES

_____ biscuit
_____ bag (as of potato chips)
_____ candy
_____ canned
_____ cookie

OTHER ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

a. tomato sauce
b. crisps
c. green mealies
d. scone
e. packet

Continued

Exercise C *Continued*

_____ corn meal	f. sweets
_____ cornstarch	g. serviettes
_____ ears of corn	h. icing sugar
_____ flavoring (as in vanilla)	i. cream cracker
_____ french fries	j. biscuit
_____ Jello™	k. corn flour
_____ ketchup	l. tinned
_____ molasses	m. chips
_____ napkins	n. maize meal
_____ potato chips	o. essence
_____ powdered sugar	p. treacle
_____ soda cracker	q. jelly

Regional Phonological Variation

The following are representative examples of regional phonological variation in North American English.

Linking [r]. This feature, which is associated with eastern New England and New York City, refers to a phenomenon whereby a vowel-vowel sequence between words is “linked” with an [r]. For example, consider a phrase like *That idea is crazy*. Note that *idea* ends with a vowel, and the following word *is* begins with a vowel. For a speaker whose dialect contains the “linking [r]” feature, this phrase would be pronounced as if *idea* ended in an [r] (*idear*). Speakers of this dialect presumably have a rule in their phonological systems which inserts an [r] between a word ending in a vowel and another word beginning with a vowel, as follows.

$$\emptyset \rightarrow [r] / V _ \# V \text{ (# indicates a word boundary)}$$

In contrast, this rule would not insert the “linking [r]” in the phrase *That idea sounds crazy*, since there are no vowel-vowel sequences between words (*idea* ends in a vowel, but *sounds* begins with a consonant).

This type of process, whereby a consonant is inserted to break up a series of two vowels, is called **consonant epenthesis**. The mirror-image process, whereby a vowel (typically [ə]) is inserted to break up a series of two consonants, is called **vowel epenthesis** (e.g., *athlete* [æθəlɪt]). Both processes reflect the fact that languages gravitate toward CVCV syllable structure.

Vowel Neutralization before Nasals. For many speakers of Southern dialects, the phonemes /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ are both represented phonetically as [i] before a nasal consonant. This process, whereby two segments lose their contrast in a particular phonetic environment, is known as **neutralization**. So, for example, the words *pen* and *pin* would both be represented phonologically as [p^hɪn] for speakers of this dialect.

Such speakers apparently have a rule in their phonological systems which changes /ɛ/ to [i] before a nasal consonant, as follows.

$$\begin{array}{c} /ɛ/ \rightarrow [i] / \text{ ______ } C \\ \text{ ______ } [+nasal] \end{array}$$

Thus, for speakers of this regional dialect, the pairs *ten-tin* and *bem-him* are phonetically identical. On the other hand, the words *pet* and *pit* would be represented phonetically as [p^hɛt] and [p^hit], respectively, since no nasal occurs after the vowels in these words. Likewise, *net* and *knet* would be represented phonetically as [nɛt] and [nit], respectively, since the nasal in each of these words comes before, rather than after, the vowel.

Before leaving this rule of Vowel Neutralization, we can give you a concrete example which illustrates the practical effects of such dialect differences. During the summer of 1985, one of the authors, Frank Parker, was visiting the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., which attracts tourists from all over the country. Because this zoo was displaying the famous pandas Hsing-Hsing and Ling-Ling (now deceased), it predictably sold quite a lot of “panda paraphernalia”—shirts, postcards, and so on. A man approached the clerk at a souvenir shop and asked for a “panda [p^hɪn].” The clerk brought him a panda pin (i.e., a button designed to be worn on a shirt). The man promptly said, “No, I want a [p^hɪn], like a ball point pen,” and the clerk responded, “Oh, you want a [p^hɛn].” Finally, the man got what he wanted: a pen decorated with panda pictures. However, neither the man nor the clerk, it appeared, ever did understand the cause of the confusion. We, on the other hand, can explain this interchange by assuming a rule of Vowel Neutralization, which is a feature of Southern dialects but not of others. The man (presumably from the South) pronounced *pen* as [p^hɪn], which the clerk (presumably not from the South) interpreted as *pin*.

Vocalization. This rule, common among speakers in the deep South, substitutes [ə] for a post-vocalic liquid (i.e., an /l/ or /r/ following a vowel). In other words, the rule “vocalizes” the liquid (i.e., turns it into a vowel). For example, *there* /ðɛr/ may be pronounced [ðɛə].

Voicing Assimilation. This rule changes the voicing feature of an obstruent (i.e., a stop, fricative, or affricate) to match that of an adjacent segment. This rule, for example, accounts for the difference between *greasy* with an [s] in the North and a [z] in the South. In the Southern dialect, the [s] assimilates the voicing of the adjacent vowels to yield [z].

Other Regional Phonological Features. There are many examples of phonological variation too numerous to discuss in detail here. The following, however, constitute a representative sample: *bottle* [baʔəl] (New York City); *wash* [warʃ] (Washington, D.C. area); *cot* and *caught* [a] (Pennsylvania); *shone* [ɔ] (Canada); and *out* [əʊ] (Canada, eastern Virginia, and South Carolina).

Several patterns also distinguish British and American English pronunciations. First of all, stress patterns may differ, resulting in a different pattern of full and reduced (/ə/) vowels. This pattern is evident in the following pairs.

	American English	British English
<i>laboratory</i>	/læb(ə)rətəri/	/ləb(ə)rətri/
<i>garage</i>	/gə'raʒ/	/gæ'raʒ/
<i>massage</i>	/mə'sɑʒ/	/mæ'sɑʒ/
<i>cervical</i>	/sɑ'rvikəl/	/sə'rvikəl/

Second, the vowel used within a stressed syllable may differ. This pattern is illustrated in the following pairs.

	American English	British English
<i>process</i>	/prə'ses/	/prós'es/
<i>patent</i>	/pə'tənt/	/pétənt/
<i>migraine</i>	/má'grɛn/	/mí'grɛn/
<i>path</i>	/pæθ/	/paθ/

We should point out that these examples illustrate differences between American English and only one variety of British English, the dialect often referred to as RP (for Received Pronunciation). This variety is actually more of a social dialect, since it is associated with educated, upper-class speakers rather than with one region of England. In reality, a number of regional dialects exist within British English as well.

Several additional points should be made before leaving this section on regional variation. First, regional dialects, at least in North America, differ primarily in vocabulary and pronunciation (i.e., lexically and phonologically). As we will see in the next section, social dialects may differ in pronunciation, word formation, and sentence structure (i.e., phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically). Second, many of the regional dialect differences detected by fieldworkers in the 1930s and 1940s are not as clear-cut as they once were. As a result, you may have noticed that some of the dialect features ascribed to your particular area of the country do not match the way you speak. For example, you may say *faucet* (Northern) rather than *spigot* (Southern), even though you're from Alabama! This should come as no great surprise; as we've already seen, the mobility of the American population since World War II has blurred, if not obliterated, what were earlier distinct limits on a particular dialect feature. Third, as we discussed earlier, a dialect is a theoretical construct devised to account for certain linguistic patterns. That is, a dialect boundary exists solely by virtue of the fact that the limits of a number of different dialect features coincide there. For example, the fact that the boundaries of *bucket*, *sack*, *spigot*, *dived*, and so on coincide (or at least formerly did) constitutes evidence for hypothesizing a Southern dialect area. A dialect area does not (and, in fact, cannot) exist apart from these individual dialect features.

Exercise D

1. The phonetic representations of words such as *absorb* and *Mrs.* contrast for some Northern and Southern speakers in the United States as follows.

NORTHERN	SOUTHERN
[əbsɔrb]	[əbzɔrb]
[mɪsɪz]	[mɪzɪz]

What systematic contrast occurs between the Northern and Southern dialects? How does the phonological environment account for the Southern forms?

- †2. Certain regional dialects of English (e.g., eastern New England and the deep South) contain the following rule:

$/r/ \rightarrow \emptyset / V \underline{\quad}$

Which of the following words would not be affected by this rule?

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|---------------------|
| a. forty | c. pretty | e. both (a) and (b) |
| b. four | d. free | f. both (c) and (d) |
3. Many Southern varieties of English contain the following rule:

$V \rightarrow [+high] / \underline{\quad} C$

<table border="1"> <tr><td>-high</td></tr> <tr><td>-low</td></tr> <tr><td>-back</td></tr> <tr><td>-tense</td></tr> </table>	-high	-low	-back	-tense	[+nas]
-high					
-low					
-back					
-tense					

Based on this rule, indicate the vowel that would occur in the phonetic form corresponding to each of the following phonemic forms.

