

# LINGUISTICS FOR NON-LINGUISTS: A Primer with Exercises, 4/e

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Frank Parker, Louisiana State University (Retired)  
Kathryn Riley, Illinois Institute of Technology

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# *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, ethnic, and gender-related** 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). This chapter looks at some examples of these types of variation.

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 and ethnic 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: the way language reflects regional, social, and stylistic influences. 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.

### *Language Universals, Languages, Dialects, and Idiolects*

In Chapters 3 through 6, we have looked at language from the perspective of its different components—semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology. From another perspective, the study of linguistics can be divided into other domains, depending on what group of speakers we are looking at. One such domain is **language universals**, those categories and rules that all human languages, past and present, have in common. For example, all known languages use the categories noun and verb; in languages where adjectives and nouns show agreement, it is always the adjective that changes to agree with the noun (not vice versa); if a language has a color system, it distinguishes at least black and white; if it has three colors, the third will be red; all languages have rules that depend upon structural relationships among words, not just on the order of words; and so on.

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 group (e.g., speakers of American English, British English, Appalachian English, African American English, and so on). A final domain is the **idiolect**, the linguistic system of a particular speaker (e.g., the linguistic system of Oprah Winfrey, Jay Leno, or Katie Couric).

All but the last of these domains are of 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.

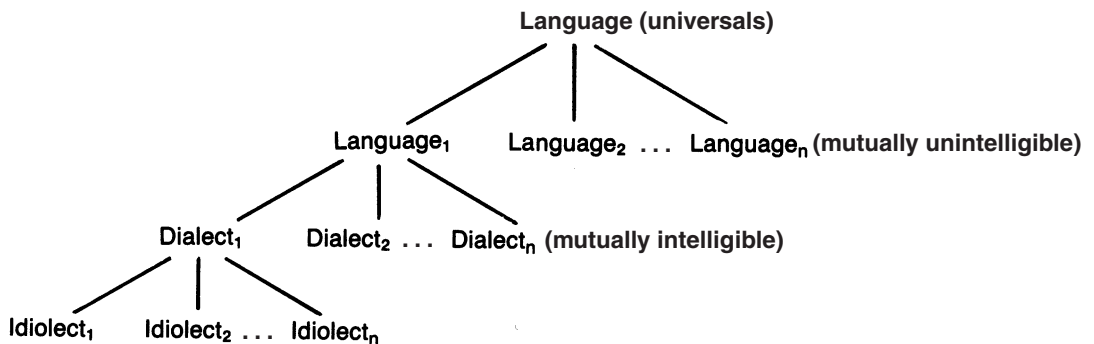


FIGURE 7.1 Domains of language study, by groups of speakers

One useful guideline for differentiating a dialect from a language 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) little trouble communicating with each other, since Texan and Bostonian represent two different dialects of the same language. These different properties of languages and dialects are represented in Figure 7.1.

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**.

### **Exercise A**

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1. The term *idiolect* 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**

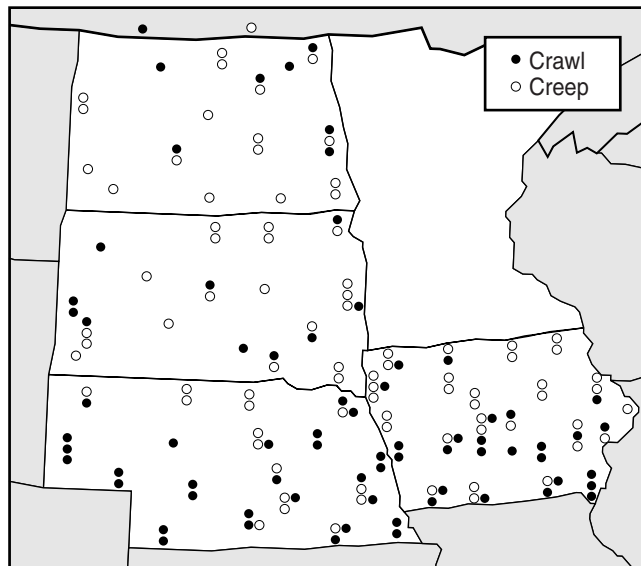
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Regional varieties of a language result from a number of political, geographical, and cultural factors. First, the early population of an area leaves its linguistic heritage. For example, a paper napkin is sometimes called a *serviette* in modern Canadian 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 South Carolina. In short, regional varieties of a language often reflect settlement history and physical geography.

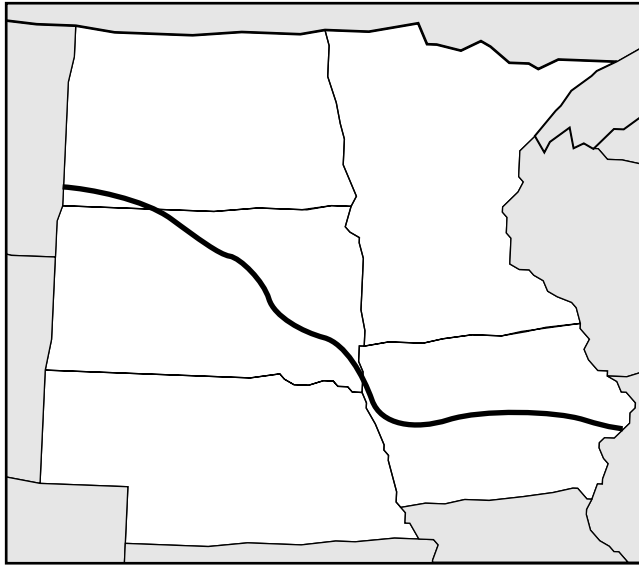
Regional variation in the United States has been documented largely through **dialect atlases**. A dialect atlas is essentially a series of maps, each of which plots the geographical distribution of a particular linguistic feature (e.g., Figure 7.2). During the 20th century, dialect atlases were undertaken for New England, the Middle Atlantic states, North Central states, Gulf states, Upper Midwest, Rocky Mountain states, Pacific West, and Pacific Northwest; however, not all of these have been published in their entireties. A project based on more recent data, the Atlas of North American English, is awaiting publication at the time of this writing.

A traditional feature of a dialect atlas is 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 7.3 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.



**FIGURE 7.2** Geographical distribution of *creep* and *crawl*

Source: From *Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest*, Volumes 1 & 2, by Harold B. Allen, Gale Group, © 1982, Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group.



