

Please Complete the Introductory Discussion

- If you didn't already!
 - Double check the syllabus for office hours (we have them on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays!)
-

What are languages?

Matt Zaslansky - LIGN 101

Today's plan

- What are languages, really?
 - Language is fractal
 - 'Right' and 'Wrong' in Language
 - 'Prescriptive' vs. 'Descriptive' Grammar
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What are languages?

There are ~7,100 living languages in the world

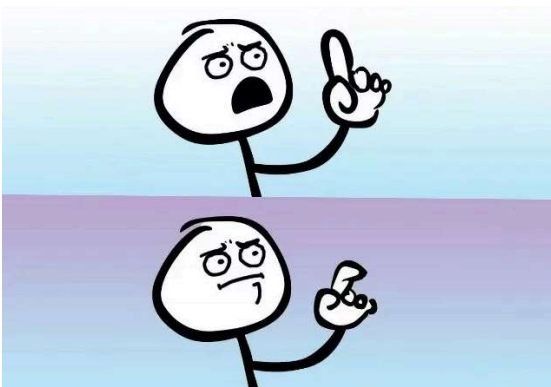
(Source) (<https://www.ethnologue.com>)

23 languages are spoken by more than 50 million people

Rank	Language	Primary Country	Speakers (millions)
1	Chinese [zho]	China	1,299
2	Spanish [spa]	Spain	442
3	English [eng]	United Kingdom	378
4	Arabic [ara]	Saudi Arabia	315
5	Hindi [hin]	India	260
6	Bengali [ben]	Bangladesh	243
7	Portuguese [por]	Portugal	223
8	Russian [rus]	Russian Federation	154
9	Japanese [jpn]	Japan	128
10	Lahnda [lah]	Pakistan	119
11	Javanese [jav]	Indonesia	84.4
12	Turkish [tur]	Turkey	78.5
13	Korean [kor]	South Korea	77.2
14	French [fra]	France	76.8
15	German, Standard [deu]	Germany	76
16	Telugu [tel]	India	74.8
17	Marathi [mar]	India	71.8
18	Urdu [urd]	Pakistan and India	69.2
19	Vietnamese [vie]	Vietnam	68
20	Tamil [tam]	India	66.7
21	Italian [ita]	Italy	64.8
22	Persian [fas]	Iran	61.5
23	Malay [msa]	Malaysia	60.7

Table from <https://www.ethnologue.com/statistics/size> (Retrieved Oct. 2018)

Wow, that's amazing! 1.3 billion people all speak the same language!

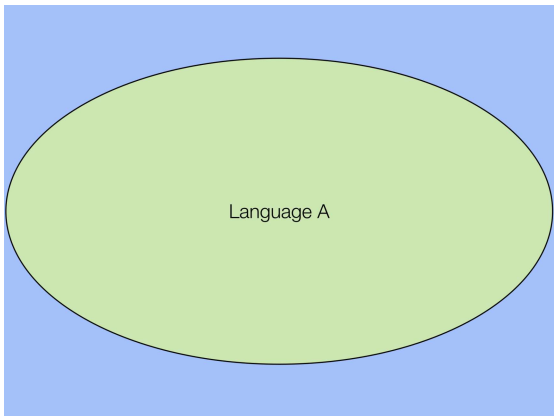
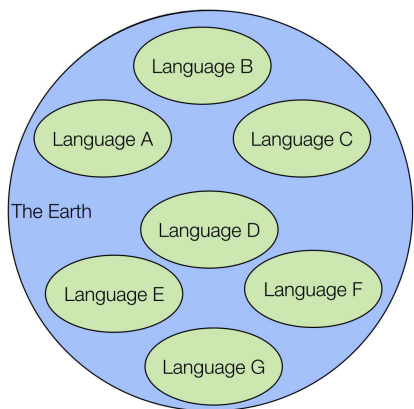
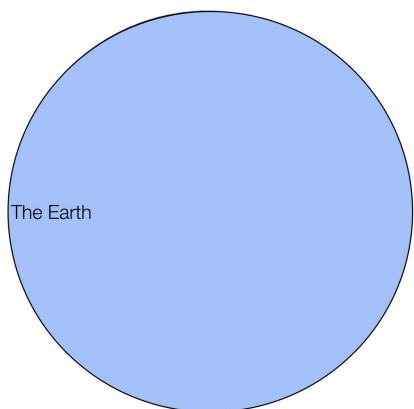