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| a. hem /hɛm/ | e. strength /strɛŋkθ/ |
| b. pin /pɪn/ | f. teen /ti:n/ |
| c. pant /pænt/ | g. net /nɛt/ |
| d. pen /pɛn/ | h. neat /ni:t/ |
- †4. Many dialects of the northeastern seaboard contain the following rule:

$\emptyset \rightarrow [r] / V \underline{\quad} \# V$

Indicate how each of the following phrases would be affected by this rule (if at all):

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| a. Anna asked Neal | c. Anna told Neal |
| b. Neal asked Anna | d. Neal told Anna |
5. How must the rule in Exercise (4) be restricted in order to correctly predict the following data?

Cuba is	[kyubərəz]	Linda ate	[lɪndəret]
Tahiti is	*[təhitɪnz]	Roscoe ate	*[raskoret]
Martha ate	[marθəret]		

Social Variation

In the preceding section we discussed data drawn from studies in regional dialectology. While many researchers still maintain an interest in this field, much research in language variation has shifted, over the past 35 years or so, to **sociolinguistics**. This field is concerned with the interrelationship between the language of a group and its social characteristics (especially socioeconomic status and ethnicity). For example, working-class New Yorkers “drop their r’s” (i.e., delete post-vocalic [r]) in words like *forty-four* more often than middle-class New Yorkers do. It would be misleading, however, to say that regional dialectology and sociolinguistics are mutually exclusive fields of study. On the contrary, researchers in regional dialectology often include sociological information about their informants (e.g., age and education). Likewise, researchers in sociolinguistics must often take into account regional influences on the social dialects they are studying. Nevertheless, we can draw a few generalizations about why research in language variation has expanded from regional dialectology to include sociolinguistics, and about the different types of phenomena that sociolinguistics emphasizes.

Several trends developed in the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s that focused more and more attention on social variation. First, since regional dialectologists had categorized information all along according to such social variables as age and education, it was a natural step for linguists to become interested in social variables for their own sake. The one person who did the most to bring sociolinguistics to prominence was William Labov. His doctoral dissertation, completed in the mid-1960s, dealt with the social stratification of English in New York City. In particular, Labov correlated several different phonological variables (e.g., the deletion of post-vocalic [r]) with different social classes (i.e., upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-working, and lower-working). Among his innovations was the use of a pre-existing sociological classification system for his informants. That is, he used a model of social stratification developed independently within the field of sociology, whereas most regional dialectologists had classified their informants using more or less subjective criteria. Moreover, he attempted to collect data from four different styles of speech: casual, careful, reading, and formal. Finally, he tried to use the results of his studies to develop both linguistic and sociological theory, whereas many regional dialectologists were working without any particular attention to fundamental issues in linguistic theory.

Second, linguists found it impossible to deal with language variation without acknowledging the fact that listeners judge a speaker according to characteristics of the speaker’s dialect. For example, someone who says *I ain’t working this afternoon* may be judged as socially inferior to another person who says *I’m not working this afternoon*. Thus arose an interest in **standard** and **nonstandard** dialects. It is no simple matter to define the difference between a standard and a nonstandard variety of language. However, for our purposes, we can define a standard dialect as one that draws no negative attention to itself; that is, educated people would not judge a person speaking such a dialect as socially inferior, lacking education, and so forth. On the other hand, a nonstandard dialect does draw negative attention to itself; that

is, educated people might judge the speaker of such a dialect as socially inferior, lacking education, and so on. A nonstandard dialect can thus be characterized as having **socially marked** forms, such as *ain't* in the example cited earlier. A socially marked form is one that causes the listener to form a negative social judgment of the speaker.

It is important to understand that identifying a dialect as standard or nonstandard is a sociological judgment, not a linguistic one. If we say that Dialect X is nonstandard, we are saying that the educated members of the society in which X is spoken judge the speakers of X as inferior in some way, and associate this negative judgment with certain linguistic characteristics of X. We are not, however, saying that X is inferior linguistically in the sense that it is cruder, less well developed, and so forth than the standard. All dialects of all natural languages are rule governed and systematic. None is more or less developed than another; all are equally complex.

Let's look at a concrete example of the difference between a sociological and a linguistic judgment. Consider the reflexive pronouns in the following sentences.

- (8) John fed *himself*.
- (9) John fed *hissself*.
- (10) *John fed *heself*.

First of all, observe that (8) and (9) are used by speakers of English, but (10) isn't. In other words, (8) and (9) are part of English, but (10) isn't. This is a linguistic fact. Second, the pronominal forms in (8) and (9) are used by different groups of speakers. That is, they belong to different dialects. This, too, is a linguistic fact. Third, the utterance of sentence (8) goes unnoticed by educated speakers of the language; it draws no negative attention to the speaker; it is not socially marked. On the other hand, the utterance of (9) does not go unnoticed; it does draw negative attention to the speaker; it is, in fact, socially marked. These and the judgments that follow from them (e.g., (8) is standard, (9) is nonstandard) are sociological facts.

Third, this interest in nonstandard dialects and socially marked forms led quite naturally to an interest in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a nonstandard dialect spoken primarily by low-income, inner-city blacks. There were several reasons that AAVE became the focus of interest in the study of nonstandard dialects. For one thing, the civil rights movement and the integration of the public schools brought the language differences between lower-class blacks and middle-class whites into noticeable contrast. This led to concerns about how best to administer public education. Also, AAVE is thought to be the nonstandard dialect most different from standard English. Thus, it seemed reasonable for linguists to begin their description of nonstandard dialects with the one most distinct from standard English. In addition, the interest in AAVE was fueled by the controversy surrounding its origin. Some scholars maintained the traditional position that AAVE was no different from the dialect spoken by poor Southern whites. Others, however, who were studying Caribbean creoles, pointed out creole forms in modern-day AAVE and suggested that AAVE itself developed from a creole. (A **creole** is the native language of a group of speakers which has evolved from a **pidgin**, a mixture of two existing languages

brought into contact by trade or colonization.) Until recently, these factors focused attention on AAVE to the virtual exclusion of other nonstandard dialects of American English (for example, those of the deep South and Appalachia).

Fourth, research on nonstandard dialects in general and AAVE in particular led quite naturally to its application to practical problems in mass education. The relevance of such research is obvious. For example, a teacher is less likely to be concerned with a student who uses *sack* instead of *bag* (a purely regional distinction) than with a student who uses *Can't nobody tell me what to do* instead of *Nobody can tell me what to do* (a socially marked distinction). Likewise, nonstandard variations may result in a child's being diagnosed for language therapy or failing a standardized test. For example, a student who pronounces *these* with initial [d] instead of [ð] may be judged as having an "articulation problem." Because social variations in language are, rightly or wrongly, so strongly linked to how students are tested and evaluated, many sociolinguists have focused their efforts on communicating with teachers, test developers, and speech-language pathologists about the nature of nonstandard dialects.

Finally, while regional dialects are largely characterized by lexical variation, nonstandard dialects are more likely to be characterized by grammatical variation (i.e., variations in phonology, morphology, and syntax). Many linguists find grammatical variation of more interest than lexical variation because it tends to be more systematic and predictable. For example, given a form such as *submarine*, referring to a sandwich made on an oblong loaf of bread, no amount of linguistic theorizing would enable an observer to predict that other speakers might call the same object a *hero*, *hoogie*, *grinder*, or *poboy!* On the other hand, grammatical forms are more likely to reflect predictable variations, as we will see in the next three sections.

Exercise E

1. What criterion would a linguist use to determine that a language should be classified as a creole rather than as a pidgin?
2. Macauley (1994:174–75) cites the following forms from Tok Pisin, a pidgin language spoken in Papua, New Guinea.

TOK PISIN	ENGLISH
gras	grass
gras bilong fes	beard
gras bilong hed	hair
gras bilong pisin	feather
gras antap long ai	eyebrow
gras nogut	weed

- a. What strategies does Tok Pisin use to build vocabulary and to indicate possession?
- b. How does the meaning of *gras* in Tok Pisin differ from the meaning of *grass* in English?

Nonstandard Phonological Variation

As we have seen, not all phonological variation carries social weight. For example, a speaker who pronounces *caught* as [k^hɔt] would probably not form any negative social judgments about a speaker who pronounces the same word as [k^hat], at least not on the basis of this single form. Similarly, a speaker from New England whose dialect contains the Linking [r] Rule would probably not form a social judgment about a speaker whose dialect lacks this feature. However, some phonological variation is socially marked. Let's now look at some examples.