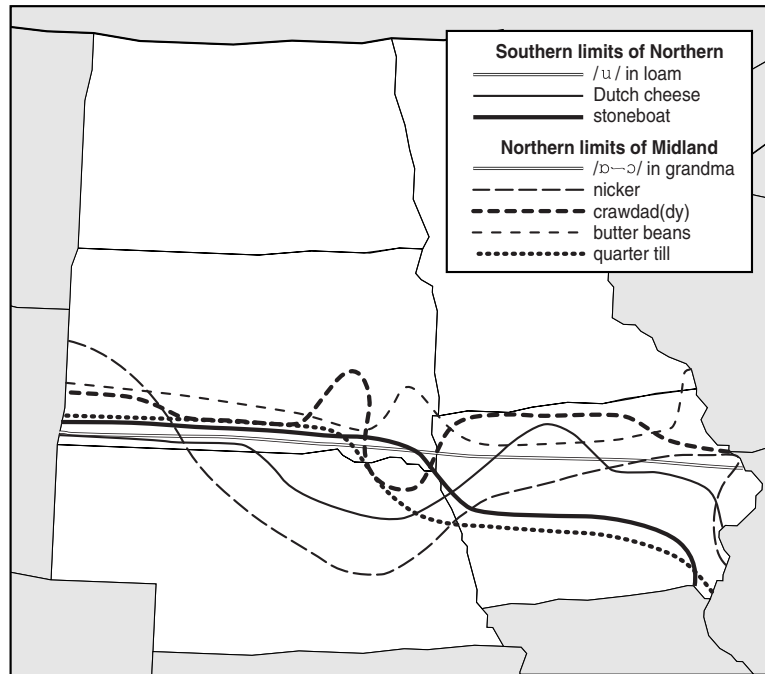
**FIGURE 7.3** Isogloss for (*Devil's*) *darning needle* in the Upper Midwest

Source: From *Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest*, Volumes 1 & 2, by Harold B. Allen, Gale Group, © 1982, Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group.

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 7.2 and 7.3, 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 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 7.4. As a result, this area has been identified as one of the boundaries between the Northern and Midland dialects.

Another major project, begun in 1965 by the late Frederic Cassidy and now edited by Joan Houston Hall, is the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)*. At this time, four volumes have been published, covering letters A-Sk. *DARE* seeks to document vocabulary, pronunciations, and phrases that appear in regional dialects. The data in *DARE* are based on face-to-face interviews conducted between 1965 and 1970 and on an extensive collection of written materials produced over several centuries.

Figure 7.5 shows a map of the major dialect regions in the United States, developed by Carver (1987). Whereas earlier dialect maps divided the United States into three regional



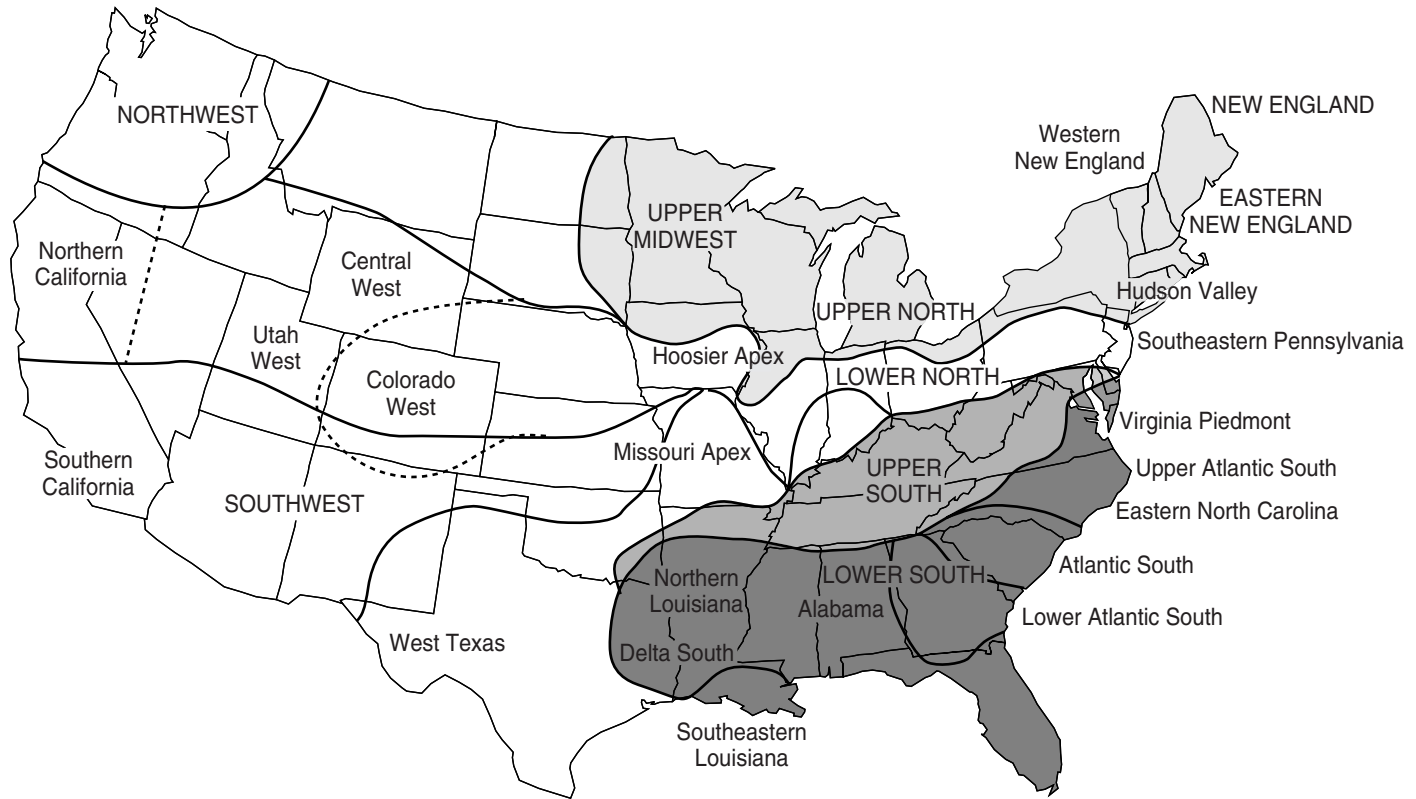
**FIGURE 7.4** Bundle of isoglosses, reflecting one boundary between the Northern and Midland dialect regions

Source: From *Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest*, Volumes 1 & 2, by Harold B. Allen, Gale Group, © 1982, Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group.

dialect areas—Northern, Midland, and Southern—Carver’s map realigns these divisions into four areas: Upper North, Lower North, Upper South, and Lower South.

### 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 7.2 indicates that *crawl* becomes more widespread as one moves north.
3. True or False: Figures 7.3 and 7.4 both illustrate dialect boundaries. Explain.
4. Figure 7.5 illustrates that dialect areas of the United States are most clear-cut on the East Coast. Why is that the case?