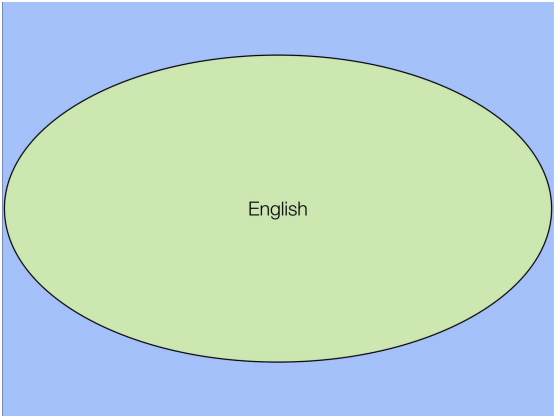
Language is a bit more complicated for Linguists!

Remember that multilingualism is common!


- America is ridiculously monolingual compared to the rest of the world
- We talk about people having an “L1” (first acquired language(s)), “L2” (second acquired language), and so on
- Don't forget that many folks have more than one language, and they can blend!

... but let's focus on 'one language'



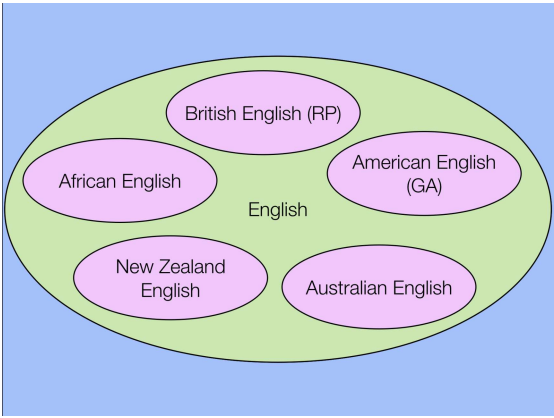


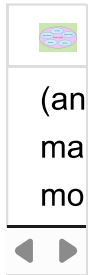
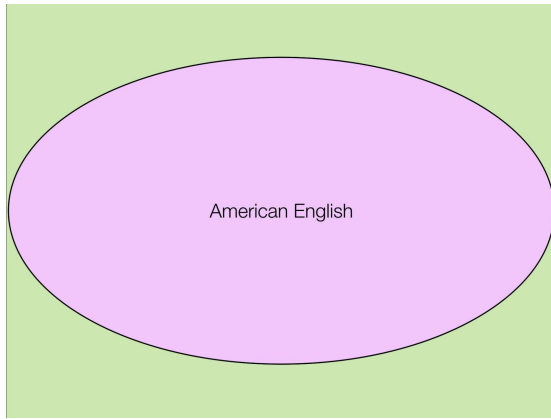
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Yet all are clearly ‘English’, right?!





American Regional Dialect Tests

- Syntax
 - 'The gate needs fixed'
 - 'I might could have some lunch'
- Pronunciation
 - 'Pin' vs. 'Pen'
 - 'Mary, 'Marry', and 'Merry'
 - 'Dude'

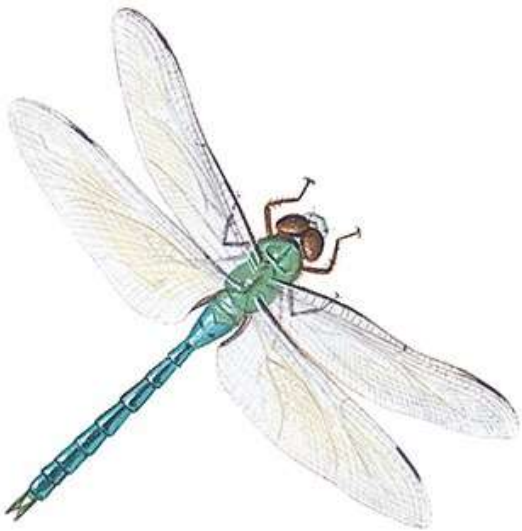
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[duːːːd]

[dʊːːːd]



Regional Vocabulary Differences



What's the generic word for a fizzy, sweet beverage?