Substitution of [d] for [ð]. Consider the pronunciation of *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, and so on with initial [d] instead of [ð]. From a social perspective, a listener may associate such forms with speakers from, say, working-class sections of New York City. If the listener holds this group in low social esteem, he or she may label such forms as “bad” or “incorrect” English. As pointed out earlier, however, it is essential to try to separate social judgments from linguistic ones. Let's concentrate on examining such forms from a linguistic standpoint; that is, with the purpose of discovering, from a phonological perspective, *why* these particular forms are used by some speakers.

First, in what sense is the pronunciation of *these* as [diz] a predictable and systematic phonological variation? In order to answer this question, we can begin by comparing the features for /ð/ and /d/. The phoneme /ð/ is a voiced interdental fricative; /d/ is a voiced alveolar stop. Intuitively, it would seem more plausible for a substitution to occur between similar segments than between dissimilar segments. At first glance, /ð/ and /d/ seem to have little in common, since they differ in place and manner of articulation. On the other hand, both segments are voiced consonants. Note, moreover, that /ð/ and /d/ are very close in their places of articulation. (To confirm this, consult the consonant chart in Chapter 6.) Therefore, the place of articulation contrast between these two segments is not so great as it may initially seem.

But what about the contrast in the manner of articulation? In order to understand why a dialect might substitute [d], a stop, for [ð], a fricative, some additional background is required. Several pieces of evidence suggest that stops are more “natural” than fricatives, especially interdental fricatives such as /ð/. One such piece of evidence comes from language acquisition, which studies the order in which children acquire linguistic forms. Evidence from this field suggests that children acquire stops before they acquire fricatives, indicating that stops are somehow more “basic” consonants than fricatives. A second piece of evidence comes from language change, the study of how languages evolve historically. As a rule, the likelihood of finding a language which had alveolar stops in its consonant inventory and then later added interdental fricatives is much greater than that of finding a language which had interdental fricatives and then later added alveolar stops. Again, this indicates that alveolar stops are more basic than interdental fricatives. A third, related piece of evidence is the fact that languages without interdental fricatives are relatively easy to find—French, German, and some dialects of Spanish are a few examples—whereas languages without at least one alveolar stop are extremely rare. All of these facts, then,

tive such as [ð] is following a “natural” linguistic trend. This process, whereby a stop is substituted for a corresponding fricative, is termed **stopping**. (Having gone through this argument, try to determine, as an exercise, why words such as *think* and *throw* might be pronounced with initial [t] rather than [θ] in some dialects of American English.)

Consonant Cluster Reduction. Consonant Cluster Reduction is a phonological rule that reduces a series of two or more word-final consonants by deleting one of the consonants. More specifically, the second member of a consonant cluster (typically a stop) is deleted if the following word starts with a consonant. For example, *iced tea* /aɪst ti/, which contains the cluster /st/ followed by another consonant /t/, would become [aɪs ti] by the rule of Consonant Cluster Reduction. (Note that *iced tea* is, not surprisingly, often spelled *ice tea*.) Such reduction occurs in the running speech even of speakers of standard dialects. This can be confirmed through introspection—try saying *iced tea* at a normal rate of speech—or by listening to another person say it at a normal rate of speech. It is very difficult to enunciate the final [t] of *iced* without pausing between words, thereby creating an artificial speaking style.

Nonstandard dialects, however, often create socially marked forms by extending the environment of a rule that applies in the standard dialect, so that the rule applies in contexts where it did not previously apply. In order to see how such things occur, consider the sentence *He pushed the car* /hi puʃt ðə kɑr/. Note that *pushed* ends in a consonant cluster /ʃt/ and the next word starts with a consonant /ð/; thus Consonant Cluster Reduction can apply and delete the /t/. This rule can be formalized as follows:

$$C \rightarrow \emptyset / C _ \# C$$

This rule would delete the /t/ in *pushed the car* (since the cluster /ʃt/ is followed by a word-initial consonant, /ð/), but it would not delete the /t/ in *pushed a car* (since the cluster /ʃt/ is followed by a word-initial vowel, /ə/).

There are, however, nonstandard dialects of English in which *both* of the forms just mentioned would undergo Consonant Cluster Reduction. These dialects have generalized the Consonant Cluster Reduction rule so that it deletes the second member of a word-final consonant cluster, regardless of what kind of segment begins the next word. This rule can be formalized as follows:

$$C \rightarrow \emptyset / C _ \#$$

This rule in the nonstandard dialect applies in the same contexts as the rule in the standard dialect. However, it also applies in contexts that the standard dialect rule does not, namely where the consonant cluster is followed by a word beginning with a vowel (e.g., *He pushed a car* → *He push a car*) or by nothing at all (e.g., *He got pushed* → *He got push*).

Other Nonstandard Phonological Features. There are many examples of socially marked phonological variation too numerous to mention here; the following, however, constitute a representative sample. One is the substitution of [t] for [k], and vice-versa: [kémɑ:k] for *K-Mart*, [krédɪk] for *credit*, [rɪsk] for *wrist*, [ot] for *oak*, [dest] for *desk*, and so on. The segments [t] and [k] are very similar acoustically, especially when they occur before another consonant, as in *K-Mart Plaza*. A speaker who is only semiliterate (i.e., unfamiliar with the spelling of a word) might understandably perceive a word like *K-Mart* as ending in the phoneme /k/.

Another nonstandard phonological process is the substitution of [f] for [θ]: [maʊf] for *mouth*, [smɪf] for *Smith*, and so on. Like [t] and [k], [f] and [θ] are very similar acoustically. Moreover, the phoneme /f/ is much more common among the world's languages than is /θ/. Thus, a semiliterate speaker is likely to perceive the final segment in *Smith* as the more common /f/ than the less common /θ/. However, such a misinterpretation is not restricted to semiliters. LSU's football stadium has been nicknamed *Death Valley* (presumably out of wishful optimism for the "death" of the opposing team); the nickname, however, has been misperceived by some as *Deaf Valley*. Those who call it this claim that the name refers to the "deafening" noise during football games.

Another example is the reversal of two segments, one of which is typically a liquid (i.e., /l/ or /r/): [čɪldərn] for *children*, [kælvəri] for *cavalry*, and so on. The process by which two segments, features, or parts of a syllable are reversed is called **metathesis**.

Another example is the deletion of a liquid following a vowel: [hɛp] for *help*, [hod] for *bold*, and so on. This process is commonly known as **post-colic liquid deletion** and applies optionally in some nonstandard dialects. This process is responsible for the variant pronunciations of, for example, *Carol*/kæɾəl/: [kæɾə] (/l/ deleted), [kæə] (/r/ deleted), and [kæə] (both /l/ and /r/ deleted).

A final example of socially marked phonological variation is the devoicing of a word-final obstruent (stop, fricative, or affricate): [kɪlt] for *killed*, [əhólt] for *abold*, [hɛt] for *head*, and so on. The process of **final devoicing** is quite common among the world's languages. It applies (in one form or another) in both German and Russian, and has applied selectively in English earlier in its history, as can be seen in the pairs *spilled/spilt*, *dreamed/dreamt*, *learned/learnt*, *burned/burnt*, and so on.

Exercise F

1. Mark the following statements true or false.

- T F [t^hɪs] is a possible pronunciation for *this* in nonstandard English.
- T F [dɪŋk] is a possible form of *think* in some nonstandard dialects.
- T F Consonant Cluster Reduction is found only in nonstandard spoken dialects.
- T F [p^hæf] is a possible pronunciation of *path* in nonstandard English.

Continued

Exercise F Continued

2. In all varieties of English, certain consonants are deleted phonetically in certain environments. Consider the following data.

	PHONEMIC	PHONETIC
most people	/most pipəl/	[mos pipəl]
most of us	/most əv əs/	[most əv əs]
iced tea	/aɪst ti/	[aɪs ti]
iced a cake	/aɪst ə kek/	[aɪst ə kek]
eight people	/et pipəl/	[et pipəl]
six people	/sɪks pipəl/	[sɪks pipəl]

- Which forms show a systematic change between the phonemic and phonetic levels?
 - What do these forms have in common?
 - State in words the rule that describes this change.
 - Write the rule in formal notation.
3. Assume that the rule of Consonant Cluster Reduction in English deletes the second member of a consonant cluster. What restrictions must be placed on this general rule so that it predicts the following data (i.e., so that the ungrammatical forms are ruled out)?