**FIGURE 7.5** 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.



## 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 traditionally associated with each one.

| NORTHERN U.S.      | SOUTHERN U.S.      |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| pail               | bucket             |
| bag                | sack               |
| faucet             | spigot             |
| quarter of four    | quarter till four  |
| sick to my stomach | sick at my stomach |
| (cherry) pit       | (cherry) seed      |

Cassidy, in his research for *DARE*, found thousands of examples of more exotic regionalisms: for example, *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 also exist between U.S. and Canadian English. The following are representative.

| UNITED STATES          | CANADA       |
|------------------------|--------------|
| electoral district     | riding       |
| faucet                 | tap          |
| napkin                 | serviette    |
| sofa                   | chesterfield |
| you know? right?       | eh?          |
| zee (name of letter Z) | zed          |

U.S. and Canadian English also spell some shared lexical items differently, with Canadian spelling sometimes patterning like British spelling: for example, U.S. *center*/Canadian *centre*, U.S. *check* (banking item)/Canadian *cheque*, U.S. *color*/Canadian *colour*, U.S. *theater*/Canadian *theatre*. However, in other cases, Canadian spelling patterns like American spelling rather than like British spelling: for example, U.S./Canadian *aluminum*/British *aluminium* (which is also pronounced differently), U.S./Canadian *tire*/British *tyre*. In fact, the phrase *tire centre* is uniquely Canadian. In the United States the phrase would be *tire center*; in England, it would be *tyre centre*.

Lexical differences between U.S. and British English are far more numerous than those between U.S. and Canadian English, so we can cover only a few examples here. Some everyday British terms, with their U.S. equivalents, include the following.

| U.S. ENGLISH                         | BRITISH ENGLISH  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| lawyer                               | solicitor, barrister (the latter can practice as a client's advocate in higher courts) |
| photo                                | snap   |
| pedestrian underpass                 | subway   |
| line (n) (as for a bus), line up (v) | queue  |
| 7-Up (or other lemon-lime drink)     | lemonade   |
| mobile home                          | caravan  |
| stove                                | cooker   |
| public housing project               | council estate   |
| plan (n)                             | scheme (can be used without a negative connotation)                                    |
| traffic circle                       | roundabout   |
| costume/masquerade                   | fancy dress  |
| appetizer                            | starter  |
| private school                       | public school  |
| public school                        | state school   |
| soccer                               | football (the U.S. version is called <i>American football</i> )                        |
| elevator                             | lift   |
| sweater                              | jumper   |
| apartment                            | flat   |
| ball-point                           | biro   |
| trash bag                            | bin bag  |
| two-week period                      | fortnight  |
| trunk (of a car)                     | boot   |
| washcloth                            | flannel  |
| eraser                               | rubber   |
| tennis shoes/sneakers                | trainers   |
| gasoline                             | petrol   |
| flashlight                           | torch  |
| pharmacist, pharmacy                 | chemist  |

### Exercise C

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1. Look up the terms *bluenose*, *choppies*, and *chopique* in *DARE*. What does each term mean? Where is each term most common in the United States?

**Exercise C** *Continued*

2. The food 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-U.S. counterpart.

|                                      |                       |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ___ biscuit                          | a. tomato sauce       |
| ___ 7-Up (or other lemon-lime drink) | b. scone              |
| ___ bag (as of potato chips)         | c. crisps             |
| ___ butty                            | d. mince              |
| ___ candy                            | e. green mealies      |
| ___ canned                           | f. sweets             |
| ___ cookie                           | g. cream cracker      |
| ___ corn meal                        | h. lemonade           |
| ___ ears of corn                     | i. jelly              |
| ___ eggplant                         | j. maize meal         |
| ___ flavoring (such as vanilla)      | k. tinned             |
| ___ French fries                     | l. treacle            |
| ___ ground beef                      | m. icing sugar        |
| ___ Jello™                           | n. aubergine          |
| ___ ketchup                          | o. courgette          |
| ___ molasses                         | p. banger             |
| ___ potato chips                     | q. mange-tout         |
| ___ powdered sugar                   | r. prawn              |
| ___ sausage                          | s. sandwich on a roll |
| ___ shrimp                           | t. packet             |
| ___ soda cracker                     | u. essence            |
| ___ sugar peas, snap peas            | v. chips              |
| ___ zucchini                         | w. biscuit            |

**Regional Phonological Variation**

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

**Linking [r].** This feature, associated with eastern New England and New York City, refers to a pattern whereby a vowel-vowel sequence between words is “linked” with an [r]. In the phrase *That idea is crazy*, for example, *idea* ends in a vowel and the following word *is* begins with a vowel. A speaker whose dialect contains the “linking [r]” feature would pronounce this phrase as if *idea* ended in an [r] (*idear*). Speakers of this dialect presumably have the following rule in their phonological systems.



**Monophthongization of /aɪ/.** In general American speech, words like *tire* and *fire* are pronounced with the diphthong [aɪ]: [taɪr], [faɪr]. However, Southern dialect speakers typically **monophthongize**, or **unglide**, this diphthong so that the second element is lost. As a result, pronunciations of *fire* and *tire* may sound like General American pronunciations of *far* and *tar*—i.e., [far] and [tar]. Similarly, words like *five* and *guide* may be pronounced as [fav] and [gad]. This process tends to occur more when the following segment is voiced, as in these examples.

**Canadian Raising.** Traditionally, this term has been applied to variations on two diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/, although some research indicates that variations on these diphthongs are not equally associated with Canadian speech, with “Canadian Raising” occurring more prominently on /aʊ/ and variations on /aɪ/ occurring in the northern United States as well as in Canada (Chambers, 1989). This phenomenon raises the first member of the vowel diphthong from /a/ to /ʌ/, so that *fight* /faɪt/ is pronounced as [fʌɪt], and *out* /aʊt/ is pronounced as [ʌʊt]. Canadian Raising is more likely to occur when the diphthong is followed by a voiceless consonant. Speakers attempting to imitate this feature of the Canadian dialect often exaggerate the back diphthong by dropping the first element and tensing the second element, so that *out* and *about* is pronounced [ʊtənəbʊt], and *about the house* is pronounced [əbʊtðəʊs].

**Stress.** 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)rətɔri/   | /ləbɔrətri/     |
| <i>garage</i>     | /gəɾɑʒ/          | /gæɾɑʒ/         |
| <i>massage</i>    | /məsɑʒ/          | /mæsaʒ/         |
| <i>cervical</i>   | /sɜrvɪkəl/       | /sərváikəl/     |

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>  | /práses/         | /próses/        |
| <i>patent</i>   | /pátənt/         | /pétənt/        |
| <i>migraine</i> | /máɪɡren/        | /míɡren/        |
| <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, numerous 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; the mobility of the American population in the last half-century has blurred, if not obliterated, what were earlier distinct limits on many dialect features. Keep in mind that a dialect boundary exists solely by virtue of the fact that a number of different dialect features coincide there. For example, the fact that the boundaries of *bucket*, *sack*, *spigot*, *seed*, and so on coincide (or at least formerly did) justifies 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  |
|-----------|-----------|
| [əbsɔːrb] | [əbzɔːrb] |
| [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/ → Ø / V \_\_\_\_\_

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 → [+high] / \_\_\_\_\_ C

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{--high} \\ \text{--low} \\ \text{--back} \\ \text{--tense} \end{array} \right]$ | [+nas] |
|--|--------|

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     | /tɪn/     |
| c. pant | /pænt/ | g. net      | /nɛt/     |
| d. pen  | /pɛn/  | h. neat     | /nɪt/     |

**Exercise D** *Continued*

†4. Many dialects of the northeastern seaboard contain the following rule:

$\emptyset \rightarrow [r] / V \_\_\_\_\_ \# V$

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    | [kyubrərɪz]  | Linda ate  | [lɪndəret]  |
| Tahiti is  | *[təhɪtɪrɪz] | Roscoe ate | *[raskoret] |
| Martha ate | [mɑrθəret]   |            |             |

**Social Variation**

Over the past 40 years or so, much research in language variation has shifted 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 such as age and education. Likewise, sociolinguists 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 gravitated toward sociolinguistics.

