

LING001

Introduction to Linguistics

Lecture 19

Variation

04/13/2020

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Exam 3 is due! Some recurring questions

- Do we have to list all allomorphs?
 - Yes
- Do we have to list more than one sentence for “No” constituency tests?
 - No, but you need to be sure No is the right answer
- Does order matter in phase structure rules
 - YES
- What do we write for the trace explanations
 - If you include what was included on the practice problem solution, that will be full credit

Language journal is due!

- But there is no longer a late penalty. We will accept your journal until April 29 without penalty.
- Grading questions
 - 10% weight computed by Canvas (not points-based)
 - We will grade your best 4 entries
 - Writing about extra credit videos or language-related SONA studies counts toward your 4 entries

Extra Credit explained

- Research participation via SONA
 - You'll still get credit, even if it wasn't a linguistics study
- We are obliged to offer an alternative — we've chosen linguistics lectures (discussion of language research)
- We are also obliged to ensure the alternative is not more work than the SONA participation — so, we chose to have you write about it, but in your language journal
 - So the writing part can be used toward your class assignment
- Can you write about SONA participation in your journal?
 - Yes, and yes that will count toward your 4 required entries, but they must be related to language in some way

How to do well ~~this week~~ today

- **Focus on Exam 3!**
- New things will be released tomorrow morning
 - Readings and practice problems for this week

THE Grammar of English?

- **So far we might have implied (but hopefully haven't) that**
 - There is one grammar of English (or any language)
 - All speakers share that grammar in a uniform way
- **Reality: Many variants of English!**
 - As many grammars as speakers!
 - Extensive regional variation
 - Variation related to social class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity...
 - Variation over time: historical change

Regional Dialects

- **Some common myths:**
 - Some people don't speak a dialect and don't have an accent
 - There is one right way to speak a language
 - Nonstandard dialects are modified versions of the standard dialect
 - Nonstandard dialects are sloppy, lazy, uneducated (etc.) versions of a "real" language
- These are all **false**.

Wrong v right in Language

- What does it mean to be wrong in language?
- Can a native speaker get their own language wrong?
- Depends on goals and intentions:
 - “You don’t know nothing” (You don’t know anything)
 - A mistake if your intention was to use formal Standard English
 - **Not** a mistake in many varieties of English
- Native speakers aren’t necessarily native speakers of a standard variety
 - Some languages don’t even have a standard variety

Language vs dialect

- Where is the dividing line between languages and dialects?
- Very hard to draw!
- A couple of possible answers...

Mutual intelligibility

- If speakers can understand each other, they're speaking dialects of the same language.
- If they can't, they're speaking separate languages
- Somewhat helpful, but raises various problems
 - **Asymmetry**: Romanians can often understand Italian; the reverse tends not to be true. (Similar issues with Brazilian and European Portuguese; Canadian and European French)
 - **Dialect continua**: Some Dutch dialects are mutually intelligible with some German dialects, but not all!
 - **Reference point**: Whose comprehension matters? People vary in how well they can understand different dialects.

Military backing



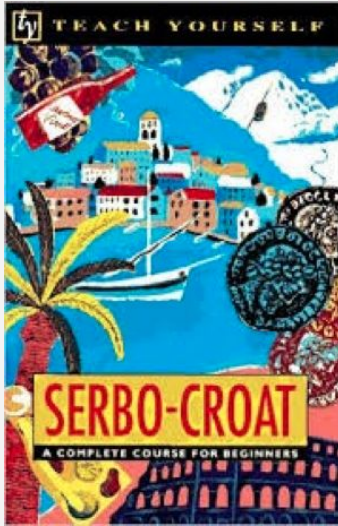
- Max Weinreich (quoting an auditor at a lecture he gave):
A language is a dialect with an army and a navy
- What does this mean?
- Not a reliable diagnostic, but gets at an important point