<i>hand</i> /hænd/ → [hæn]	<i>help</i> /help/ → *[hɛl]
<i>lamp</i> /læmp/ → *[læm]	<i>hold</i> /hold/ → [hol]
<i>last</i> /læst/ → [læs]	<i>bulk</i> /bʌlk/ → *[bʌ]
<i>bent</i> /bent/ → *[bɛn]	

4. Which of the following phonological variations is not typically found in nonstandard English?
- [kemark] for *K-Mart* /kemart/
 - [dɛst] for *desk* /dɛsk/
 - [saʊf] for *south* /sauθ/
 - [hæθ] for *half* /hæf/
5. What phonological process accounts for the following forms, found in some nonstandard dialects of English?

	STANDARD	NONSTANDARD
business	[bɪznɪs]	[bɪdnɪs]
wasn't he	[wʌznɪ]	[wʌdni]
Disney	[dɪznɪ]	[dɪdni]

6. Identify the phonological process reflected by each of the following.
- Pulled /pʊld/ becomes the nonstandard form /pʊlt/.
 - Cassidy (1981) states that in some dialects *bronical* /bráɪnkəl/ is substituted for *bronchial* /bráŋkiəl/.
 - Tests* becomes the nonstandard form *tesses* /tesəz/.

Nonstandard Morphological Variation

Morphological variation refers to differences in word formation, especially those related to the inflection of nouns and verbs. Whereas many phonological processes

are common to all spoken dialects of English, variations in morphology tend to be restricted to particular social dialects. In general, morphological variation is more socially marked in speech than is phonological variation. However, morphological variation, like phonological variation, is also predictable and systematic. In fact, non-standard morphological forms often reflect more regular treatments of the noun and verb systems of English than their standard counterparts do, as we will see in the following examples.

Reflexive Pronouns. One example of nonstandard morphological variation was given in the exercises for Chapter 5. In Supplementary Exercise 4, we observed that some nonstandard dialects of English use the following system of reflexive pronouns.

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1st person	myself	ourselves
2nd person	yourself	yourselves
3rd person	herself/hisself	theirselves

This system is identical to the standard English system, with two exceptions: the third-person singular form *bisself* is used, instead of the standard English form *himself*; and the third-person plural form *theirselves* is used, instead of the standard English form *themselves*.

Again, if we set aside any social judgments that we may have about the non-standard forms, we can see that these forms are highly systematic from a linguistic perspective (and, in fact, are more predictable than the standard English forms *himself* and *themselves*). Note that the first- and second-person reflexive pronouns have as their base a possessive pronoun: *my*, *our*, or *your*. (The third-person singular feminine form, *herself*, can be interpreted as either possessive + *self* or objective + *self*.) In other words, given the first- and second-person forms, the principle for forming a reflexive pronoun in English appears to be the following: add *-self* or *-selves* to the possessive form. Following this rule would give us *bisself* and *theirselves* for the third-person forms. Therefore, from a linguistic perspective, the nonstandard forms *bisself* and *theirselves* are actually more systematic than the standard forms *himself* and *themselves*. The reflexive pronoun system illustrates quite pointedly the systematic nature of nonstandard morphological variation.

Omission of Final -s on Verbs. Consider the sentence *He walk home every day*. We can begin by comparing this sentence to its standard English counterpart, *He walks home every day*. One way to account for the nonstandard form *walk* is to hypothesize that a morpheme has been deleted, namely the {PRES} inflection that occurs in standard English as *-s* on the third-person singular form of present tense verbs. In order to understand why this morpheme is omitted in some nonstandard dialects, we need to look at the standard English system for the inflection of present tense verbs.

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1st person	I walk	We walk
2nd person	You walk	You walk
3rd person	He/She walks	They walk

Upon examining the standard English system, we can see immediately that most present tense verbs have no overt inflection for {PRES}. If we substitute the nonstandard forms (*He/She walk*) for the corresponding standard forms, we come out with a perfectly regular system (i.e., no present tense forms have an overt inflection). This regularization of the third-person present tense verb forms generalizes to all main verbs and auxiliaries in some nonstandard dialects of English, yielding forms like *He do* for *He does*, *He don't* for *He doesn't*, and *He have* for *He has*.

Other Nonstandard Morphological Features. Once again, more examples exist than can be detailed here. The following, however, are representative. One feature is the use of nonstandard past tense and past participial verb forms: for example, *see*, *seed*, or *seen* for *saw*; *come* for *came*; and *rid* for *rode*. (Atwood's *Survey of Verb Forms* is filled with such examples, owing primarily to older and relatively uneducated informants.) Another feature is the omission of -s on plural nouns (the morpheme {PLU}) and possessive NPs (the morpheme {POSS}): for example, *girl* for both *girls* and *girl's*. It is significant that in AAVE the -s endings representing {PRES}, {POSS}, and {PLU} are omitted with different frequencies. Specifically, {PRES} is omitted more frequently than {POSS}, and {POSS} is omitted more frequently than {PLU}. This indicates that the omission of -s is morphological rather than phonological. If it were phonological, all three morphemes would be omitted with equal frequency, since they are phonologically identical.

Another nonstandard morphological feature is the extension of one inflected form of *be* to all forms. Unlike other present tense verbs in English, which have a predominant form (without -s) and an exceptional form (with -s), *be* has three forms, all of which appear to be exceptional: *am*, *are*, and *is*. Thus, speakers of some nonstandard dialects regularize all present tense forms of *be* to one single form: for example, *I is*, *You is*, *We is*, and *They is*. Note that when this happens *be* is no longer an "irregular" verb (i.e., one with exceptional forms). The point is that nonstandard morphological variations, like nonstandard phonological variations, tend to reflect a highly systematic treatment of English.

Exercise G

1. *Ain't* fills a gap in the standard English system by providing an alternative contracted form for the phrase *I am not*. However, the use of *ain't* is not restricted to the first person subject in nonstandard dialects. Given the following data, in what way is the nonstandard system more regular than the standard one?

Exercise G *Continued*

STANDARD SYSTEM

(no form) we aren't
 you aren't you aren't
 he/she/it isn't they aren't

NONSTANDARD SYSTEM

I ain't we ain't
 you ain't you ain't
 he/she/it ain't they ain't

2. Some dialects of Appalachian English use the prefix {a} on certain forms. Based on the following data (adapted from Wolfram [1982]), state five constraints on the use of this prefix. (Some are phonological; others are morphological.)
- She kept a-callin' my name.
 - She woke up a-screamin'.
 - The bear come a-runnin' out of the woods.
 - She kept a-waterin' the lawn.
 - *She kept a-forgettin' my name.
 - *She kept a-askin' my name.
 - *She woke up a-screaming.
 - *They like a-sailin'.
 - *They shot the a-runnin' bear.
- †3. The following is taken from a church bulletin: *The deacon wives will be meeting on Thursday, April 11, in the uptown location.* Explain how the socially marked form in this passage arises. (Hint: The wives are not deacons.)
- †4. The morphemes {PRES}, {PLU}, and {POSS} are omitted with different frequencies in AAVE. Given the different frequencies of omission, the standard English sentence *Sam hates his sister's boyfriends* is most likely to show up in AAVE as _____.
- Sam hate his sister's boyfriends.
 - Sam hate his sister boyfriends.
 - Sam hates his sister boyfriends.
 - Sam hates his sister's boyfriend.
 - either (a) or (b)

Nonstandard Syntactic Variation

Like morphological variations, syntactic variations tend to be more socially marked than phonological variations, some of which are regional as well as social. Let's take a look at some specific nonstandard syntactic constructions.

Inversion in *wh*-Interrogatives. In some nonstandard dialects of English, an interrogative such as *What is it?* may be phrased as *What it is?* In order to demonstrate the relation between these two syntactic forms, we will need to make use of several concepts discussed in Chapter 4 (Syntax), namely underlying structure, surface structure, and transformation. With these concepts at hand, we can begin by analyzing the **derivation** of the standard English form *What is it?*; that is, by making some observations about the transformations that relate its underlying and surface structures.

Let us assume that, in the underlying structure of this interrogative, we have a sequence of elements like the following:

it - is - what

Note that this underlying structure differs from the surface form in two ways. First, the verb (*is*) follows the subject (*it*) in the underlying structure, but precedes it on the surface. Second, the *wh*-word (*what*) is in final position in the underlying structure, but in initial position on the surface. Each of these differences involves a transformation. Inflection Movement (I-Movement) moves the verb-form inflected for tense to the left of the subject. *Wh*-Movement moves the *wh*-word to clause-initial position. Applying each of these transformations yields the standard English form *What is it?*, as shown in the following derivation.