Several trends developed in the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s that shifted attention to social variation. First, since regional dialectologists had been collecting information about social variables such 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. Labov correlated several different phonological variables (e.g., the deletion of post-vocalic [r]) with different social classes (upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-working, and lower-working). Among his innovations was the use of a preexisting sociological classification system for his informants. That is, he used a model of social stratification developed within sociology, whereas most regional dialectologists had classified their informants using relatively subjective criteria. Moreover, he collected 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 often make social judgments based on characteristics of a speaker’s dialect. For example, someone who says *I ain’t sorry* may be judged as coming

from a lower socioeconomic status than another person who says *I'm not sorry*. 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 a language. However, for our purposes, we can define a standard dialect as one that draws no negative attention to itself; that is, educated people do not judge a person speaking such a dialect as coming from a lower socioeconomic status, lacking education, and so forth. On the other hand, a nonstandard dialect does draw negative attention to itself; educated people might judge the speaker of such a dialect as coming from a lower socioeconomic status, lacking education, and so on. Nonstandard forms such as *ain't*, which cause the listener to form a negative social judgment of the speaker, are referred to as **socially marked** forms.

Third, the interest in nonstandard dialects in the 1960s and 1970s led quite naturally to an interest in what is now called African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a variety spoken primarily by low-income blacks in urban areas. There were several reasons for this interest. For one thing, the civil rights movement and 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. Research on nonstandard dialects in general and on AAVE in particular has been especially relevant to practical problems in public education. For example, a teacher is less likely to be concerned when a student says *tap* instead of *faucet* (a purely regional distinction) than when a student says *Can't nobody tell him what to do* instead of *Nobody can tell him what to do*. 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 on communicating with teachers, test developers, and speech-language pathologists about the nature of nonstandard dialects.

Also, it seemed reasonable for linguists to begin their description of nonstandard dialects with AAVE, since it is thought to be the most distinct from standard English. Their interest was further fueled by the controversy surrounding the origins of AAVE. Some scholars maintained the traditional position that AAVE developed from the dialect spoken by poor Southern whites. Others, however, proposed that AAVE developed from a **creole**. A creole is a language that develops from a **pidgin**, a linguistic system used when speakers of different languages come into contact through trade or colonization—as, for example, when slaves on plantations came into contact with slaves from different language groups and with speakers of English. When the pidgin evolves into a more complex system and becomes the native language of a later generation, it has become a creole. Evidence for the **creole hypothesis** about the origin of AAVE came from researchers who were studying Caribbean creoles and who pointed out creole forms in modern-day AAVE.

A final reason for the increased interest in social dialects is that, while regional dialects are characterized largely by lexical variation, social dialects are more likely to reflect grammatical variation—variation in phonology, morphology, and syntax. Many linguists find these patterns more interesting than lexical variation because grammatical variation tends to be more systematic and predictable. For example, given the fact that *submarine* refers to a sandwich made on an oblong loaf of bread, no amount of theorizing would enable us to predict that other speakers might call the same object a *hero*, *hoagie*, *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.

Before looking at specific examples of socially marked forms, we want to emphasize 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 of being 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 linguistic judgment and a sociological one. Consider the reflexive pronouns in the following sentences.

- (8) Lou hurt *himself*.  
 (9) Lou hurt *hisself*.  
 (10) \*Lou hurt *heself*.

Both (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 that we can capture by using some terms that came up in our discussion of syntax: we can say that (8) and (9) are **grammatical**, meaning simply that each occurs regularly in some system of English, while (10) is **ungrammatical**, meaning that it is not part of any system. (Recall that the asterisk \* designates an ungrammatical structure.) Second, (8) and (9) are used by different groups of speakers; they belong to different social dialects. In particular, (8) is not socially marked and would go unnoticed by educated speakers of the language. On the other hand, (9) is socially marked; educated speakers may make a negative sociological judgment about the speaker of (9). We can capture the difference between (8) and (9) by saying that, while both forms are grammatical, (8) is standard (not socially marked), while (9) is nonstandard (socially marked).

### 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<sup>h</sup>ɔt] would probably not form any negative social judgment about a speaker who pronounces the same word as [k<sup>h</sup>at], 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 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]. A listener may associate such forms with speakers from, say, working-class sections of New York City. A listener who holds this group in low social esteem may label such forms as “bad” or “incorrect” English. As pointed out earlier, though, 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, on 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 predicable and systematic phonological variation? 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 seems 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. Moreover, /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 replace /ð/, a fricative, with [d], a stop, some additional background is required. Several pieces of evidence suggest that stops are more “natural” than fricatives, especially interdental fricatives such as /ð/. For one thing, children acquire stops before they acquire fricatives, indicating that stops are somehow more “basic” 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 that had alveolar stops in its consonant inventory and then later added interdental fricatives is much greater than finding a language that had interdental fricatives and then later added alveolar stops. Again, this pattern indicates that alveolar stops are more basic than interdental fricatives. A third, related piece of evidence is 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, suggest that a dialect which substitutes a stop such as [d] for a fricative such as /ð/ is following a “natural” linguistic trend. This process, whereby a stop is substituted for a corresponding fricative, is termed **stopping**.

**Exercise F**

1. Based on the preceding discussion of stopping, determine what substitution might occur for /θ/ in some nonstandard dialects (e.g., as the first segment of *think* and *throw*).
2. In some varieties of AAVE and in some nonstandard British English dialects, /θ/ and /ð/ are replaced by /f/ and /v/, respectively, so that *Ruth* is pronounced as [ruf], and *brother* is pronounced as [brʌvə]. In what way does this pattern resemble the stopping pattern just discussed? In what way is it different?

**Consonant Cluster Reduction.** Consonant Cluster Reduction deletes a consonant from a series of two or more word-final 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 additional contexts. As an illustration, consider how Consonant Cluster Reduction operates in standard English:

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

Now consider a phrase like *He pushed the car* /hi pʊʃt ðə kɑː/. Note that *pushed* ends in a consonant cluster /ʃt/, and the next word starts with a consonant /ð/. Therefore, our standard English rule of Consonant Cluster Reduction would delete the /t/ in *pushed the car*. However, it would not delete the /t/ in *pushed a car*, since the /ʃt/ cluster 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 segment begins the next word. The rule can be formalized as follows:

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

This nonstandard version of the rule still applies in the same contexts as the standard dialect rule. 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: [kémark] for *K-Mart*, [krédik] for *credit*, [rɪsk] for *wrist*, [ot] for *oak*, [dɛst] 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 example is **metathesis**, the reversal of two segments, one of which is typically a liquid (/l/ or /r/). This process results in forms like [čıldərn] for *children*, [kælvəri] for *cavalry*, [nukyulər] for *nuclear*, and so on. Liquids may also be deleted following a vowel: [hɛp] for *help*, [hod] for *hold*, and so on. This process, known as **post-vocalic liquid deletion**, applies optionally in some nonstandard dialects. This process is responsible for the variant pronunciations of words like *Carol* /kæɹəl/: as /kæɹə/ (/l/ deleted), /kæə/ (/r/ deleted), and /kæə/ (both liquids deleted).