Complications

- What gets called a language and a dialect varies a lot and has a lot to do with politics
 - Romance “languages” are at least as similar to each other as dialects of Arabic
 - Chinese consists of several mutually unintelligible “dialects”
 - Question complicated by shared standard varieties (e.g. Modern Standard Arabic, Classical Arabic) and shared/different writing systems

Croatian

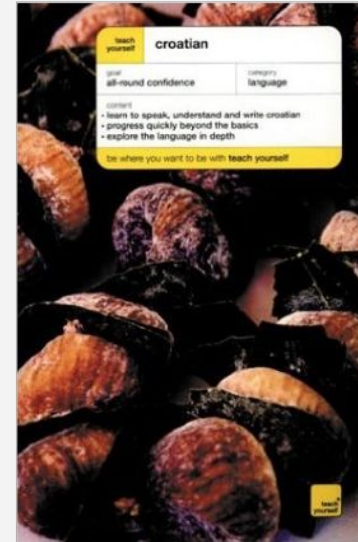
- Croatian War of Independence: 1991-1995



This edition first published 1993



Published 2003



Another diagnostic

- If you imitate it and speakers are impressed, it's a language
- If you imitate it and speakers get angry, it's a dialect
- Actually somewhat helpful, but mostly about how speakers see their own variety (and this varies!)

The wrong question?

- For these reasons, linguists often avoid making the distinction (use words like variety). To some extent it reflects an artificial division in continuous space.
- Interestingly, there are analogous problems with distinguishing biological species.



Dialects and Prestige

- Dialects differ a lot in **prestige**
- But **no dialect** is really superior
- Dialect prestige has nothing to do with any objective superiority of the dialect itself. Simply driven by the prestige of it's speakers.
- Often, there is official or unofficial recognition of one dialect as the "**standard**" for a language
- The standard is not better than other dialects; often it is just the dialect of the capital city.
- Over time, standards can be seen as a changing fashion