- A. Pop
- B. Soda
- C. Soda-Pop
- D. Coke
- E. Cooldrink

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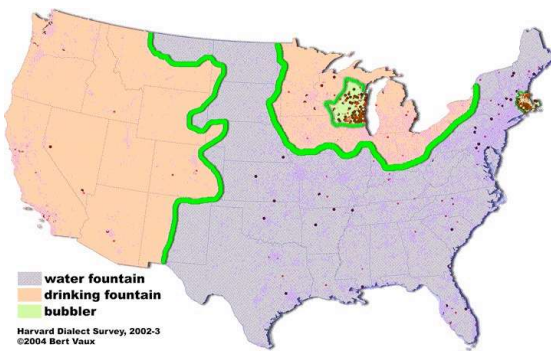
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What's this thing?

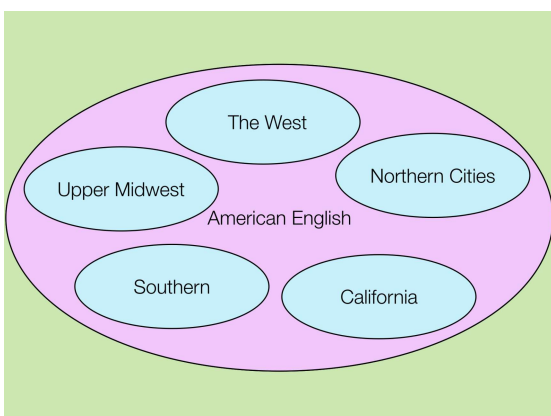


Not everybody from a region will have (all of) the dialect features

- This is as much a function of attitude as location
 - ‘Rootedness’ plays a major role (c.f. [Paul Reed's Work \(http://paulereed.com/\)](http://paulereed.com/))
 - There are many aspects of a person's identity that add up to “dialect”

There are many more regions and regional features we haven't covered

- Consider this a taste, not a meal!



It's not that simple

- Young Speakers
 - Old Speakers
 - Men
 - Women
 - Non-Binary speakers
 - Trans speakers
 - Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Queer Speakers
 - Speakers of AAVE
 - Latinx/Chicano Speakers
 - Educated Speakers
 - Uneducated Speakers
 - Urban Speakers
 - Rural Speakers
 - Nerds
 - ... and so on forever
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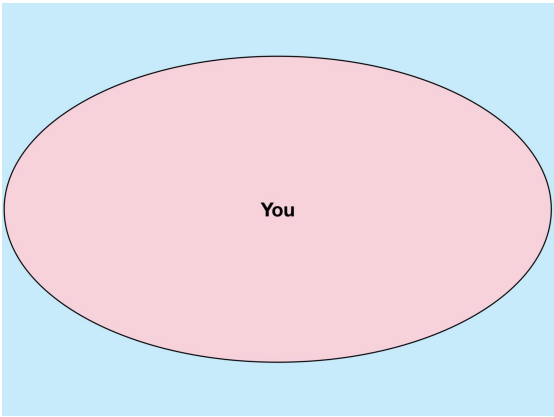
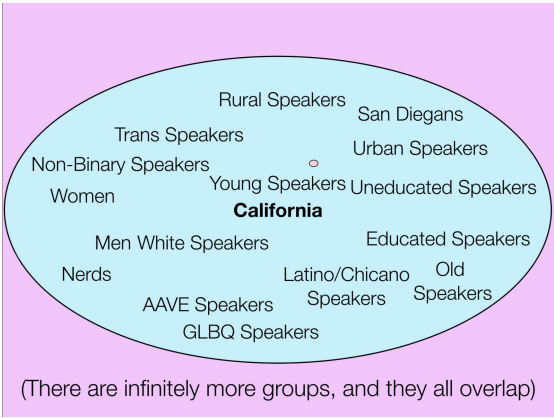
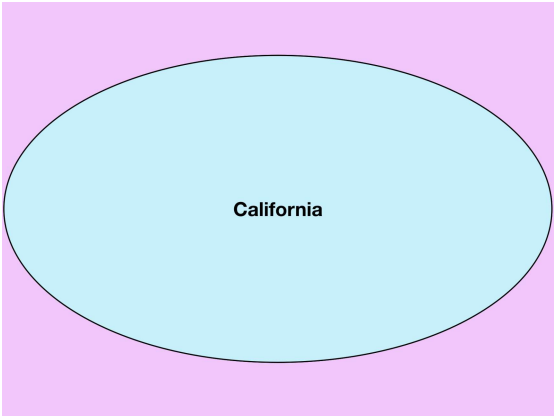
These are Sociolects