A final example of socially marked phonological variation is the devoicing of a word-final obstruents (stop, fricative, or affricate): [kɪlt] for *killed*, [əhólt] for *ahold*, [hɛt] for *head*, and so on. This process, called **final devoicing**, is quite common among the world's languages. It applies 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 G

- Mark the following statements true or false.
  - T F [tʰɪs] 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 [pʰæf] is a possible pronunciation of *path* in nonstandard English.
- In all varieties of English, certain consonants are deleted phonetically in certain environments. Consider the following data.

|              | PHONEMIC      | PHONETIC      |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| most people  | /most pi:pəl/ | [mos pi:pəl]  |
| most of us   | /most əv əs/  | [most əv əs]  |
| iced tea     | /aɪst ti/     | [aɪs tɪ]      |
| iced a cake  | /aɪst ə kek/  | [aɪst ə kek]  |
| eight people | /et pi:pəl/   | [et pi:pəl]   |
| six people   | /sɪks pi:pəl/ | [sɪks pi:pəl] |

- 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.

**Exercise G** *Continued*

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? In other words, how must the rule be restricted if we want to prevent it from applying to /læmp/, /bent/, /help/, and /bʌlk/?

hand /hænd/ → [hæn]      help /help/ → \*[hel]  
 lamp /læmp/ → \*[læm]      hold /hold/ → [hol]  
 last /læst/ → [læs]      bulk /bʌlk/ → \*[bʌl]  
 bent /bent/ → \*[ben]

4. Which of the following phonological variations is not typically found in nonstandard English?  
 a. [kemark] for K-Mart /kɛmɑrt/      c. [saʊf] for *south* /saʊθ/  
 b. [dɛst] for *desk* /dɛsk/      d. [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]  | [wʌdnɪ]     |
| Disney    | [dɪznɪ]  | [dɪdnɪ]     |

6. Identify the phonological process reflected by each of the following.  
 a. Pulled /pʊld/ becomes the nonstandard form /pʊlt/.  
 b. Cassidy (1981) states that in some dialects *bronical* /brʌnɪkəl/ is substituted for *bronchial* /brʌŋkiəl/.  
 c. *Tests* becomes the nonstandard form *tesses* /tɛsəz/. (Hint: Two processes are involved.)

**Nonstandard Morphological Variation**

Nonstandard patterns in word formation tend to involve 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, nonstandard 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.

|            | SINGULAR        | PLURAL      |
|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 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 *hisself* 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 nonstandard 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 *hisself* and *theirselves* for the third person forms. Therefore, from a linguistic perspective, the nonstandard forms *hisself* 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.

|            | SINGULAR   | PLURAL    |
|------------|------------|-----------|
| 1st person | I walk     | We walk   |
| 2nd person | You walk   | You walk  |
| 3rd person | S/he walks | They walk |

We can see immediately that most present tense verbs in standard English have no overt inflection for {PRES}. If we substitute the nonstandard forms (*S/he 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*.

It is interesting to note that the *-s* ending can represent three different morphemes in English, but that these morphemes are omitted with different frequencies in nonstandard dialects such as AAVE. Specifically, {PRES} (as in *She walks home every day*) is omitted more frequently than {POSS} (the possessive morpheme, as in *the girl's book*). In turn, {POSS} is omitted more frequently than {PLU} (the plural morpheme, as in *two friends*). This pattern indicates that the omission of *-s* is morphological rather than phonological—that is, speakers are omitting an inflection, not simply a segment. If the omission were phonological, all three morphemes would be omitted with equal frequency, since they are phonologically identical.

**Other Nonstandard Verb Patterns.** Divergences from standard English occur in several other verb inflections. One socially marked feature is the use of nonstandard past tense and past participial verb forms, especially on irregular verbs. For example, the verb *to see* in standard English has the past tense *saw* and the past participle *seen*: *I saw him yesterday*; *I've seen him three times this week*. Nonstandard dialects may regularize these forms by using one of several strategies. One is to form the past tense by using the regular inflection, spelled *-ed*, yielding a sentence like *I seed him yesterday*. Another is to use one form for both the past and past participle forms, yielding sentences like *I seen him yesterday* or *I've saw him three times this week*.

The irregular verb *to be* is highly variable in standard English, with seven different inflected forms depending on the number and person of the subject and the tense and aspect of the verb phrase: *am, are, is, was, were, been, being*. Perhaps not surprisingly, 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. This strategy and those discussed in the preceding paragraph have the effect of regularizing forms that are irregular, and therefore unpredictable, in the standard dialect.

### Exercise H

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?

| STANDARD SYSTEM |             | NONSTANDARD SYSTEM |            |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|------------|
| (no form)       | we aren't   | I ain't            | we ain't   |
| you aren't      | you aren't  | you ain't          | you ain't  |
| he/she/it isn't | they aren'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.)
  - A. She kept a-callin' my name.
  - B. She woke up a-screamin'.
  - C. The bear come a-runnin' out of the woods.
  - D. She kept a-waterin' the lawn.
  - E. \*She kept a-forgettin' my name.
  - F. \*She kept a-askin' my name.
  - G. \*She woke up a-screaming.
  - H. \*They like a-sailin'.
  - I. \*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.)

(continued)

**Exercise H** *Continued*

- 
- †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 \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Sam hate his sister's boyfriends.
  - b. Sam hate his sister boyfriends.
  - c. Sam hates his sister boyfriends.
  - d. Sam hates his sister's boyfriend.
  - e. 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 looking at 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

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 these transformations yields the standard English form *What is it?*

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.



|                       | STANDARD ENGLISH      | NONSTANDARD ENGLISH   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 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 claim can largely be traced to a highly influential book written by Robert Lowth in 1762, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Lowth’s work appeared during the 18th-century **prescriptive grammar** movement, which produced many collections of “dos and don’ts” about the English language. Unfortunately, many of these proclamations were based on personal prejudices against certain structures (for example, Jonathan Swift objected to verb forms such as /dɪstərbɪd/ instead of /dɪstərbəd/ 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 that 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 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, double negatives were obligatory, as they are 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, double negatives 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 double negatives became associated with uneducated speakers. This, of course, eventually led to double negatives 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.