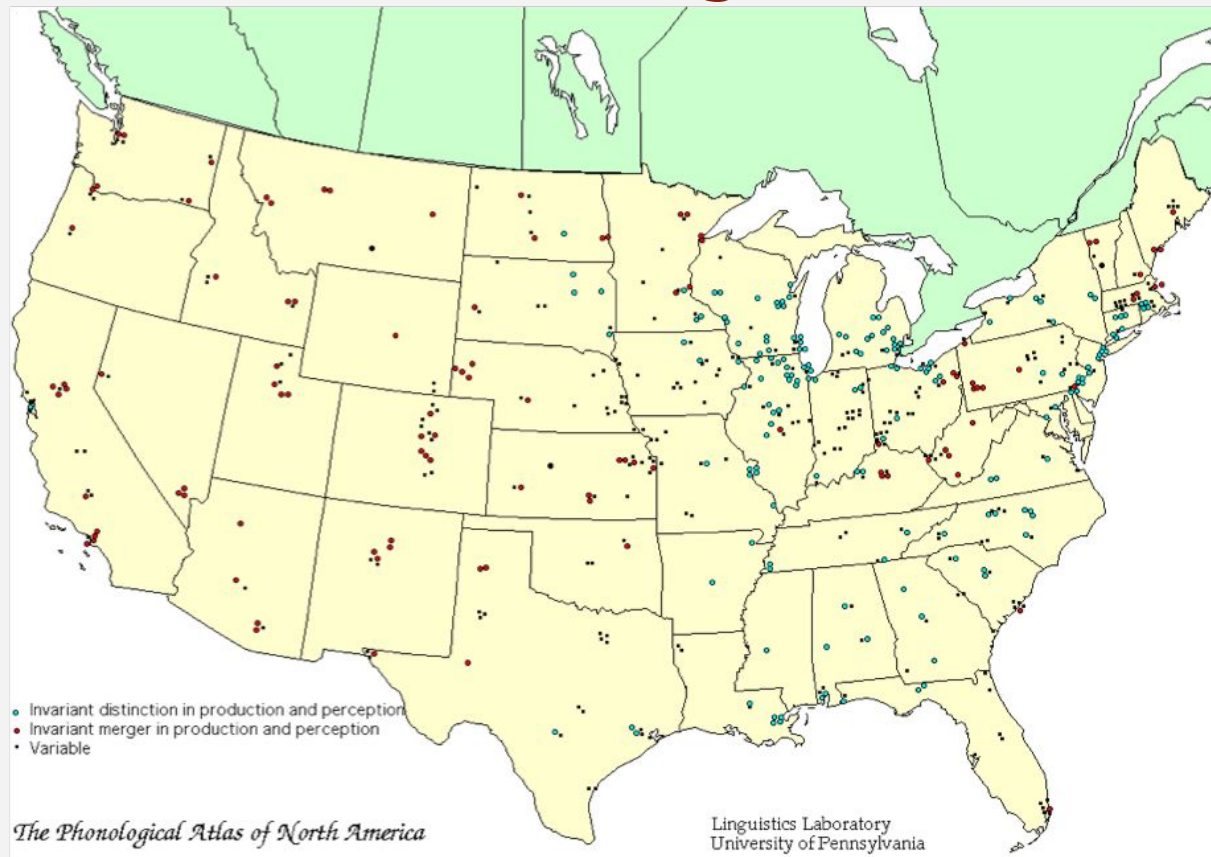
Changing Standards

- **Around 1800:**
- Americans looked to Southern England for fashionable, “correct” speech:
 - **r**-dropping
 - Back a [ɑ] in **last, ask, bath, half**
 - **g**-dropping and h-dropping (‘untin’, shootin’, fishin’)
- This has clearly changed!
- Change also happens with individuals over time

Why are there dialects?

- **Default explanation:** linguistic patterns gradually diverge when separated geographically (or socially)
- Differences build up over time
- With colonization and immigration, different **settlement patterns** can also lead to dialect differences.
- Internal **population movements** also have an important effect
 - Can neutralize historical differences
 - Can spread existing variants to new areas
 - Sometimes creates new variants
- If anything, variation in US English may be increasing

Cot = Caught?