- A sociolect is a dialect shared among members of a certain social group
 - People can have influence from more than one sociolect at once
 - We often switch sociolects when in different social situations
 - Using a sociolect is a way of showing affiliation with a certain identity
 - Some sociolects have prestige, others don't
 - ... and which dialect is prestigious varies by context
 - These are the bread and butter of sociolinguists
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People can switch among their dialects and sociolects

See "It Wasn't 'Verbal Blackface.' AOC Was Code-Switching."

(<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/04/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-code-switches-black-english/586723/>).



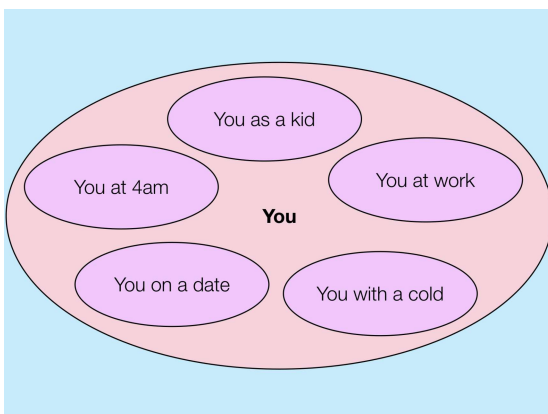


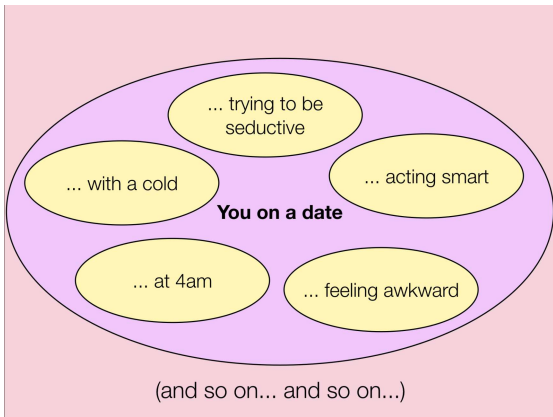
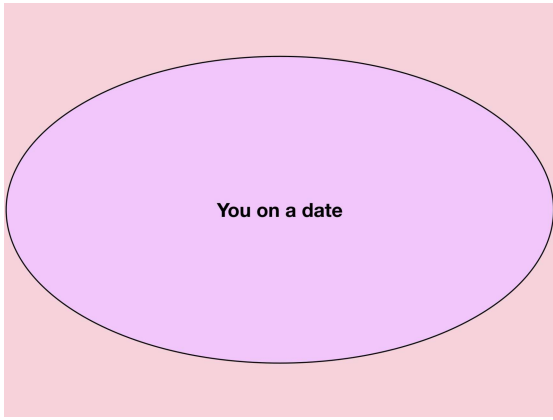
Idiolect

- You use language in a certain way, that way is your “idiolect”
 - Your esoteric pronunciations
 - The expressions and catch phrases that you use and prefer
 - The specific meanings that given words or phrases have to you
 - The features which you’ve inherited from your region(s) or social group(s)
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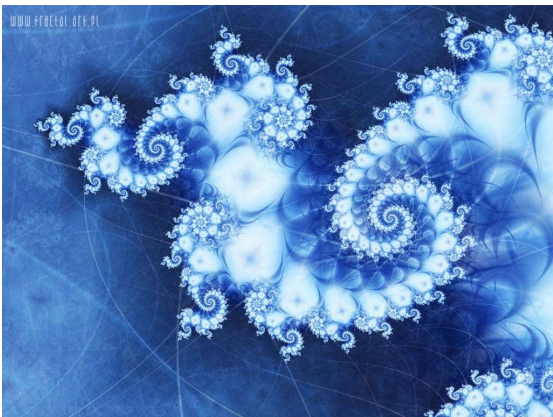
More Idiolect Features