**Nonstandard Treatments of *to be*.** AAVE differs from standard English in several patterns that affect forms of *to be*. One of these patterns is *be*-deletion, the absence of what would occur in standard English as an inflected form of auxiliary or main verb *be*: for example, *He’s looking for work* → *He looking for work*, or *Her hair is messed up* → *Her hair messed up*. Labov has determined that AAVE can omit an inflected form of *be* only in environments where standard English can contract it. For example, in the sentences below, standard English allows contraction of the first occurrence of *be*, but not the second occurrence. Similarly, AAVE allows deletion of the first occurrence of *be*, but not the second occurrence.

**STANDARD ENGLISH: CONTRACTION**

Allowed: *It is his.* → *It’s his.*

Not allowed: *What is it?* → \**What’s it?*

**AAVE: BE-DELETION**

Allowed: *It is his.* → *It his.*

Not allowed: *What is it?* → \**What it?*

Another nonstandard syntactic feature involves the treatment of main verb *be* in interrogatives such as *Do they be sick?* Standard English has a general rule for forming an interrogative: I-Movement applies to auxiliaries but not to main verbs. If there is no overt auxiliary verb, a form of *do* is used to form an interrogative. This distinction is shown below.

**STANDARD ENGLISH: I-MOVEMENT ALLOWED  
ON AUXILIARIES BUT NOT ON MAIN VERB**

They have gone to work. → Have they gone to work?

They went to work. → \*Went they to work? (cf: Did they go to work?)

The exception to this rule in standard English is that main verb *be* behaves like an auxiliary verb for purposes of forming an interrogative. That is, it undergoes I-Movement, as shown below.

They are at work. → Are they at work?

Now consider what form we would get if main verb *be* in standard English behaved like all other verbs, that is, if it did not undergo I-Movement but instead required a form of *do* to form an interrogative. We would get exactly the structure that occurs in AAVE, as shown below.

They are at work. → Do they be at work?

In this case, the nonstandard dialect has regularized an exception in standard English, so that main verb *be* is treated exactly like all other main verbs.

Another pattern found in AAVE and some varieties of Southern rural white speech is **habitual *be*** (sometimes called **distributive *be***) as in *He be looking for work* ‘He is always looking for work’ (as opposed to ‘He is looking for work right now’). This structure is reserved for utterances that refer to activities or states that occur over time (including the present) or are generally true. Taken together, *be*-deletion and habitual *be* form a system that allows for the same meaning distinctions found in Standard English. The following table shows instances of auxiliary *be* and main verb *be* in standard English and their counterparts in AAVE.

| INTENDED REFERENT                  | STANDARD ENGLISH               | AAVE                      | MEANING IN BOTH DIALECTS  |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Specific instance or point in time | He is looking for work.        | He (is) looking for work. | ‘He is looking for work at this point in time.’   |
|                                    | Her hair is messed up.         | Her hair (is) messed up.  | ‘Her hair is messed up at this point in time.’  |
| Ongoing or habitual occurrence     | He is always looking for work. | He be looking for work.   | ‘He is engaged in an ongoing search for work; every time I talk to him, he’s looking for work.’ |
|                                    | Her hair is always messed up.  | Her hair be messed up.    | ‘Her hair is messed up all the time; every time I see her, her hair is messed up.’              |

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 I

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1. 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?
  - A.1. The girl hit him.
  - A.2. \*The girl hit he.
  - B.1. Please call me.
  - B.2. \*Please call I.
  - C.1 I don't know her.
  - C.2. \*I don't know she.
2. Consider the following sentence: *That is not where they are now*. Which occurrences of inflected *be* could be omitted in AAVE?
- †3. A freshman composition teacher corrects a student's sentence from *I asked her what did she want to* 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?
  - a. To objectively describe the actual language of speakers.
  - b. To make English conform to classical languages such as Latin.
  - c. To indicate the geographical distribution of certain dialects.
  - d. To show how creole languages evolve from pidgin languages.
5. Consider the following data:
  - A. Are they sick? (standard)
  - B. Do they be sick? (nonstandard)

**Exercise I** *Continued*

- C. Are they going? (standard)
- D. Do they be going? (nonstandard)
- E. Do they have a car? (both dialects)
- F. Do they need money? (both dialects)

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

- a. T F SE treats main verb *be* like other main verbs.
  - b. T F NSE treats main verb *be* like other main verbs.
  - c. T F NSE treats auxiliary *be* like a main verb.
  - d. 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, 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 promote an antifemale bias? In this section we focus on findings about 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 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, associating these forms with masculinity and strength. This theory is supported by the fact that men tend to overreport 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 supported 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 a 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 J**

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 7.6, 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. Let’s move *these* out *first*.

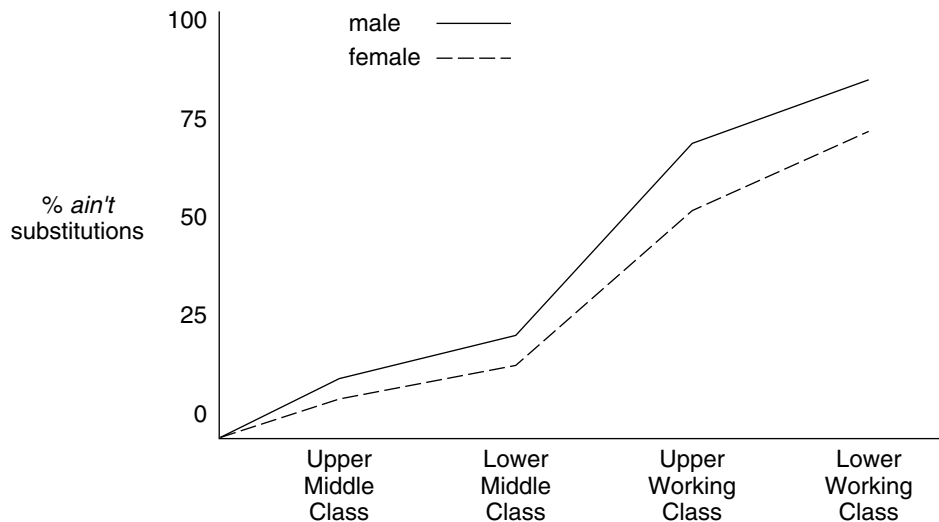


FIGURE 7.6 Substitutions of *ain't* for other verb forms during casual conversation



**Exercise J** *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 within 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 blazer, a tie, and 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.

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 blazer is not “better” than his shorts in any absolute sense. Rather, the blazer is more appropriate for the job interview, while the 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 would never occur to him to wear his sandals on his hands. Likewise, while he may have to make a conscious decision about which tie to wear to the job interview, the decision to wear some tie 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 dress, stylistic variations in language cannot be judged as appropriate or not without reference to the participants (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 pepper 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 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 multisyllabic 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 neutralizes /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* [æfɛkt] and *effect* [ɪfɛkt] are both ordinarily pronounced [əfɛkt]; 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., [mémber] for *remember*) may be suppressed, resulting in “hypercorrect” pronunciations such as [ɛləméntəri] for *elementary* or [mæθəmáɪrɪks] 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 18th-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 object position 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, an African American 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*, *he don’t*, *me and him went*, etc.), he was accepted into the group.

