

Session 1: *Language, varieties, dialects and accents*

“Language is a purely human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.”
Sapir (1921)

- ▶ Neutral term: *variety* for any specific form of language.

You and dialects

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- ▶ Possibly relevant questions: If you or your relatives speak a dialect, do you plan to teach it to your children? Do you see it as an advantage or a disadvantage? If you haven't been exposed to dialects, do you regret this? Should dialects be given a higher status at home/in schools/in society?

Dictionary definitions

- (1) Language:
 - a. a system of expression by spoken sounds or conventional symbols.
 - b. the faculty for the use of such systems.
 - c. the language of a particular nation or people.
 - d. ...
 - (2) Dialect: a form of a language spoken in a particular area, distinguished by its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation
- ▶ (Source: The Collins paperback English dictionary, second edition, 1990)

Accents vs. Dialect

Accents vs. Dialect

- (3) Trudgill (2000: 5):
- a. The term *dialect* refers, strictly speaking, to differences between kinds of language which are differences of vocabulary and grammar as well as pronunciation.
 - b. The term *accent*, on the other hand, refers solely to differences of pronunciation, and it is often important to distinguish clearly between the two.

Classic data and case studies: Scandinavian varieties

- (4)
 - a. Hun sidder i vinduet og ser ud over gaden. [Danish]
 - b. Hun sitter i vinduet og ser ut over gatan.
[Norwegian]
 - c. Hon sitter i fönstret och ser ut över gatan. [Swedish]

Classic data and case studies: Scandinavian varieties

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[Norwegian]
 - c. Hon sitter i fönstret och ser ut över gatan. [Swedish]
- ▶ Danish and Norwegian: shared vocabulary, considerable differences in pronunciation
 - ▶ Swedish and Norwegian: considerable differences in vocabulary, but more similar pronunciation

Classic data and case studies: Scandinavian varieties

Mutual intelligibility:

- ▶ Danes and Swedes claim good understanding of Norwegian.
- ▶ Danes
 - ▶ claim to understand Norwegian much better than Norwegians claim to comprehend Danes.
 - ▶ claim to understand Swedes better than Swedes claim to understand either Danes or Norwegians
- ▶ Poorest mutual comprehension: Danes and Swedes.
- ▶ Best mutual comprehension: Norwegians and Swedes.

Cf. Romaine (2000, 11–13)

Classic data and case studies: Yugoslavia

- ▶ Serbo-Croatian
- ▶ Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian (BCS)
- ▶ Different preferences in vocabulary, different scripts (Roman vs. Cyrillic)

Classic data and case studies: China

- ▶ One Chinese language
- ▶ Many dialects are mutually unintelligible.

Classic data and case studies: China



Picture credit: Wu Yue / CC-BY-SA-3.0

Classic data and case studies: China

- ▶ One Chinese language
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- ▶ “A language is a dialect with an army and navy.” Max Weinreich (1945)

Dialects in English

Dialect area	Dominating towns
North-east	Newcastle
Merseyside	Liverpool
North-west Midlands	Manchester
West Midlands	Birmingham
Central South-west	Bristol
Home Counties	London

Dialects in English



Map 2. Modern English dialect areas

Dialects in English

	London	Manchester	Hyde, Cheshire
<brush>	[brʌʃ]	[brʊʃ]	[brəɪtʃ]
<such>	[sʌtʃ]	[sʊtʃ]	[sɪtʃ]
<tough>	[tʌf]	[tʊf]	[tɒf]
<put>	[pʊt]	[pʊt]	[pʊr]

North American dialects



Map 3. Modern North American dialect areas

Dialects vs. Language in English

- ▶ Consider German-English-Scots-American: Which of these are languages? (Example courtesy of Trousdale 2010, 7)

Dialects vs. Language in English

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- ▶ Dialects and good and bad language

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(5) AAVE

- a. Bruce be running when I leave for work.
- b. Your phone bill be high, don't it?

Dialects vs. Language in English

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(5) AAVE

- a. Bruce be running when I leave for work.
- b. Your phone bill be high, don't it?

- (6)
- a. 'It is usually the cases that Bruce's running is in progress/Bruce begins to run when I leave for work'
 - b. 'Your phone bill is usually high, isn't it?'