Underlying structure:	it - is - what
I-Movement:	is - it - what
<i>wh</i> -Movement:	<u>what - is - it</u>
	<i>What is it?</i>

How can we account for the nonstandard English structure, *What it is*? Let's assume that this form has the same underlying structure as its standard counterpart: it - is - what. What transformational rules are needed to relate this underlying structure to the surface form *What it is*? Only one: *wh*-Movement. Applying this transformation to the underlying structure would yield the surface form *What it is*?

Let's compare the standard and nonstandard derivations side by side. As we have seen, the difference between them can be explained by assuming that I-Movement applies in the standard derivation, but not in the nonstandard derivation. This situation is summarized here.

	<i>Standard English</i>	<i>Nonstandard English</i>
Underlying structure:	it - is - what	it - is - what
I-Movement:	is - it - what	(does not apply)
<i>wh</i> -Movement:	<u>what - is - it</u>	<u>what - it - is</u>
	<i>What is it?</i>	<i>What it is?</i>

At this point, it should be clear that the nonstandard derivation omits a step (I-Movement) that appears in the standard derivation. This should not be interpreted to mean that the nonstandard derivation is "deficient" or "incomplete" in some way. Rather, a dialect containing this nonstandard feature is perfectly rule governed and differs from standard English in a systematic and predictable way.

Double Negatives. Let's now take a look at the infamous double negative construction, exemplified by sentences such as *I don't have no money* (cf. standard English *I don't have any money*). This construction is significant not so much

because it is socially marked (which of course it is in Modern English), but because of the faulty reasoning usually associated with its prohibition.

Every school child is familiar with the following rule: double negatives are incorrect because two negatives make a positive. This statement of the rule can largely be traced to a highly influential book written by Robert Lowth in 1762, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Lowth's work was one of many similar collections of "dos and don'ts" about the English language which appeared during the eighteenth-century prescriptive grammar movement. Unfortunately, many of these proclamations were based on personal prejudices against certain structures (for example, Jonathan Swift objected to verb forms such as /distárbd/ instead of /distárbəd/ for *disturbed*) and on the notion that new forms (including words such as *banter*, *bully*, and *mob*) would corrupt the language. Moreover, many leaders of this movement believed that English should emulate Greek, Latin, and other systems which were perceived as more authoritative and rational than English.

Lowth's prohibition against double negatives illustrates this latter tendency, in that it attempted to make English conform to mathematical logic. According to Lowth, "Two Negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an Affirmative." Here Lowth was apparently generalizing the principle that the product of two negative numbers is a positive number: for example $(-2) \times (-2) = 4$. (Interestingly enough, Lowth could likewise have *defended* the double negative by analogy to mathematics, arguing that the sum of two negative numbers is itself a negative number: that is, two negatives reinforce, rather than cancel, each other.) The point is that Lowth proclaimed the double negative in English to be "illogical" not because it violates our linguistic system, but because it violates a principle from another system—mathematics.

If Lowth's reasoning were correct, we would expect certain things to follow from it. First, we would expect a sentence such as *I don't have no money* to mean 'I have some money.' Contrary to Lowth's prediction, however, this sentence means 'I don't have any money,' as any native speaker of English can point out. Second, we would expect human languages in general to shun double negative constructions. This, however, is not the case. If we turn to the present-day forms of languages other than English, we find that double negatives appear as a matter of course. For example, the standard English sentence *I don't want anything*, which contains one negative (the contracted form of *not*), has as its Spanish equivalent *No quiero nada*, where both *no* and *nada* indicate negation. Thus, there is nothing inherently deviant about the double negative construction. Moreover, if we look back at earlier stages of the English language, we find double negatives in the language of quite a few highly esteemed writers. The double negatives in (11–13) have been italicized.

- (11) Old English (King Alfred, the *Orosius*, ca. 880–890): "*ne bið ðær nænig ealo gebrowen mid Estum*" (literally 'not is there not-any ale brewed among Estonians'; Modern English 'no ale is brewed among the Estonians').
- (12) Middle English (Chaucer, the *Canterbury Tales*, ca. 1390): "he that is irous and wrooth, he *ne may nat* wel deme" (literally 'he that is angry and

wrathful, he not may not well judge'; Modern English 'he cannot judge well').

- (13) Early Modern English (Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, ca. 1600): "There's *never none* of these demure boys come to any proof" (Modern English 'Not one of these young boys amounts to anything').

From a historical perspective, then, it is difficult to say that the double negative construction was either socially or linguistically marked in earlier forms of English.

If, then, Lowth's analysis of double negatives is inaccurate, what actually led to the socially marked status of double negatives in Modern English? Briefly, here's what seems to have happened. In Old English, the double negative construction was obligatory, as it is in Modern Spanish. That is, the Old English equivalent of *I don't have no money* would have been grammatical, and the equivalent of *I don't have any money* would have been ungrammatical. By Shakespeare's time, the double negative construction had become optional. That is, the Early Modern English equivalents of *I don't have no money* and *I don't have any money* existed side by side, both fully grammatical. Apparently, however, the single negative construction somehow became associated with educated speakers, while the double negative became associated with uneducated speakers. This, of course, eventually led to the double negative construction being socially marked in Modern English. The point to keep in mind, however, is that sociolinguistic phenomena are a function of the interaction of linguistic and sociological forces; mathematical and logical systems have no bearing on them whatsoever.

Other Nonstandard Syntactic Features. There are many other socially marked syntactic constructions too numerous to detail here. The following, however, constitute a representative sample. Labov has determined that AAVE speakers can omit an inflected form of *be* only where standard English can contract it. Thus, in standard English *be* can be contracted in a construction such as *Do you know if it is his?* → *Do you know if it's his?*, but not in *Do you know what it is?* → **Do you know what it's?* Similarly, in AAVE *be* can be omitted in *Do you know if it is his?* → *Do you know if it his?*, but not in *Do you know what it is?* → **Do you know what it?*

Another nonstandard syntactic feature involves the treatment of main verb *be* in interrogatives such as *Do they be sick?* In standard English, I-Movement applies to auxiliaries to form an interrogative: *John has seen Mary* → *Has John seen Mary?* On the other hand, I-Movement never applies to main verbs: *John saw Mary* → **Saw John Mary?* Instead, when there is no auxiliary verb, a form of *do* takes the place of the missing auxiliary: *John saw Mary* → *John did see Mary* → *Did John see Mary?* Thus, standard English has a general rule for forming interrogatives: I-Movement applies to auxiliaries but not to main verbs; *do* appears when there is no overt auxiliary. There is, however, a major exception to this rule in standard English: main verb *be* behaves like an auxiliary rather than a main verb, in that it undergoes I-Movement. For example, *They are sick* → *Are they sick?*

Now consider what form we would get if main verb *be* behaved like all other main verbs, that is, not undergoing I-Movement and consequently triggering the

appearance of *do*: *They be sick* → *They do be sick* → *Do they be sick*? This is the non-standard counterpart of standard English *Are they sick*? In this case, the nonstandard dialect has regularized an exception in standard English, namely the treatment of main verb *be*. The nonstandard dialect treats main verb *be* exactly like all other main verbs.

A final example of a socially marked syntactic feature involves moving a negative auxiliary to sentence-initial position when the subject is an indefinite NP (e.g., *everyone*, *nobody*, and so on), as in *Everybody can't win* → *Can't everybody win*.

To summarize this section, socially marked grammatical variations are highly systematic from a linguistic perspective. They reflect predictable variations of standard English forms and are by no means “illogical” from the standpoint of how language actually works. Any negative judgments that we may have about nonstandard forms are based more on our social biases about the speakers who use them than on their linguistic structure.

Does this mean that linguists take an “anything goes” attitude toward language? That is, do linguists advocate the use of double negatives and other socially marked forms? We cannot speak for all linguists, of course, but our own point of view is that social judgments are just as real as linguistic judgments. That is, a form like *What it is?* is likely to elicit a negative social judgment from many listeners, even though they understand the meaning of the sentence. It would be foolhardy to pretend that such social judgments are nonexistent or unimportant. On the other hand, it would be just as misguided to claim that a structure like *What it is?* constitutes an illogical or inferior linguistic form. We believe that anyone who is in the business of teaching language and evaluating the language of others should understand the distinction between social and linguistic judgments, as well as the underlying regularity of many socially marked forms.