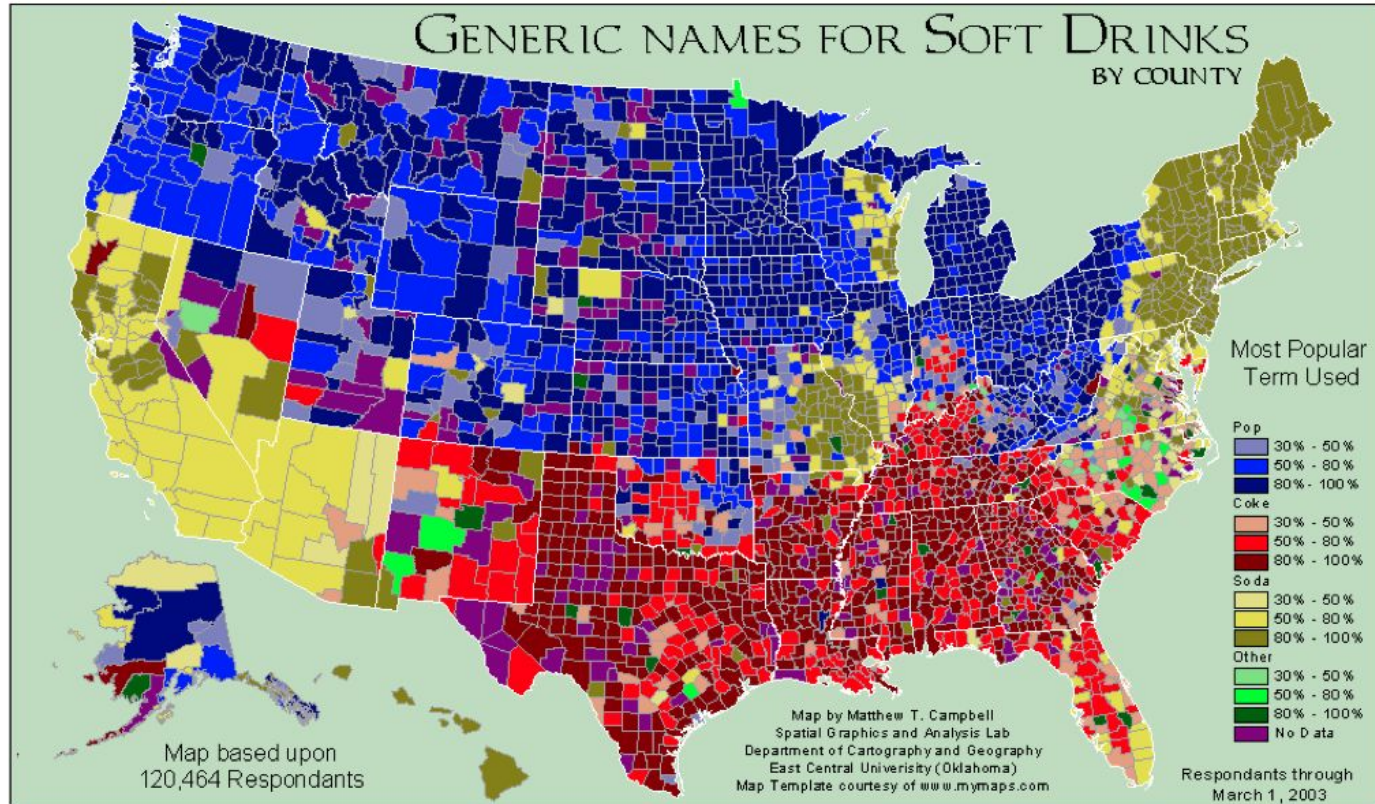
Variation at all levels

- Dialects vary in all the ways in which languages vary
 - Phonology
 - Vocabulary
 - Morphology and syntax

Examples of dialect specific words

Place	Word	Means
Rhode Island	<i>cabinet</i>	milkshake
Pittsburgh	<i>gumband</i>	Rubber band
South Wales	<i>tidy</i>	Cool, good
PA Dutch-influenced English	<i>snickelfritz</i>	Rowdy kid
New York	<i>schlep</i>	Carry, drag
Scotland	<i>juice</i>	soda