- Odd spellings or emojis you use (LOL vs. lol, “Thanx”)
 - Your writing style, speech style
 - Your individual set of speech organs (which may change the way your speech sounds)
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Language is fractal



Language is fractal

- You see larger patterns at first
- Then you look closer and find more patterns and structure
- Then you look closer and find more patterns and structure

- Then you look closer and find more patterns and structure
 - Then you look closer and find more patterns and structure
 - Then you look closer and find more patterns and structure
 - ... you get the idea
-

It's very hard to find clear lines

- It can be hard to define what is a single language
 - The distinction between 'language' and 'dialect' is often political
 - If you like them, they speak a dialect of your language, otherwise, whole different language
 - Everybody speaks at least one dialect, sociolect, and idiolect
 - People often have features from multiple dialects or sociolects or languages
 - Each of these things overlap in complicated ways
 - **There's a reason that the social elements of language have an entire subfield**
-

We try to discuss variation in terms of languages, dialects, sociolects and idiolects

- Dialects are a particular form of language used by a certain social or geographical group of people
 - A sociolect is a particular social group's specific dialect
 - Your idiolect is your unique way of using language and speaking
 - Your speech and language is variable from situation to situation, from word to word
 - As you look closer and closer at language, you find more patterns and complexity, not less
-

“I can tell Pat really sent the text, they always use the 🙌 emoji”. This is an example of their...

- A. Dialect
- B. Sociolect
- C. Idiolect

D. Emojilect

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A. Dialect

B. Sociolect

C. **Idiolect**

D. Emojilect

Linguists are interested in how *everybody* talks

- Not just one prestigious or ‘correct’ variety
 - Not just the ‘academic’ or ‘mainstream’ dialects
 - Not just what goes in textbooks or dictionaries
 - ... and as such ...
-

We don’t tend to believe in a ‘correct variety’ of a language

- It’s hard to pin down which one *would be* correct
 - “Which region/dialect/sociolect/idiolect is right?”
 - The situationally ‘correct or ’appropriate’ variety is about social context
 - “That variety is bad here” does not mean “That variety is bad”
 - **‘Correct’ is a social judgement, not a linguistic one**
-

So, we think about ‘grammar’ differently than your English professor

Prescriptive and Descriptive Grammar

Speakers of a language have intuitions about grammar

Which of these sentences is ‘grammatical’ English?

- A. “John went with Tina to the cat show”
 - B. “The boy flame take watchingsly”
 - C. “Correct Horse Battery Staple”
 - D. “Esta oración no es inglés”
 - E. I’m not sure which is grammatical
-

Descriptive Grammar

The grammatical rules of the language, dialect, and sociolect being spoken which *describe* how (a group of) people *actually talk or write*.

“The boy flame take watchingsly” is descriptively ungrammatical

- ‘Grammatical’ sentences are in harmony with the local rules
- People ‘stumble’ over ungrammatical sentences
- **When something is descriptively ungrammatical, it’s often hard to understand**
 - Although not all hard-to-understand sentences are ungrammatical!

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Dialects and Sociolects and Idiolects each have their own descriptive grammar!

- ... and they follow it!
-

African American English

- Also known as 'AAVE' (African American Vernacular English) or historically, 'Ebonics'
 - Negative Concord
 - Can't nobody say he don't work
 - *Nobody can say he doesn't work.
 - Habitual be
 - He be drivin all over the place
 - *He often drives all over the place lately
 - Copula deletion
 - They not like us
 - *They are not like us
 - **These grammatical rules are followed carefully by speakers of AAE**
-

It is patently false to claim that Black (or Chicano, Southern, etc) speakers 'have no grammar'

- Damnit.
 - They use the grammar of their dialect as carefully as you do yours!
-

Let's try a different set of grammar judgements...

Which of these sentences is 'grammatical' English?

- A. 'I never know what I should write with'
 - B. 'I don't know who she photographed'
 - C. 'Ron and Jerry stayed home last night'
 - D. 'We hope to considerably advance machine learning technology'
 - E. I'm not sure which is grammatical
-

According to some people, C is only the correct answer

- A. 'I never know what I should write with'
 - B. 'I don't know who she photographed'
 - C. **'Ron and Jerry stayed home last night'**
 - D. 'We hope to considerably advance machine learning technology'
 - E. I'm not sure which is grammatical
- **A B and D all violated rules of prescriptive grammar**
-

Prescriptive Grammar

Made up or social rules that *prescribe* how people *should* talk or write

The 'rules' being violated

- A. 'I never know what I should write with'
 - "Never end a sentence with a preposition"
 - B. 'I don't know who she photographed'
 - "'whom' should be used for a direct object"
 - D. 'We hope to stunningly advance machine learning technology'
 - "How dare you split an infinitive, you ingrate!"
-

Which one of these clicker questions was harder?