### Exercise K

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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?

**Exercise K** *Continued*

- 
- †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?*
- 

**Summary**


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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.

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- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: William Morrow.
- Wolfram, W., Adger, C. T., & Christian, D. (1999). *Dialects in schools and communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Wolfram, W., & 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. The volumes of *DARE* (Cassidy and Hall) are the result of over 30 years of research on regional expressions found in the United States; these four volumes cover terms beginning with the letters A–Sk. 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). The books by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet and by Green provide comprehensive introductions to language and gender and to African American English, respectively. Tannen's work also discusses language and gender issues. Wolfram, Adger, and Christian is an excellent discussion of dialect issues that concern professionals in the language arts and speech-language pathology.

### Supplementary Exercises

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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.
2. Consider the following dialects of English.

|           | DIALECT A  | DIALECT B  |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| police    | /pə'lıs/   | /pólɪs/    |
| hotel     | /hotéɪ/    | /hótel/    |
| July      | /jə'laɪ/   | /júlaɪ/    |
| insurance | /ɪnʃúrəns/ | /ínʃərəns/ |
| Detroit   | /dət'rɔɪt/ | /dítrɔɪt/  |

- a. What is the principle for assigning stress in Dialect A? (Assume stress is assigned from the right.)
  - b. What is the principle for assigning stress in Dialect B? (Assume stress is assigned from the left.)
  - c. Which principle is simpler?
  - d. Which dialect is more socially marked?
3. Some nonstandard forms actually fill gaps or regularize exceptions in the standard English system, as was the case with *hissself* and *theirselves*. Now consider another case: all but one of the following phrases can be contracted in two different ways; the exceptional case has only one contracted form.
  - A. I am not
  - B. We are not
  - C. You are not
  - D. He/She is not
  - E. They are not
  - a. Which phrase has only one contracted form in standard English?
  - b. By analogy with the other four phrases, how would the “missing” contracted form for this phrase be constructed? Give a phonological representation for this form.
  - c. Assume, first, that two consecutive nasals cannot occur in the same syllable in English (e.g., *mnemonic* is represented phonemically as /nimánɪk/) and, second, that in some dialects of English the vowel before a nasal is raised (e.g., *can't* is pronounced as [kʰɛ̃nt] rather than as [kʰæ̃nt]). Apply these principles to the form you constructed for (b). What nonstandard form seems to fill the role of the “missing” contracted form?
4. Weasel Podowski handed in the following paragraph to his English teacher, Miss Movable Feast.
 

Muffy pulled out her overnight case. She plan to go to her frien's house the nex day. She had been there before. She walked a mile to get there. She wish she did not have to walk all the way.

Miss Feast, who is a friend of yours, claims that Weasel has no sense of time, because he makes so many “tense errors.” You realize Miss Feast’s mistake.

- a. What part of Weasel’s grammatical system is responsible for these errors?
  - b. Write a rule (in formal notation) that accounts for these errors.
5. Consider the following vowel contrasts between General American English and certain South Midland dialects (southern Indiana down to northern Alabama, Maryland over to Arkansas).

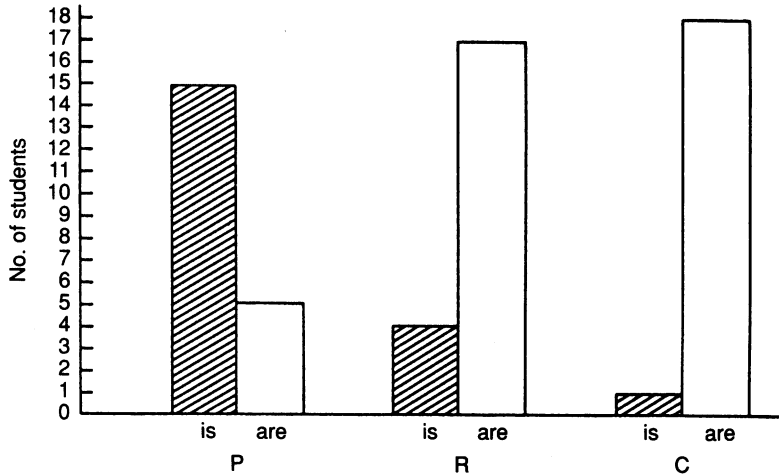
|         | GENERAL AMERICAN | SOUTH MIDLAND |
|---------|------------------|---------------|
| fish    | [fɪʃ]            | [fɪʃ]         |
| fifth   | [fɪfθ]           | [fɪfθ]        |
| measure | [mɛʒər]          | [mɛʒər]       |
| left    | [lɛft]           | [lɛft]        |
| push    | [pʊʃ]            | [pʊʃ]         |
| itch    | [ɪtʃ]            | [ɪtʃ]         |
| fresh   | [frɛʃ]           | [frɛʃ]        |
| butcher | [bʊtʃər]         | [bʊtʃər]      |
| puss    | [pʊs]            | [pʊs]         |

- a. What generalization can you state about the difference between the vowels in these two dialects?
  - b. Construct a formal rule that would change the relevant vowels in the General American dialect to those in the South Midland dialect.
6. Cassidy (1981) notes that in the South and Southwest *nother* is a separate word meaning ‘other’ as in *That’s a whole nother thing*. Explain the origin of the form *nother*.
7. Dave says [vihɪgə] for *vehicle*. What two phonological processes is Dave applying that do not apply in the Standard English pronunciation of this word?
8. Wolfram and Fasold (1974:208–211) point out that some tests used to diagnose articulation problems in children contain items that may be biased against speakers of certain regional or social dialects. For example, if a child is asked to name a picture of a pie and says [pa] rather than [paɪ], this response may be scored as an error. Explain how each of the following forms might lead to similar problems if used on an articulation test, due to regional or social variations from the standard pronunciation. Include a phonemic transcription of how each word might be pronounced due to dialect influence, and identify the phonological process responsible for the variation.
- a. death
  - b. felt
  - c. they
  - d. Ken
  - e. test
9. A bar in Baton Rouge has a sign over the jukebox that reads *Don’t use nickels in judebox*. Explain how *jukebox* becomes *judebox* phonologically.
10. Assume a speaker has been told to say *running* instead of *runnin’*. The speaker then extends this treatment to forms like *mountain* and *button*.
- a. What forms will result?
  - b. What principle has the speaker misinterpreted?
  - c. What general phenomenon do the forms in (a) illustrate?

11. In a study reported by Fasold (1984:258–59), college freshmen were tested to see whether they would use *is* or *are* in the frame *There \_\_\_\_\_ about five minutes left*. Following this performance test, they were asked to self-report on which verb they had used and also to judge one of the verbs as more “correct.” Figure 7.7 shows the results (P = performance test, R = self-report, and C = judgment as correct).

Based on the graph, mark the following statements true or false.

