

Social Variables in Linguistic Variation

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Learning Objectives

At the end of this lecture, students will understand how multiple social variables interact with linguistic variables in linguistic variation:

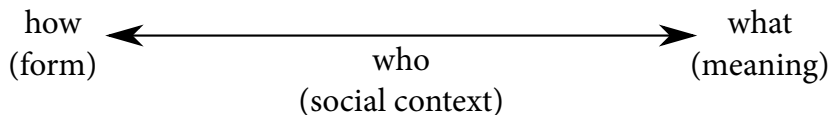
- Place
- Power
- Class
- Formality
- Race

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Age

Students should be able to formulate testable hypotheses about linguistic behavior given social identity.

Students will also understand the major methodologies used in variationist sociolinguistics.

Language and Identity

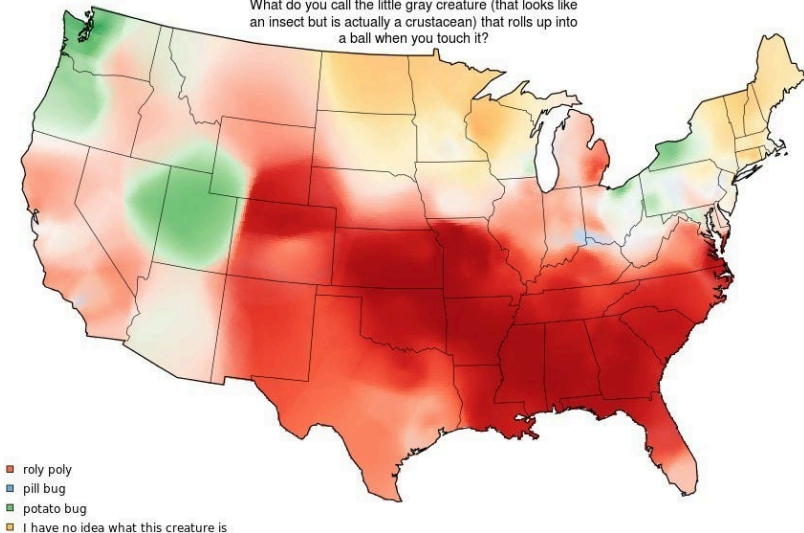


Dahntahn [dʌntʌn] says, “I’m from
Pittsburgh.”

You talk in ways that express your local or regional identity.

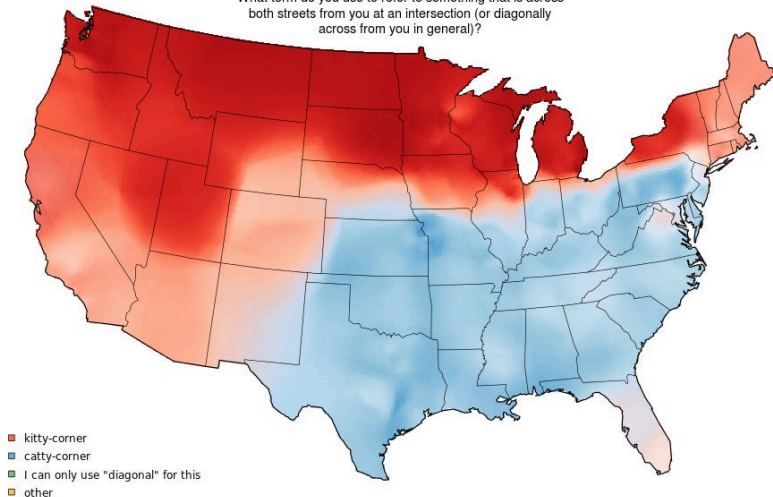
Language and Place

What do you call the little gray creature (that looks like an insect but is actually a crustacean) that rolls up into a ball when you touch it?



Language and Place

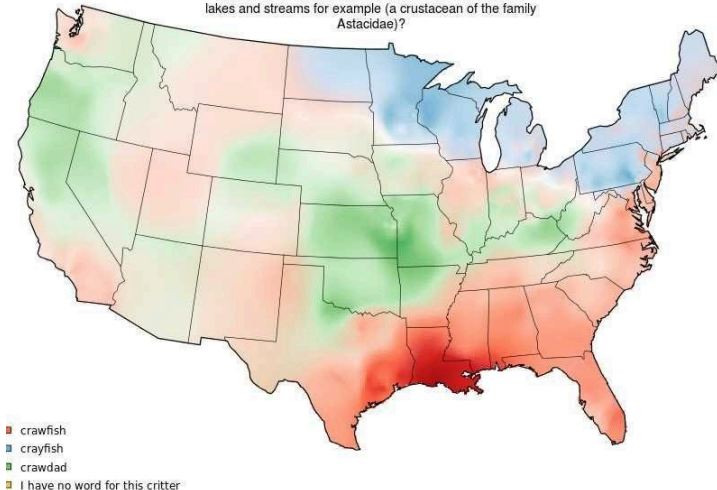
What term do you use to refer to something that is across both streets from you at an intersection (or diagonally across from you in general)?



