

# Dialect

## Dialect Definition

A dialect is the language used by the people of a specific area, class, district, or any other group of people. The term dialect involves the spelling, sounds, grammar and pronunciation used by a particular group of people and it distinguishes them from other people around them.

Dialect is a very powerful and common way of [characterization](#), which elaborates the geographic and social background of any [character](#).

## Examples of Dialect in Literature

---

### Example #1: *Huckleberry Finn* (By Mark Twain)

---

**Jim:** “We’s safe, Huck, we’s safe! Jump up and crack yo’ heels. Dat’s de good ole Cairo at las’, I jis knows it.”

**Huck:** “I’ll take the canoe and go see, Jim. It mightn’t be, you know.”

One of the best dialect examples in literature, in which it is used as a literary device, occurs in this piece by Mark Twain. Here, Twain uses exaggerated dialect to distinguish between the characters.

---

### Example #2: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (By Harper Lee)

---

Characters that are less educated and less sophisticated are usually shown to be speaking with a much stronger dialect. At certain points you might even need translations. Such as:

**Walter:** “Reckon I have. Almost died first year I come to school and et them pecans — folks say he pizened ’em and put ’em over on the school side of the fence.”

Translation: I suppose I have. The first year I came to school and ate those pecans, I almost died. Some people accuse him [Mr. Radley] of poisoning them, and keeping them over on the school side of the fence.

## Examples of Dialect in Poetry

---

### Example #4: *Poor Bit of a Wench* (By D. H. Lawrence)

---

“Will no one say hush! to thee,  
poor lass, poor bit of a wench?  
Will never a man say: Come, my pigeon,  
come an’ be still wi’ me, my own bit of a wench!”

---

### Example #5: *Gipsy* (By D. H. Lawrence)

---

“I, the man with the red scarf,  
Will give thee what I have, this last week’s earnings.  
Take them and buy thee a silver ring  
And wed me, to ease my yearnings.  
  
For the rest when thou art wedded  
I’ll wet my brow for thee  
With sweat, I’ll enter a house for thy sake,  
Thou shalt shut doors on me.”

You can also find great examples of dialect usage in two of George Eliot’s novels, *Silas Mariner* and *Middlemarch*. Another method of using dialect is to knowingly misspell a word to build an artistic aura around a character, which is termed “metaplasma.”

## Dialects in American and British English

There have been several very unique dialects in literature in the past, out of which some have grown to be more dominant. Old and middle English had distinctive regional dialects. The major dialects in old English involved Kentish, Northumbrian, Mercian, and West Saxon dialects. As the years passed, the West Saxon dialect became the standard. Moreover, middle English included Southern, West Midlands, Northern, East Midlands, and Kentish dialects.

In the British Isles, modern English give out hints of class as well as regional dialects. Almost every British country has its own variation to a certain extent. A. C. Baugh pointed out that in one place, at times, you can mark three dialectal regions in a single shire. Modern American English consists of dialects such as Eastern New England, Mid-southern, Inland Northern, Southern, General American North, Midland, New York, and Black English [Vernacular](#).

## **Function of Dialect**

The [narrative voice](#) in literature usually aspires to speak in concert with the reality it illustrates. African American authors often criticize this condition, while discussing the significance of speaking in so-called “standard” American English in [comparison](#) with African American English. Toni Cade Bambara has made a remarkable contribution to this aspect by choosing the language of her culture and [community](#).

She used her language as a very productive critical tool, and her dialect illustration in *The Lesson* functioned as an examination of how the people who listen to it ultimately hear the disparaged speech. By reviving the language, which had long been marginalized, she contributes towards the effort to salvage the cultural identity of African Americans. This integration of non-standard linguistic features into the literature in “the lesson” works as an insightful response to marginalization. It also proves the strength and power of language in portraying the diverse realities of people from different places.