Exercise H

- One prescriptive rule states that the nominative case of a pronoun should be used after a form of main verb *be*: hence, *It is I*, *That is he*, and so on. However, most speakers, at least in an informal register, tend to use the objective case of a pronoun in these structures: *It's me*, *That's him*. Given the following data (where an asterisk marks an ungrammatical structure), what general principle do speakers appear to be following when they use the objective case pronoun following *be* instead of the nominative case?
 - The girl hit him.
 - *The girl hit he.
 - Please call me.
 - *Please call I.
 - I don't know her.
 - *I don't know she.
- Consider the following sentence: *That is not where they are now*. Which occurrences of inflected *be* could be omitted in AAVE?

Continued

Exercise H Continued

- †3. A freshman composition teacher corrects a student's sentence from *I asked her what did she want* to *I asked her what she wanted*. What syntactic rule of English accounts for the difference between the original version of the sentence and the revised version?
4. Which of the following was a goal of prescriptive grammar?
- To objectively describe the actual language of speakers.
 - To make English conform to classical languages such as Latin.
 - To indicate the geographical distribution of certain dialects.
 - To show how creole languages evolve from pidgin languages.
5. Consider the following data:
- Are they sick? (standard)
 - Do they be sick? (nonstandard)
 - Are they going? (standard)
 - Do they be going? (nonstandard)
 - Do they have a car? (both dialects)
 - Do they need money? (both dialects)

Label the following generalizations about *yes-no* questions as true or false.

- T F SE treats main verb *be* like other main verbs.
 - T F NSE treats main verb *be* like other main verbs.
 - T F NSE treats auxiliary *be* like a main verb.
 - T F SE treats main verb *have* like an auxiliary verb.
6. Consider the following interchange between a judge and the foreman of a jury.
- JUDGE: Have you reached a verdict?
 FOREMAN: We have, Your Honor.
 JUDGE: What say you?
- The judge's grammar differs from that of Modern English in the formulation of one syntactic rule. What is that rule, and how is it different from Modern English?
7. Macauley (1994:76) writes:

In French it is the reduction of negative marking to a single form that is stigmatized. In "correct" (that is, socially approved) French the simple negative consists of two parts, *ne* and *pas*, as in *Je ne sais pas* ("I don't know"). Many French people now simply use *pas* alone for the negative in everyday conversation, much to the disgust of purists.

How does this fact present a problem for Lowth's proclamation about double negatives?

Language and Gender

So far we have dealt with linguistic variation that correlates with socioeconomic status and ethnicity. In addition to these social variables, however, linguists have also investigated the relation between language and **gender**: the social and psychological roles, attitudes, and traits associated with biological sex. The field of language and gender has focused on two questions. First, what correspondences can be drawn between a speaker's language and gender? (Can we generalize, for example, about

the degree to which males and females use indirectness?) Second, is language sexist? That is, do certain linguistic forms (such as the use of *mankind* to refer to all people) reflect, or perhaps promote, an antifemale bias? In this section we will focus on issues that have been raised by investigations of the first question, referring the reader to supplementary readings for discussions of the second question.

Gender as a Social Variable

We have already seen that socioeconomic status and ethnicity are related to the use of standard and nonstandard linguistic forms. For instance, suppose we were to study two groups of 30-year-old white males: one upper-middle class and one lower-working class. A typical finding would be that lower-working class speakers are more likely than upper-middle class speakers to omit the *-s* on the third-person singular form of the verb (e.g., *He don't* for *He doesn't*). This is the expected result: other things being equal (in this example, age and ethnicity), the use of nonstandard forms increases among speakers of lower socioeconomic status.

What happens, though, when gender is introduced as an additional variable? A number of studies have found that, within a given socioeconomic class, female speakers are more likely to use standard forms than male speakers. For example, lower-working class women are more likely than lower-working class men to retain third-person singular *-s* (e.g., *He doesn't* rather than *He don't*). In some cases, in fact, the language of women patterns more like that of the men in the next-highest class.

This general tendency for women to use standard forms more often than men (or, stated conversely, for men to use nonstandard forms more often than women) has emerged in studies of a number of linguistic variables. For example, Labov (1966) found that New York City men were more likely than women to employ stopping (i.e., substitution of [t] and [d] for [θ] and [ð], respectively). Other forms that have been studied, with similar findings, include post-vocalic [r] deletion, the use of medial and word-final [ʔ] for /t/ (e.g., [baʔəl] for *bottle*), Consonant Cluster Reduction, omission of the {POSS} and {PLU} morphemes, and multiple negatives.

Researchers such as Peter Trudgill (1972, 1983) have offered several explanations for gender differences in the frequency of standard and nonstandard forms. The greater use of standard forms may reflect women's traditional role as caregivers to children and a concern with transmitting more highly valued forms to the next generation. The use of standard forms may also offer women a way of achieving or signalling a higher social status when other paths (such as greater earning power) have been closed off to them. Along other lines, Trudgill has proposed that middle- and working-class men attach "covert prestige" to their use of nonstandard forms, which may reflect their association of these forms with masculinity and strength. This theory is supported by the fact that men tend to over-report their use of nonstandard forms; that is, they claim to use even more nonstandard forms than they actually do.

Gender Patterns within Standard English

In addition to differences in the use of standard and nonstandard forms, other differences between men and women's language have also been investigated, many of

them as the result of Robin Lakoff's influential work *Language and Women's Place* (1975). Lakoff proposed that there is a set of traits which distinguish women's language from men's language, among them a greater use of tag questions, hedges (e.g., *sort of, you know, I guess*), question intonation on declarative structures, indirect speech acts, euphemisms (e.g., *powder room* for *toilet*), "empty" adjectives and intensifiers (e.g., *that is SUCH an ADORABLE puppy!*), and specialized vocabularies in domains such as color terms (e.g., *magenta* and *periwinkle* for shades of purple and blue).

Lakoff based her claims on her own impressions and personal observations rather than on empirical study. Consequently, much subsequent research has attempted to test the accuracy of her perceptions. One finding has been that Lakoff's claims do reflect common stereotypes about women's language. For example, people presented with a cartoon caption (minus the cartoon) like *That is SUCH an ADORABLE puppy!* and asked to guess the speaker's gender will usually identify the speaker as a woman. Other research has been more concerned with confirming whether or not women's language actually displays the traits proposed by Lakoff. This research has borne out some of her claims to varying degrees. In some studies, for example, women have been found to use comparatively more hedges, fewer taboo terms for sexual and bodily functions, and more indirect speech acts. On the other hand, studies of question intonation and tag questions have yielded mixed results, with some studies finding gender differences but others not.

In addition to the linguistic traits proposed by Lakoff, other patterns have also been studied, such as those involving conversation and other interaction. For example, a number of studies of classroom behavior have found that boys talk more than girls and that teachers are likely to give more attention (both positive and negative) to boys. Such differences persist to adulthood, when men tend to dominate situations such as question-and-answer periods after lectures. Studies of conversations between men and women have also revealed that men tend to take longer "turns" throughout the conversation and have a greater tendency to interrupt women than vice versa. Women, on the other hand, tend to ask more questions and provide frequent "support indicators" for the other speaker—expressions like *yeah, um-hm, and right*.

Gender patterns, where found, have naturally given rise to attempts at their explanation. Following Lakoff, some analysts have associated the (purported) traits of women's language with powerlessness, uncertainty, and deference. Under this view, for example, hedging is seen as a sign of the speaker's tentativeness. In fact, one extension of this view is that "women's" language is actually the language used by powerless speakers of either gender; "women's" language reflects the fact that women have tended to occupy less powerful positions. This hypothesis is reinforced by studies that have discovered "women's" language used by men in subordinate roles and "men's" language used by women in powerful roles.

Other analysts have taken a different approach, arguing that women's language reflects a social interaction style that is different from, but not inferior to, that of men. Under this view, women's language reflects their concern with building cooperation, showing empathy, and facilitating communication. This approach, for example, treats the more frequent use of questions among women not as a sign of deference and uncertainty, but instead as a strategy for showing interest in and engaging the

other speaker. Similarly, studies of children playing have revealed that boys tend to give each other direct orders (*Put that piece here!*), while girls tend to use more indirect, “inclusive” language (*Why don't we see if this piece fits here?*). From a social interaction perspective, these linguistic differences may reflect differences between a more individualistic, competitive mode more typical of males and a more communal, cooperative mode more typical of females.

Some interest has developed in applying findings about language and gender to solving problems in cross-gender communication at the personal, institutional, and professional levels. For example, as discussed in Deborah Tannen's work *You Just Don't Understand*, many misunderstandings between couples can be traced to differences in male and female conversational styles. Similarly, language and gender studies have been applied in the teaching profession to promote more egalitarian treatment of male and female students. Differences in male and female communication styles have also been used to analyze communication problems encountered by females entering traditionally male fields such as management.