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Language and Place

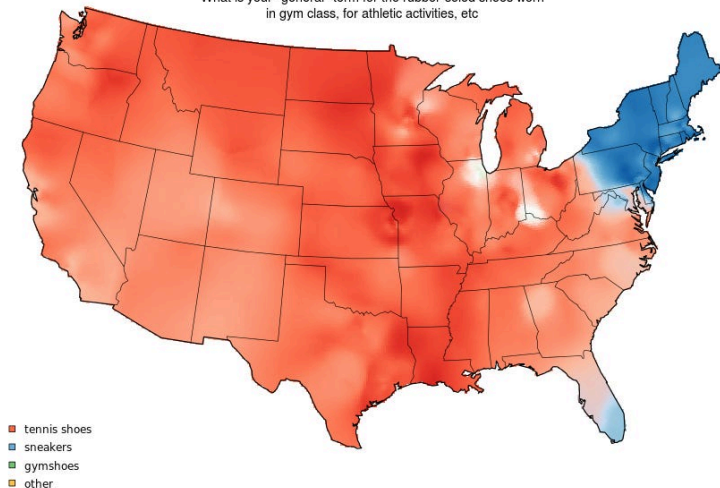
What do you call the miniature lobster that one finds in lakes and streams for example (a crustacean of the family Astacidae)?



Joshua Katz, Department of Statistics, NC State University

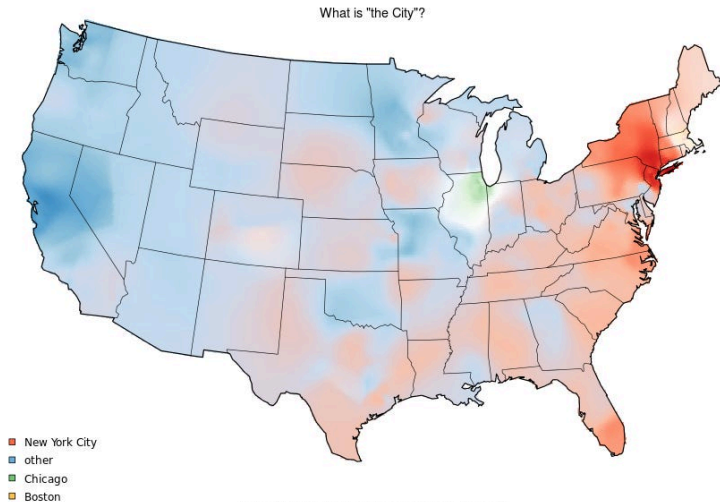
Language and Place

What is your *general* term for the rubber-soled shoes worn in gym class, for athletic activities, etc



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Language and Place



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Martha's Vineyard

In William Labov's famous study of /aj/ and /aw/, he found that the variants with a schwa nucleus (like [tʃəjm] for *time* or [tʃəwn] for *town*) was associated with identification with Martha's Vineyard.

- Identifying with Martha's Vineyard more than Massachusetts
- Living away from the tourist areas
- Being a fisherman, a traditional role of people on Martha's Vineyard
- Being male (see language and gender, below)

Language and Power

Relative power is also reflected in linguistic form.

Examples?

- Politeness strategies
- Honorific systems

Language and Class

Closely related to power is class. Language varies according to class identity. Example: British English (as exemplified in *Downton Abbey*, reality, etc.)

- Working class dialects (*harm* and *arm* merge)
- Middle class dialects
- Upper class dialects

Language and Formality/Familiarity

- Speech and writing differ according to level of formality
- An email message to a professor might differ from a text message to a friend
 - I do not know
 - I don't know
 - idk
- Familiar pronouns

Language and Race

- While Britain is characterized by class divisions in language (and society), the United States is characterized by racial divisions
- Race and language have been studied extensively in the US
- AAVE and SWE have become increasingly racialized language varieties, even though they dialect features in the southern US were originally more regional than racial
- AAVE differs from Standard American English in its phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and discourse patterns

- Just as language varies with race, it also varies with ethnic identity.
- Chicano English or Hispanic Vernacular English is an example of this.
- It is not the same as L2 English—many of its speakers are native speakers of English

Language and Gender

- There are many stereotypes about how genders differ linguistically
- Many of these are not true (for example, that women talk more)
- However, there are real ways in which people communicate their gender identity through linguistic form.
- One example: even when you control for vocal-tract length, female vowels spaces tend to be more dispersed than male vowel spaces
- Another example: in North America, women are more likely to use certain discourse strategies, like hedging, than men.

Language and Age

- If there were not linguistic differences between generations, language would not change.
- However, language and age is very difficult to study.
- There are a small, finite number of genders; societies usually define a finite number of racial and ethnic categories.
- Age is continuous.
- Furthermore, chronological age doesn't always line up with generational identity.

How do we study this?

- Surveys
- Corpus studies
- Experimental studies

Questions?