The Standard

- ▶ A standard language is always an issue of sociopolitics.
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- ▶ Wide across-speaker agreement

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- ▶ Standard languages typically fulfill a particular set of functions (e.g., usage in media, education).
- ▶ Wide across-speaker agreement
- ▶ Who sets the standard?

Variance in the standard

- ▶ written vs. spoken
- ▶ regional differences

Many standards?

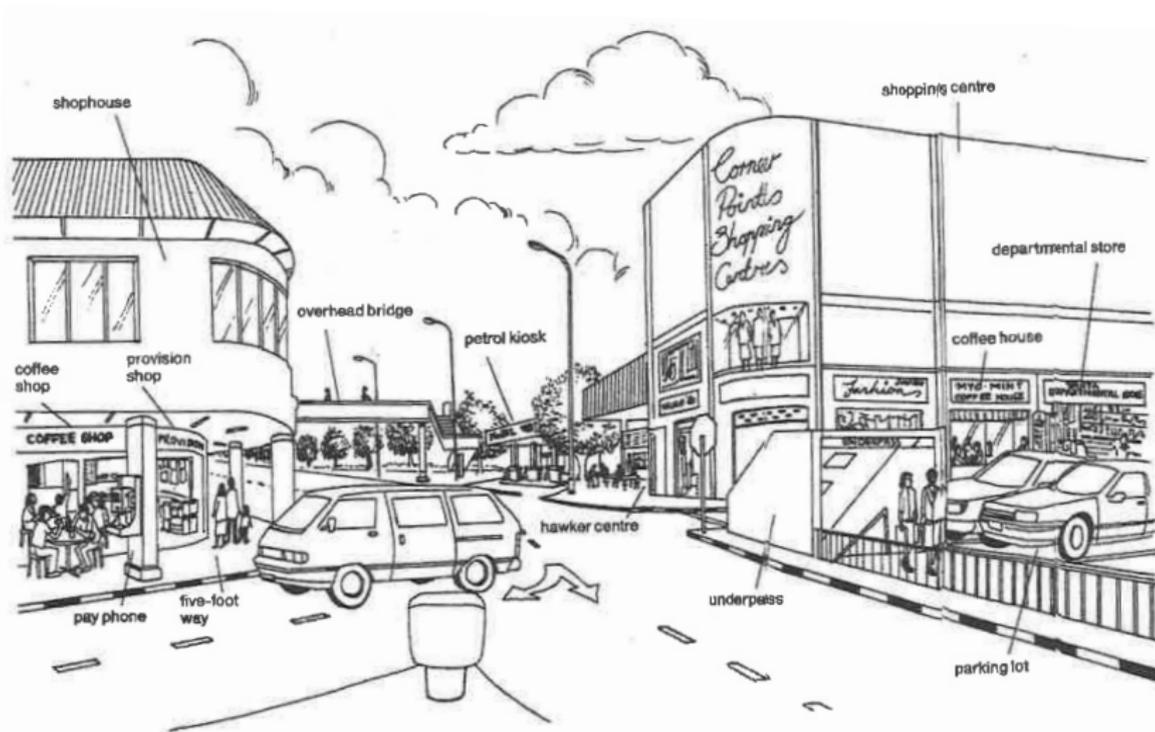


Figure 4 A Singaporean–Malaysian street scene, including a *petrol kiosk*
(from *Times-Chambers Essential English Dictionary*, Singapore 1997: 987)

Many standards?

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- ▶ Please take five minutes to answer this question in written form.

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- ▶ Please take five minutes to answer this question in written form.
- ▶ Pronunciation: *ate* /eɪt/ (rhyme: *mate*) vs. /et/ (rhyme: *Met*)
- ▶ Grammar: *They had gotten used to it.* vs. *They had got used to it.*
- ▶ Vocabulary: *Put it in the boot/trunk.*

A list

8	car park	parking lot	3
9	the baker's opposite	the bakery	4
9	lot	bunch	4
10	shan't	won't	6
11	her lot	her crowd	7
13	sherbet lemon	lemon drop	10
16	motorbike	motorcycle	14
16	dustbin	trashcan	14
19	bobble hats	bonnets	18
19	roundabout	carousel	18
19	cooker	stove	19
20	punch-bag	punching bag	20
20	sellotape	scotch tape	20
21	mummy	mommy	21
21	cine-camera	video camera	22
21	video recorder	VCR	22
22	cinema	movies	22

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References I

- Romaine, S. (2000). *Language in Society. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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