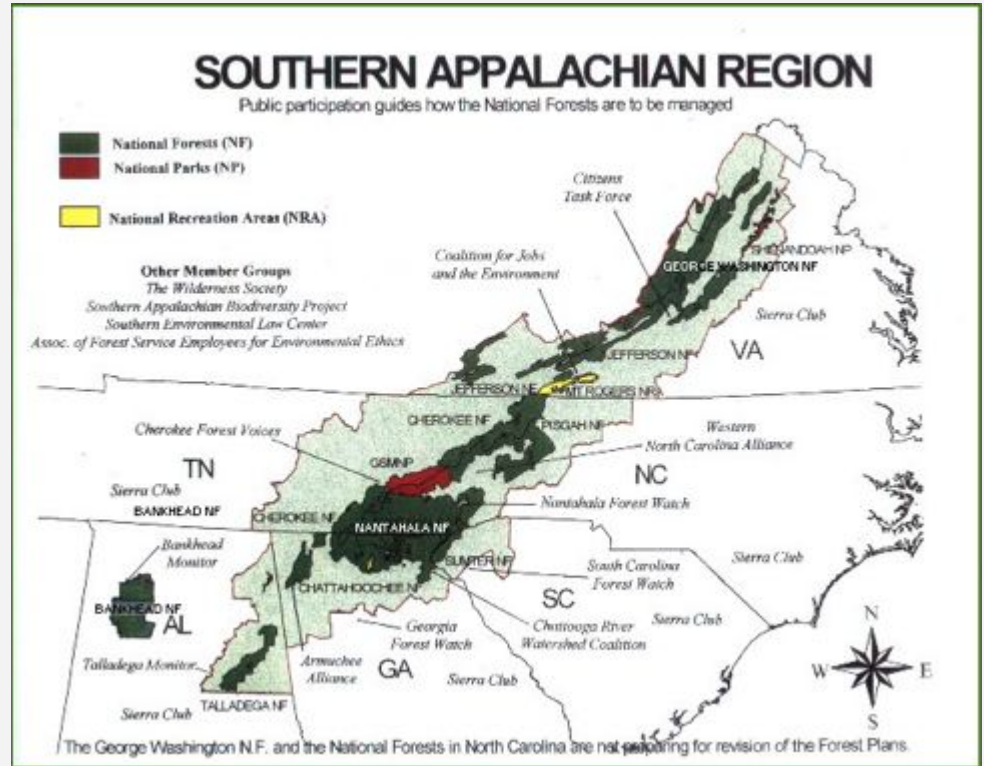
Pop - Soda - Coke



Grammatical differences

- **Appalachian Dialect**

- She kept a-callin' my name
- She woke up a-screamin'
- She kept a-waterin' the lawn
- The bear come a-runnin' out of the woods



The Grammar of a-verbing

- a-verbing has **systematic distributional restrictions**
 - The verb must have initial stress: You can't say ***a-forgettin'** or ***a-deceivin'**
 - The verb must begin with a consonant: You can't say ***a-askin'**
 - It can only be used as a progressive verb form: you can't say ***I like a-sailin'** or ***I saw the a-runnin' horse**
- Note that a-verbing did not originate in US English
 - Common historically in British English (before US English existed!)

Sociolinguistic Variation

- Various **social factors** affect variation
 - Region
 - Social class
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Register
 - Ethnicity

The rise and fall of r

- Most English Speakers in England, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, and Southern Africa pronounce /r/ only before vowels (**non-rhotic dialects**)
- Most Scottish, Irish, and North American speakers pronounce it even before consonants or at the ends of utterances (**rhotic dialects**)
- History in the US:
 - A rhotic **prestige dialect** in England spread to the US and was carried inland
 - Non-rhoticity then **became common (and prestigious)** in English but only spread to some coastal cities in US (Boston, New York, Savanna, GA, etc)
 - Now “standard” American English is rhotic (has r)

Social Significance of Non-rhoticity

- Famous sociolinguistic study on rhoticity by **William Labov** in 1960s
- Ask sales people at department stores: where is this item? (he knew it was on the **fourth floor**)
- Background: Post World War II New York
 - Non-rhotic speech perceived as lower class in NYC
 - Rhoticity more prestigious



Department Store Study

- Procedure
 - Experimenter asks a clerk **"Where's women's shoes?"**
 - Clerk answers casually, **"Fourth floor"**
 - Experimenter says, **"Excuse me?"**
 - Clerk answers emphatically, **"Fourth floor"**
 - Make a note of whether or not r is pronounced