Exercise I

1. A catalogue uses the following terms to describe color selections for riding breeches: “beige, caramel, fawn, sage, moss, slate, and pearl.” Is this catalogue designed to appeal primarily to men or women? Explain.
2. Man or woman? “That X is so cute!” Explain.
- †3. Are men or women more likely to phrase an order in a restaurant as “Give me a cup of coffee” (as opposed to “I'd like a cup of coffee”)? Explain.
4. Consider Figure 7.7, showing the percentage of times that *ain't* was substituted for other verb forms during casual conversation. The results are broken down by both socioeconomic status and gender.
 - a. Based on this graph, what generalization can be made about the relative use of non-standard forms among males and females?
 - b. Among speakers of different socioeconomic status?
5. Tannen (1990:153–54) cites a study in which children (ages 6–14 years) produced the following utterances while they were engaged in making objects by hand. Speculate on whether each utterance was produced by a boy or a girl, and explain your choice.
 - a. Gimme the pliers!
 - b. Man, don't come *in* here where I *am*.
 - c. Maybe we can slice them like that.
 - d. We gotta find some more bottles.
 - e. Get off my steps.
 - f. Let's ask her, “Do you have any bottles?”
 - g. Give me that, man. After that, after you chop 'em, give 'em to me.
 - h. Get off my steps.
 - i. Let's move *these* out *first*.

Continued

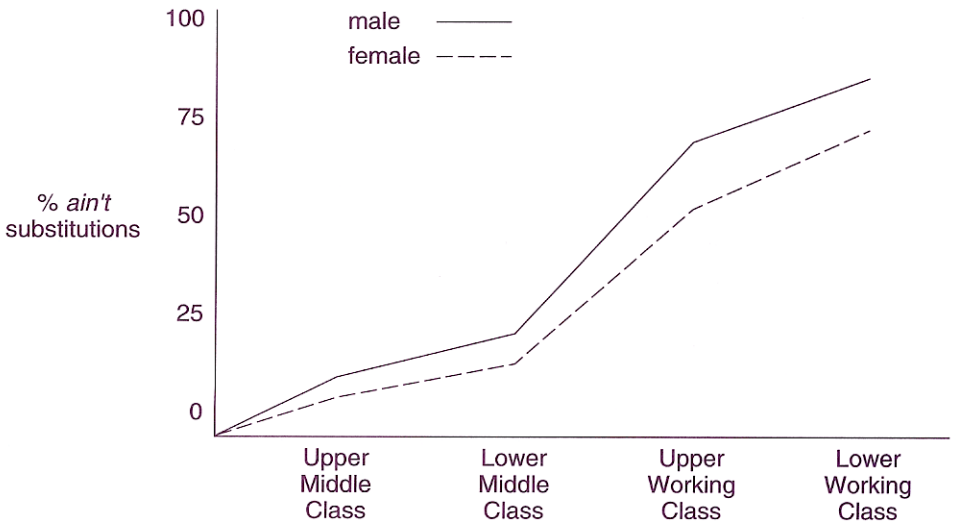


FIGURE 7.7 Substitutions of *ain't* for Other Verb Forms During Casual Conversation

Exercise I Continued

6. Tannen (1990:242) cites the following passages that were used to describe vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro during the 1984 campaign:

An article in *Newsweek* . . . quoted a Reagan aide who called Ferraro “a nasty woman” who would “claw Ronald Reagan’s eyes out.” . . . She was credited with “a striking gift for tart political rhetoric, needling Ronald Reagan on the fairness issue and twitting the Reagan-Bush campaign for its reluctance to let Bush debate her.” . . . One headline [in another source] called her “spunky,” another “feisty.”

Why did Tannen choose these passages to support her claim that “gender distinctions are built into the language. The words available to us to describe women and men are not the same words” (243)? (Hint: What particular words would seem odd or inappropriate if used to describe a male politician, and why?)

Stylistic Variation

Earlier in this chapter, we looked at linguistic features that vary from one group to the next. In this section, we will look at stylistic variation—that is, systematic variations in the language of any one speaker, depending upon the occasion and the participants in the interchange. Different styles or **registers** range from extremely formal to quite informal.

An analogy can be drawn between stylistic variation in language and variation in dress. For example, if Professor Smith goes on a job interview for a teaching position—a fairly formal encounter with an unfamiliar audience—he is likely to wear a dark suit, a conservative tie, and black dress shoes. If he gets the job, however, it is unlikely that he will continue to dress in this same manner while teaching from day to day. Rather, he is likely to dress more informally, perhaps in a sweater, trousers, and loafers. And, if he goes to a backyard barbecue at the house of one of his colleagues, he is likely to wear shorts, a tee-shirt, and tennis shoes.

Although Smith's manner of dress changes according to the situation and the participants, these changes have in common the fact that they reflect what is appropriate for his role in each situation, the activities he expects to participate in, and the impression he wants to make on the other participants. In this regard, his navy blue suit is not "better" than his Bermuda shorts in any absolute sense. Rather, the suit is more appropriate for the job interview, while the Bermuda shorts are more appropriate for the backyard barbecue. (Anyone who has ever looked into a closetful of clothes and declared, "I don't have a thing to wear" was actually saying, "I don't have anything to wear that is appropriate for this particular occasion.") Moreover, variations in dress are largely automatic; that is, they do not require a lot of conscious thought. For example, while Smith might decide to wear sandals instead of tennis shoes to the barbecue, it probably would never occur to him to wear his sandals on his hands. Likewise, while he may have to make a conscious decision about which suit to wear to the job interview, the decision to wear some suit is relatively unconscious. In other words, we move from one style to another without giving it a lot of conscious thought, so long as we are familiar with the conventions of each style.

Similar observations can be made about stylistic variation in language. First of all, linguistic style is a matter of what is **appropriate**. Like variation in our manner of dress, stylistic variations in language cannot be judged as appropriate or not without reference to the participants in the interchange (i.e., speaker and listener or reader and writer). For example, you would not speak to a 5-year-old child, an intimate friend, and a professor using the same style of speech. Using the term *elemosynary* 'charitable' would probably be inappropriate for the child and the friend, while using *number one* 'urinate' would probably be inappropriate for the friend and the professor. Moreover, stylistic variations in language are largely automatic, in that we do not normally have to stop and think about which style to shift into next. For example, even though many Americans are given to peppering their conversations with "four-letter words" occasionally, very few speakers have to consciously suppress such forms when they are talking to their mother, the president of their company, or a store clerk. In short, shifting styles is essentially automatic and unconscious, and is governed by the concept of appropriateness.

Differences in formality tend to form a continuum rather than a discrete set of categories. Therefore, even though it is fairly easy for an observer to determine when two styles are different, it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear boundary between two styles. The best we can do is identify the relative formality of a particular form (i.e., state the circumstances in which it would be appropriate) and determine the type of variation it represents: lexical, phonological, morphological, or syntactic.

With these points in mind, let's take a look at some different types of stylistic variation.

Stylistic Lexical Variation

One rather obvious stylistic dimension that speakers vary from one situation to another is vocabulary. When speaking or writing in a more formal register, our word choice may lean toward polysyllabic words rather than their shorter equivalents. For example, someone writing a letter of application for a job may close with a phrase like *Thank you for your consideration*. In more informal correspondence, the same person may use *Thanks for your time* to express the same idea. In the same way, a person may use connectives such as *however*, *therefore*, and *thus* in a more formal register, and use *but* and *so* in a less formal one. Similarly, idiomatic expressions such as *let the cat out of the bag*, *kick the bucket*, *make the grade*, and *give me a break* are characteristic of more informal registers. Likewise, words borrowed from Latin and Greek tend to be more formal than native Germanic lexical items: for example, *canine* (from Latin) rather than *dog*; *thermal* (from Greek) rather than *heat*; *dental* (from Latin) rather than *tooth*; and *lexical* (from Greek) rather than *word*.

Stylistic Phonological Variation

The application (or nonapplication) of various phonological rules also correlates with changes in register. In particular, neutralization rules (i.e., those that obliterate the distinction between segments) and deletion rules tend to be suppressed in more formal types of speaking. For example, Flapping, which reduces both /t/ and /d/ to [ɾ], may be suppressed, so that *latter* is pronounced with a [t] and *ladder* with a [d] (rather than both being pronounced [læɾər]). Likewise, English has a rule of Vowel Neutralization that reduces all unstressed vowels to [ə], so that *affect* /æf'ekt/ and *effect* /if'ekt/ are both ordinarily pronounced [əf'ekt]; speakers often suppress this rule in very formal registers. Likewise, Consonant Cluster Reduction may be suppressed, so that the /t/ in *soft drink* is pronounced. Finally, the **deletion of unstressed syllables** (e.g., [mémbrə] for *remember*) may be suppressed, resulting in “hypercorrect” pronunciations such as [eləméntəri] for *elementary* or [mæθəmæ'tɪks] for *mathematics*.

