

Types of Linguistic Variation

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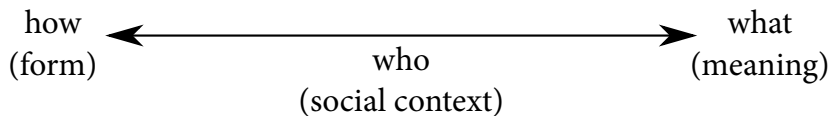
Learning Objectives

At the end of this lecture, students will have a basic understanding of, and know multiple examples of, several types of linguistic variation:

- Phonetic variation
- Phonological variation

- Morphological variation
- Lexical variation
- Syntactic variation
- Discourse variation
- Pragmatic variation

Social Meaning



When you talk, read, and write, you are not just communicating *propositional* meaning; you are communicating *social* meaning. One way you do this is through linguistic variation.

Phonetic Variation

Difference is how phonemes are realized. Part of “accent.”
In Martha’s Vineyard (an island off the coast of the US state of Massachusetts) many people pronounce the diphthongs /aj/ and /aw/ differently than in Standard American English and the English of mainland Massachusetts.

	Std Am	Martha’s Vineyard
bite	bajt	bəjt
pipe	p ^h ajp	p ^h əjp
bout	bawt	bəwt
pouch	p ^h awtʃ	p ^h əwtʃ

No splits or mergers.

Phonological Variation

Phonological variation is different from phonetic variation in that the system of contrasts is restructured. Consider the following song:

*Oh, they had to carry Harry to the ferry,
And the ferry carried Harry to the shore;
And the reason that they had to carry Harry to the ferry
Was that Harry couldn't carry any more.*

The only makes sense as a song if *carry*, *Harry*, and *ferry* all rhyme, which they do in certain innovative dialects of North American English and do not in more conservative dialects. Since this involves MERGERS, it is phonological variation.

A similar type of merger has happened in the English of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and also in the Great Basin of the western US. In these dialects, /i/ and /ɪ/ have merged to /ɪ/ before /l/ so that *still* and *steel* are pronounced the same.

Morphological Variation

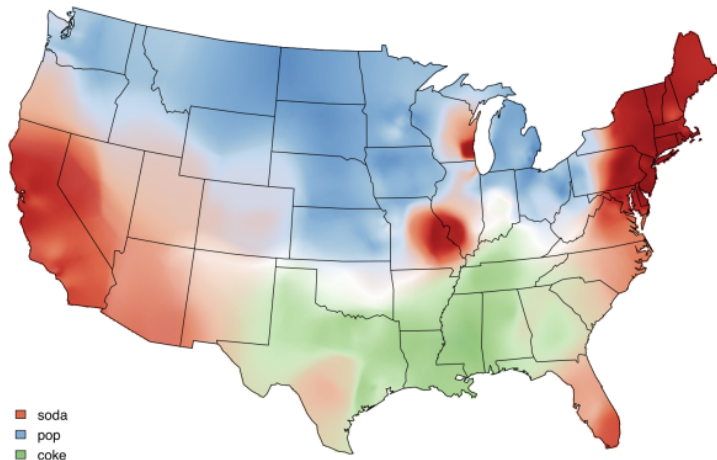
Sociolects may differ in the morphological constructions they include. For example, consider the *eye-fuck* construction. There are many compounds with this structure, but they are largely restricted to a particular social context.

There is also paradigmatic variation as in English *to see*:

	DIALECT A	DIALECT B
INFINITIVE	see	see
NON-PAST	see	see
PAST	saw	seen
PRESENT PARTICIPLE	seeing	seeing
PAST PARTICIPLE	seen	seen

Lexical Variation

What is your generic term for a sweetened, carbonated beverage?



Map by Joshua Katz, Department of Statistics, NC State University
Based on survey data from Bert Vaux, Department of Linguistics, University of Cambridge

Syntactic Variation

- (1)
 - a. Most babies like cuddled.
 - b. Most babies like to be cuddled.
- (2)
 - a. The grass needs cut.
 - b. The grass needs cutting.
 - c. The grass needs to be cut.

There is socially conditioned variation in how discourse is structured. For example, in some social contexts, speakers may structure their discourse as personal narratives or factual assertions. What other examples of discourse variation can you think of?

Variation in Pragmatics

- There is great socially-conditioned variation in politeness strategies (e.g. positive politeness versus negative politeness)
 - **positive politeness** make the hearer feel good about themselves
 - **negative politeness** avoid imposition on the hearer
- What about turn-taking in conversation?
- What about other speech acts?