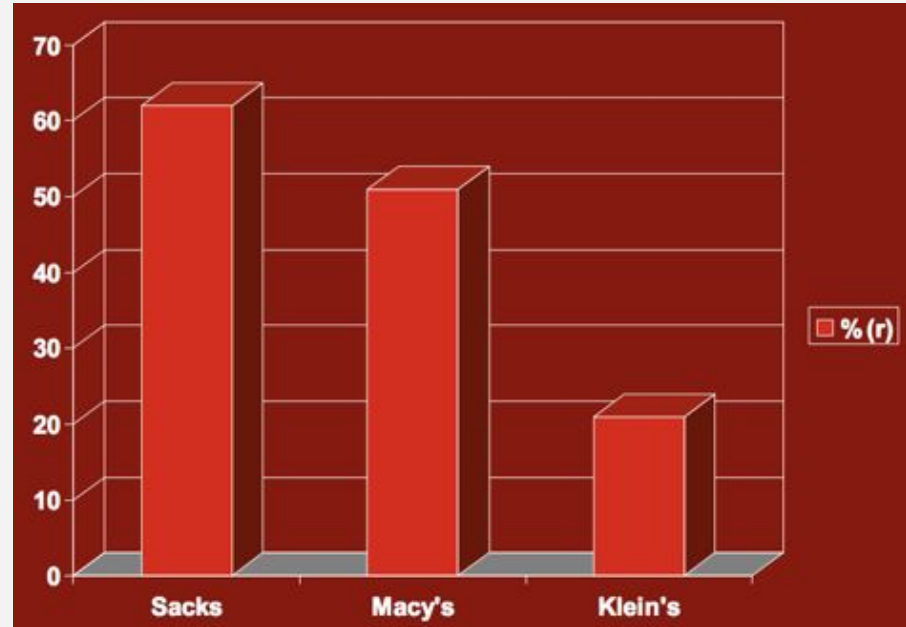
Different Places

- **High prestige:** Saks Fifth Avenue
 - Customers are wealthy
- **Middle prestige:** Macy's
 - Customers are (upper-)middle class
- **Low prestige:** S. Klein
 - Customers are working class



Findings on r

- More “r”s in careful pronunciation
- **Social stratification**
 - Saks > Macy’s > S. Klein
 - Note: class of customer is what matters!
- **Gender:** women > men



Sociolinguistic Variation

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Variation by age

- **Two kinds** of variation over time:
 - Age grading: speakers change how they speak as they age
 - Language change: language changes over time
- **Gold-standard approach to language change:**
 - Track specific individuals over their lifespan
 - Track their children
 - Takes a very long time! High drop-out rate!
- **Alternative approaches**
 - Record people of different ages in the same community (“apparent time”)

Variation by register

- E.g. **Formal/polite** vs. **conversational/casual**
 - “I was rather enthusiastic about the prospect”
 - “I was, like, totally psyched!”
- Honorific suffixes in Korean
 - Korean has a complex system of register/ politeness suffixes to show social rank distance between speaker and listener
 - Similar systems in other languages, such as Japanese

Japanese man fatally stabbed with umbrella

REUTERS

TOKYO — A Japanese man was so enraged by an acquaintance's failure to address him with an honorific that he stabbed the man to death with an umbrella, police said yesterday.

It was the second killing with an umbrella in Japan in less than a month.

Ryuji Sakamoto, 32, was arrested yesterday and confessed to kill-

ing Takayuki Niimi, also 32, during a Friday night quarrel in the city of Sakuragi, police said.

"It appears that Sakamoto harbored resentment of Niimi . . . because Niimi did not use an honorific when speaking to him," a police spokesman said.

Sakamoto punched Niimi in the face and then, when he fell over, stabbed him in the head with the umbrella, police said.

Honorific terms of address are used in Japan even among friends, most commonly by adding "san" to a person's name. Failure to do so is seen as extremely rude.

In May, a man was stabbed to death with an umbrella, apparently in an argument over who had the right of way on a narrow road.

What's behind variation in language?

- The **default explanation** (slow divergence through separation) may not be sufficient in all cases
- People often **modify their speech** to become like those they identify with
 - Emphasize solidarity with group
 - Slang and jargon often fulfills this function (among other things)
- People may also **modify their speech** to set themselves apart.
 - Emphasize difference from other groups

Attitude Matters

- How you speak is strongly affected by your attitude
- **Strong identification with group:** adopt/keep their speech patterns, even exaggerate them
- **Desire to separate from group:** attempt to eliminate marked speech patterns
- **Department store study:** adjustment to context/addressee
- **Another early Labov Study:** Martha's Vineyard, where pronunciation is an indicator of attitude

Social Dialects on Martha's Vineyard

- Two ways of pronouncing diphthongs in words like house and town
 - **Standard:** [haus]
 - Vowel in 'cow'
 - **Vineyard Dialect:** [həʊs]
 - Vowel in 'show'