The suppression of such rules in informal settings, however, can have unintended effects. One of the authors, Frank Parker, had a colleague whom he first encountered in an informal conversation in the hallway. After listening to him speak for a few minutes, Parker inferred that he was not a native speaker of English. Later, after learning that this fellow was a native of Chicago, Parker realized what had given him his initial impression: the colleague systematically (and quite unnaturally) suppressed rules like Flapping, Consonant Cluster Reduction, and Vowel Neutralization in *all* styles of speech.

These examples illustrate two points worth emphasizing. First, pronunciations characterized by phonological neutralization and deletion do not reflect “careless” speech; on the contrary, they reflect a style of speech appropriate for informal registers. Second, it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that informal styles are

appropriate only for informal occasions, but that formal styles are appropriate for all occasions. The latter half of this proposition is false, as we have seen from the example of the colleague from Chicago. Using a formal register in casual situations is just as inappropriate as using a casual style on formal occasions.

Stylistic Morphological Variation

The formation of words can also exhibit stylistic variation. One of the features most commonly associated with more informal registers is contraction: for example, *I'm* for *I am* and *you're* for *you are*. Note, however, that contraction of a lexical NP (e.g., *John'll* for *John will*) seems to be more informal than contraction of a pronoun (e.g., *he'll* for *he will*). Moreover, contraction in speech is characteristic of all but the most formal styles. For example, even when being interviewed for a job, you might be more likely to say *I'll do it immediately* rather than *I will do it immediately*. In fact, most people would have to concentrate very carefully in order to block contraction in speech.

Another morphological characteristic of informal registers is the use of clipped forms: for example, *psych* for *psychology*, *econ* for *economics*, and *comp lit* for *comparative literature*. Note that in an academic treatise on compulsive behavior you might find the term *sports fanatic*, but in the sports section of the newspaper you would see *sports fan*. Once again, contracted and shortened forms are no more "careless" than their lengthier counterparts; rather, they are perfectly appropriate in more informal speech and writing.

Stylistic Syntactic Variation

Changes in syntax may also occur as a function of changes in register. For example, a speaker in a job interview might ask *In which department will I be working?* Having gotten the job, however, the same speaker might ask a colleague *Which department do you work in?* Notice that in shifting from a relatively formal to a more informal register, the speaker has placed the preposition *in* at the end of the clause, rather than at its beginning. The more formal structure, with *in* in initial position, may reflect the speaker's awareness of a prescriptive rule: don't end a sentence with a preposition. This prohibition originated with the eighteenth-century prescriptive grammarians; it was based on an attempt to model English after Latin, a language in which prepositions cannot appear in sentence-final position. (In fact, the word *preposition* comes from a combination of Latin morphemes meaning 'put before [NPs].') Likewise, the use of *whom* for *who* in the objective case is characteristic of more formal styles. These two variables (moving a preposition to initial position and substituting *whom* for *who*) interact to form a continuum from formal to casual: for example, *For whom do you work?* → *Whom do you work for?* → *Who do you work for?*

Another informal syntactic pattern is omission in interrogatives. Such omission forms another continuum from relatively formal to more informal: for example, *Do you want another drink?* → *You want another drink?* → *Want another drink?* The rule here seems to be (a) omit the auxiliary (in this case *do*) and (b) omit *you*. It is clear, however, that these omissions are absolutely rule governed, since the subject

you cannot be omitted unless the auxiliary has been omitted (cf. **Do want another drink?*). Once again, the more informal syntactic constructions discussed in this section do not constitute “careless,” “sloppy,” or “incorrect” English. The key to their use is appropriateness. Suppose, for example, that you knock on a friend’s door and a voice from inside asks *Who’s there?* You respond with *It is I* (rather than *It’s me*). The use of this extremely formal construction (with a nominative case pronoun following an uncontracted form of *be*) is clearly inappropriate in this case.

Before leaving these examples of stylistic variation, we want to make one final point concerning the central concept of appropriateness. All of the examples we have covered in this section on stylistic variation involve standard English. The only difference between, say, *Who did you speak to?* and *To whom did you speak?* is a matter of register. There are times, however, when the use of even nonstandard forms is appropriate. For example, a black adolescent from the inner city would in all likelihood be ostracized by his friends on the street if he were to address them in standard English, no matter how informal the style. He would be better off speaking AAVE under the circumstances, because anything else would be inappropriate. Roger Shuy, a well-known sociolinguist, has told a similar story about his experiences. While in college, he got a summer job working on a loading dock in his home town. At first, he was shunned by his co-workers, lower-working class men who worked on the dock year round. The fact that he was excluded from their circle bothered him and pretty soon he figured out the problem: he was speaking standard English, which was inappropriate in this situation. Once he started using some nonstandard forms (e.g., *ain’t*, *be don’t*, *me and him went*, etc.), he was accepted into the group.

Exercise J

1. When a speaker attempts to emulate a stylistic register that he or she is not completely familiar with, a phenomenon known as **structural hypercorrection** may result. This term describes the use of a structure associated with a more formal register in a linguistic environment where it is not typically used. Now consider the following data.
 - A. To whom should I speak?
 - B. Whom did you see?
 - C. Whom is taking you to dinner?
 - a. Which sentence illustrates structural hypercorrection?
 - b. What principle has the speaker of these sentences apparently learned?
 - c. What principle has the speaker failed to learn?
 - †2. In one of her comedy routines, Lily Tomlin introduced the character of Ernestine, a rather obnoxious telephone operator. A typical utterance from Ernestine might be *Is this the party to whom I was just speaking to?*
 - a. How would you render this utterance in a more informal style?
 - b. Which forms and constructions does Tomlin use to help characterize Ernestine’s personality?
 3. What changes might occur in the following sentence if it were spoken in a more informal style: *From whom is he taking a psychology course?*
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Summary

The theory of language variation makes use of such concepts as regional, social, and stylistic variation; dialect; social markedness; standard and nonstandard forms; gender; and register. We have seen that one variety of language can differ from another in terms of its lexicon, phonology, morphology, and syntax. Perhaps most importantly, we have seen that language variation is highly systematic, with nonstandard forms often reflecting a more predictable system than their standard counterparts.

Supplementary Readings

- Cassidy, F. (1985, 1992, 1996). *Dictionary of American regional English*, 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dillard, J. (1972). *Black English: Its history and usage in the United States*. New York: Random House.
- Fasold, R. (1984). *The sociolinguistics of society*. New York: Blackwell.
- Fasold, R. (1990). *The sociolinguistics of language*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Graddol, D., and Swann, J. (1989). *Gender voices*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- McDavid, R. I. (1958). The dialects of American English. In W. N. Francis (Ed.), *The Structure of American English* (pp. 480–543). New York: Ronald Press.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: William Morrow.
- Wolfram, W., Adger, C. T., and Christian, D. (1999). *Dialects in schools and communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Wolfram, W., and Schilling-Estes, N. (1998). *American English: Dialects and variation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

You are now prepared to read all of these works. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes is a recent introductory text offering treatments of regional, social, and gender variation in American English. McDavid is an accessible overview of early regional dialectology in the United States. Cassidy is the result of over 30 years of research on regional expressions found in the United States; these three volumes (the first of five) cover those terms beginning with the letters A–O. The books by Fasold are in-depth texts covering the sociology of language (where linguistic factors are brought to bear on the study of society) and sociolinguistics (where social factors are brought to bear on the study of linguistics), respectively. Dillard is a thorough account of the purported creole origins of AAVE. Wolfram, Adger, and Christian is an excellent discussion of dialect issues that concern professionals in the language arts and speech-language pathology. Graddol and Swann and Tannen discuss language and gender from several different perspectives.

Supplementary Exercises

1. Mark the following statements true or false.
 - a. T F Linking [r] is a phonological feature of Southern English.
 - b. T F Male speakers are more likely to use nonstandard forms (e.g., [dɪs] for *this*) than are female speakers.
 - c. T F Girls tend to use more direct directives (e.g., *Put that piece here*) than boys do.
 - d. T F Dialects of different languages are mutually unintelligible.