Prescriptive grammar rules are social rules

- They are not universally observed
 - They do not generally affect your ability to be understood
 - They're often based in written ambiguity (e.g. there, they're, their)
 - They're often quoted from one particular source (Strunk and White, 🎨)
 - They're often associated with a specific setting or institution
-

What other prescriptive grammar rules are you familiar with?

Let's work on that distinction a bit more

Which of these rules is a *descriptive* grammar rule?

- A. "Say 'I'll make do', not 'I'll make due'"
 - B. "All sentences must include a verb"
 - C. "Always include the punctuation inside the quote"
 - D. "In-text citations should be surrounded by parentheses"
 - E. "Emojis cannot be used in professional correspondence"
-

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Which of these sentences is a *descriptively* ungrammatical?

- A. "Me and Mark are going clubbing"

- B. "I hate polar bears, there paws are too big."
 - C. "Frank Suzanne live Dallas"
 - D. "Herbert ain't gone to the store yet"
 - E. "Michael Bay luvs 2 desecrate good cartoonz."
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Linguists are interested in *descriptive grammar*

- We don't believe there is a 'correct' variety
 - A rule which a large number of people don't follow isn't a real rule
 - ... or it's not a rule in all dialects
 - And if you speak a non-standard variety, we think that's awesome!
-

It's fun to see *when* prescriptive corrections are made

- Sometimes, people truly believe the rules are real
 - Awwwwwww....
 - Often, they're trying to help
 - "If you want to be taken seriously in [context], you'll need to talk like this"
 - Sometimes, they're trying to show superiority
 - "You bring an argument before me yet you cannot master even basic grammatical structure! Fool!"
 - ... and frustratingly often, it's because ...
-

Attacking people's language is often used as a covert way of attacking people

- “Somebody needs to teach these inner-city kids to be more articulate”
 - “You’re in America, learn to speak English right”
 - “You’re so shrill, you should be more lady-like in your speech”
 - “He’s a nice boy, but why does he have to talk so Mexican?”
 - “Damned teenage girls filling their speech with [insert thing we all do]”
(<https://www.npr.org/2015/07/23/425608745/from-upspeak-to-vocal-fry-are-we-policing-young-womens-voices>)
-

Whole languages get similar ideological treatments

- People love describing languages as ‘rough’ or ‘unevolved’ or ‘angry’ or ‘primitive’ or ‘romantic’ (and so on)
 - These ideas are generally not supported by or evaluable in linguistic theory!
 - They often cite characteristics found in huge numbers of languages as ‘evidence’ of this
 - These are usually social judgements applied to people via their languages
 - ... rather than facts about the languages themselves
 - Be careful with these kinds of language ideologies, as they can be hurtful
 - ... and ask yourself why and how they’re being discussed!
-

Of course, it's not all like that

- Most people mean well
 - There's value to learning how to talk like the Old People with Power want you to talk in some contexts
 - “Code switching” among dialects for fun and profit.
 - ... but it's important to think carefully about these things
-

This is why Linguists don't like being called 'grammarians'

- It's why we spend so much time talking about the difference between descriptive and prescriptive grammar in LIGN 101
 - ... and it's why we'll spend the rest of the quarter talking about descriptive grammar, rather than prescriptive grammar
-

Wrapping up

- Language is fractal with massive amounts of variation
 - We try to subdivide variation into dialects, sociolects, and idiolects
 - It's hard to identify a 'correct' variety, and that's a social thing anyways
 - Descriptive rules describe what's actually being said
 - Prescriptive rules prescribe what somebody *thinks* should be said
 - Linguists care about descriptive grammar, and don't tend to buy into 'prescriptive rules'
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For next time

- Read Fromkin's chapter on 'Phonetics' if you'd like
 - ... and don't be a pedantic twit
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Thank you!