Note: speakers are not necessarily conscious of this difference

Up-Island vs. Down-Island

- Two-way divide on island:
 - **Up-island** — rural, sparsely settled
 - **Down-island** — three towns, more mainland-oriented, because of ferry terminal and tourist trade

Factors influencing [əʊ] use

- **Region:** more common up-island than down-island
- **Profession/class:** more common among fisherman
- **Age:** common among people in 30s and 40s
- **Attitude** toward the island
 - Positive - 68%
 - Neutral - 37%
 - Negative - 5%

Dialect and Attitude

- Martha's Vineyard is easy to love and to hate:
 - Beautiful place
 - Hard to make a living; everything is expensive
 - Wealthy incomers an opportunity and an irritation
- Those who have a **positive attitude** toward the island (negative attitude to outsiders) talk in the MV way
 - [həʊs]-diphthongs
- Those who have a **negative attitude** toward it talk in a mainland way, with [aʊ]-diphthongs
- The dialect difference maintained by social attitude
 - But this is **unconscious** — speakers not clearly aware of the differences between the two diphthongs

Another example of identity driven variation

- African-American Vernacular English (**AAVE**)
- AAVE is **often described as** slang or bad English (including by some of its speakers)
 - **Not true!** In fact, AAVE is simply another variety of English
 - Similar misunderstandings common for other dialects (e.g., Scots English)
- AAVE forms are **often thought to be** altered from Standard American English
 - **Not true!** The alternation between **ask** and **ax** has occurred since Old English (accepted in formal writing until 1600s)

Where do new languages come from?

- Some cases of sign languages emerging from (more or less) nothing:
 - Nicaraguan Sign Language...
- Some cases of spoken languages emerging from contact situations:
 - Pidgins
 - Creoles

Dialects become languages

- **More usually...**
 - **New dialects** emerge through
 - i. separation
 - ii. social pressures
 - Eventually enough change accumulates that we consider them **separate languages**
 - But what causes the changes that accumulate?

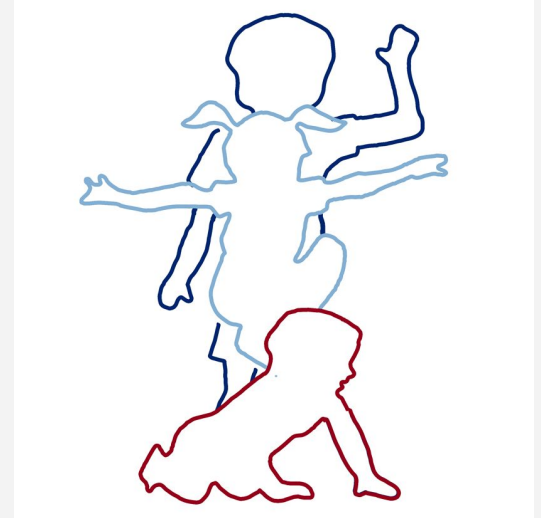
Next time

Why and how does language change?

Variation at Penn

Acquisition of Variation

- My lab studies acquisition of variation in children
- How do children acquire variation in language?
- How do they know to ignore some variation (“noise” or mistakes) and learn other variation?



Language Variation and Cognition Lab

- Dr. Meredith Tamminga
- “My research is based on the premise that social, temporal, and spatial patterns of linguistic variation reflect the underlying structure of the human capacity for language. I integrate experimental psycholinguistic methods, computational modeling, and the quantitative analysis of natural speech data to learn how speakers store and produce linguistic variables”.
- Ling 102* Sociolinguistics (Sector I; Quantitative Data Analysis)



Expanding variation at Penn

Dr. Nicole Holliday

Joining Penn linguistics
faculty

“I study sociolinguistics, specifically, how individuals interact with language to conceptualize and construct identity of both self and others. I’m especially interested in how individuals who cross traditional racial/ethnic boundaries reflect multiple social identities through linguistic practices”

