

# Language and Society

Unit 1, Class 5

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# Language in Social Context

- Language is **not just a set of symbols**.
- We use language **socially**, not just individually.
- Language use **varies by context**:
  - *Courtroom language vs. language with patients.*

# Varieties of Language

- Language use **differs across individuals, groups, and regions.**
- “Variety” avoids *langauge* as a term
- Key terms:
  - **Variety**  $\equiv$  **Lect**  $\equiv$  **Isolect**

# Dialect

- A **variety** of language used by a group, often linked to **geographic regions**.
- **Standard dialect** is promoted by institutions.
  - *Example: Nepali supported by Pragma Parishad.*
- Dialects differ in **grammar and vocabulary**:
  - *kanno vs. dhaad, rayo vs. bhaaji (East vs. West Nepal)*

No dialect is linguistically superior—status arises from **social and political power**.

*“A language is a dialect with an army and navy.” – Max Weinreich, 1945 YIVO Conference (Abend, 2023)*

## Discussion:

*When does a dialect become a language?*

# Accent

- Accent refers to **pronunciation features** that show a speaker's **region, background, or social identity**.
- May result from:
  - **Native language influence.**
  - **Social/geographic variation.**
- Accent  $\neq$  Dialect (only one aspect of it).

## Discussion:

*Why is accented speech sometimes considered substandard?*

# Sociolect & Idiolect

## Sociolect

- A language variety spoken by a **social group or class**.
- Shared among members of the group.

## Idiolect

- A **unique personal language variety** of an individual.
- Includes personalized grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation.

# Register

*A register is a language variety used for a **specific purpose** in a **specific context**.*

Word	Everyday meaning	Specialized usage	Register
Notebook	A book for notes	A portable computer	Computing
Minor	Not important	Not legally adult	Legal
Freeze	Liquid turning to solid	Stop financial transactions	Banking
Share	A portion of something	Part of a company you can buy	Stock Exchange
Bill	Money owed	Proposed law	Legal

**Other examples:** scientific register, legalese, journalese, baby talk.

# Bi/Multilingualism

- **Bilinguals:** Fluent in two languages
- **Multilinguals:** Fluent in more than two
- **Simultaneous bilingual:** learns both languages before age 3
- **Sequential bilingual:** learns second language after age 3
- Research shows cognitive advantages in executive function  
(Bhandari et al., 2020; Bialystok et al., 2012)



# Assignment

Q1

Why do **varieties** exist? Discuss from the perspective of any one theory of language evolution we've discussed in the class.

Q2

In the recent demonstration of resident doctors, they used placards with slogans and demands. How does the language used in such protests and rallies differ from the one used with patients? Include examples from your experience and discuss.

# References

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