- a. T F The form judged “correct” by most speakers is the same one actually used by most speakers.
  - b. T F Most speakers think that they actually use an “incorrect” form.
  - c. T F The form judged “correct” is more formal than the form actually used by most speakers.
  - d. T F It appears that most speakers are able to give a reliable report of the forms that they themselves use.
12. What forms might result from structural hypercorrection of the following forms?
- a. two children
  - b. Bob Johnson’s car
  - c. I want a cookie.
13. The phrase *What can I do you for?* is sometimes used facetiously for *What can I do for you?* Explain how the underlying structure of the facetious phrase differs from that of its Standard English counterpart.



Number of subjects who used *is/are* in performance tests (P), who reported *is/are* as the form they used (R), and who considered *is/are* correct (C).

**FIGURE 7.7** Results of performance test, self-reported usage, and judgments as correct

Source: From Ralph Fasold (1984), *The Sociolinguistics of Society*. New York: Blackwell. Reprinted with permission.



### Exploratory Exercises

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1. In addition to the forms noted in Exercise C.2, British English contains many informal words and phrases not used in the United States, such as those listed below. What is the U.S. equivalent of each item? Try to construct a sentence for each item that uses the word or expression idiomatically. You may want to consult a source like the British-American online dictionary at <http://www.bbcamerica.com/britain/dictionary.jsp>.

|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Bob's your uncle    | knackered           |
| cheeky              | knickers in a twist |
| chuffed             | over the moon       |
| doddle              | posh                |
| fancy               | toff                |
| flash               | twee                |
| give it some wellie | whinging            |
| Give over!          | wind up             |
| gobsmacked          |                     |

2. The following movies and TV series portray characters with regional, social, and ethnic dialects. Select one of these movies (or several episodes of a series) and prepare an inventory of some of the dialect features that you find. Focus on phonological and lexical features, although you may also be able to find morphological and syntactic features if social variation is involved.

As a more advanced project, determine how accurately the dialect is portrayed if the actor is not a native speaker of it. For example, are any features exaggerated? You may also want to consider any personality or character traits that are associated with speakers of the dialect.

|                               |                                     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>The Andy Griffith Show</i> | <i>Mr. Saturday Night</i>           |
| <i>Blown Away</i>             | <i>My Cousin Vinny</i>              |
| <i>Clueless</i>               | <i>My Fair Lady</i>                 |
| <i>The Color Purple</i>       | <i>The Office</i> (British version) |
| <i>Eight Mile</i>             | <i>Quiz Show</i>                    |
| <i>Fargo</i>                  | <i>Sling Blade</i>                  |
| <i>Ghosts of Mississippi</i>  | <i>The Sopranos</i>                 |
| <i>Goodbye Columbus</i>       | <i>Steel Magnolias</i>              |
| <i>JFK</i>                    | <i>Thirteen Days</i>                |
| <i>Malibu's Most Wanted</i>   |                                     |

3. Examine a catalog or website that sells clothing primarily for women (e.g., Talbots) and one that sells clothing primarily for men (e.g., Cabela's). What differences, if any, do you notice in their use of color terms?
4. An article analyzing the campaign strategies of 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Wesley Clark included the following statement: "Clark's embrace of flag, faith and family plays very well in Red State America, where the Democrats are hurting. Last week, as he traveled through eight Southern states on a two-day 'True Grits Tour,' wavin' the flag and droppin' his g's, he seemed exuberant" (Thomas & Klaidman 2004:23). Discuss this characterization of

Clark's language from a sociolinguistic perspective, looking in particular at how dialect features might be used as part of a campaign strategy. You may want to include data about other dialect features that you have heard used by this or other political candidates.

5. Review some of the findings from the dialect survey at <http://hcs.harvard.edu/~golder/dialect/>. Can you draw any inferences about the survey's methodology (i.e., the way that respondents were selected or solicited, the way that questions were constructed, and the medium through which the survey was conducted)? How might methodological considerations affect your interpretation of the survey results? What might you need to know about the methodology in order to judge how interpret the results? Explain.
6. Cockney Rhyming Slang is a system said to have its origins in the language of thieves in 19th-century London. It now survives as a dialect feature used to evoke "colorful" working-class characters in British media and as the basis for tourist items such as dictionaries of rhyming slang (similar to the books on "how to talk Southern" that one can find in parts of the United States). Consider the following classic examples of rhyming slang.

| COCKNEY RHYMING SLANG | MEANING                                   |
|-----------------------|---|
| apples and pears      | stairs                                    |
| butcher's hook        | look                                      |
| grasshopper           | copper                                    |
| hit or miss           | kiss                                      |
| Lady Godiva           | fiver (i.e., £5 note, a unit of currency) |
| trouble and strife    | wife                                      |

The rhyming slang phrase may be used either in full or in an abbreviated form. Hence a speaker might say, "I caught him coming down the apples and pears with his trouble" or "Come and have a butcher's at this."

- a. Based on these examples, write a rule for forming Cockney Rhyming Slang.
  - b. How are the supposed origins of Cockney Rhyming Slang related to its use?
  - c. What might a speaker mean who says "Use your loaf!"?
  - d. What does it mean to "grass on" someone? How might this term have evolved?
  - e. According to the Oxford dictionaries, a new genre called Popney Rhyming Slang is alive and well and being added to constantly. Examples of this genre include *Britney Spears* for *beers* and *Billy Ocean* for *suntan lotion*. Refer to an online dictionary of Cockney Rhyming Slang such as the one at <http://www.cockneyrhymingslang.co.uk/> and find additional examples of the Popney variety. (Warning: Since slang terms often replace taboo words, the translations of some entries may contain offensive language!)
7. **Eye dialect** is a written strategy used by authors to suggest that a speaker is illiterate or otherwise not a speaker of standard English. However, the form used in eye dialect differs from the standard form only in spelling, not in pronunciation. For example, an author might record a character's utterance as "Sez who?" instead of "Says who?" Note that *sez* and *says* would both be pronounced [sɛz]. Hence the use of *sez* is an instance of eye dialect.

With this concept in mind, examine the following newspaper ad for a pizza shop in Duluth, Minnesota, a heavily Scandinavian area. (Sven & Ole's is a restaurant in northern Minnesota; the pizza shop referred to in the ad is a new branch of it.)

Sven & Ole  
Vood Like Tew  
Congradeulate  
Jim & Renee  
On Da Opening of Dere New  
Store, Sven & Ole's Pizza  
Express! Da Store iss Located  
At 5 S. 13 Ave. E. inn Duluth's  
Plaza Shopping Center and  
Serves Da Finest Peetzahs and  
Sandviches from Lake  
Superior's North Shore

- a. What forms in this ad qualify as eye dialect? What forms represent pronunciations that actually differ from standard English pronunciations?
  - b. Based on this sample, what would you infer to be some of the phonological properties of Scandinavian languages? That is, what are some ways in which the phonological system represented in this ad appears to differ from that of standard English?
  - c. What is the sociolinguistic purpose of using nonstandard spellings in this ad? That is, what effect do you think the advertiser is trying to achieve by deliberately using misspellings?
-