Today

- What is sociolinguistics?
- Language variation
- Dialects

Readings: 10.1-10.2, 10.4
Sociolinguistics

- The study of the relationship between language and society, of language variation, and of attitudes about language
- Variation may occur at all levels of the grammar
Language variation

- No two speakers of a language speak exactly the same way
  - Between group variation = *intergroup variation*
- No individual speaker speaks the same way all the time
  - Within-speaker variation = *intraspeaker variation*
A variety of a language spoken by a group of people that is characterized by systematic features (e.g., phonological, lexical, grammatical) that distinguish it from other varieties of that same language.

**Idiolect**: the speech variety of an individual speaker
Language = a continuum of dialects

Dialect = a continuum of idiolects
Misconceptions about ‘dialect’

- Dialect ≠ ‘substandard’
- Dialect ≠ ‘incorrect’
- Dialect ≠ ‘slang’

FACT: Everyone speaks a dialect
Language vs. dialect?

- Linguistic criterion
  - Mutual intelligibility
    - YES? = dialects
    - NO? = languages
  e.g., British vs. American vs. Irish vs. Australian (= dialects of English)
Paris, France ____________________________ Rome, Italy

L1...D1...D2...D3...D4...Di...L2...Di...Di...Di...Di...L2

Piedmontese, (Italy)

**Q: Why do dialects exist?**

A: Because of isolation or long term separation of groups

Isolation can be across time, geography or social barriers. Two types of “dialects”:

(1) **sociolects** or “social dialects”: linguistic differentiation based upon on membership in a longstanding socially-isolated or separate group

(2) **regional dialects**: linguistic differentiation based upon on membership in a longstanding geographically-isolated or separate group
Problems (cont’d)

- Asymmetries in intelligibility, e.g.,
  - Danish speakers understand Swedish, but not vice versa
  - Brazilian Portuguese speakers understand Spanish, but not vice versa
Problems (cont’d)

- Nonlinguistic criteria (political, historical, geographic etc.) may play a role
  - Mandarin, Cantonese are mutually *unintelligible*, but are referred to as ‘dialects’ of Chinese
  - Serbian and Croatian *are* mutually intelligible, but are referred to as separate languages
    - Czech vs. Slovak
    - Norwegian vs. Swedish
Ways dialects vary

- Phonological (‘accent’)
- Morphological
- Syntactic/grammatical
- Semantic/lexical
Regional dialects

- Dialects that are defined in terms of geographic boundaries
Where are they from?

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<th>Margaret</th>
<th>Michele</th>
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Regional U.S. dialects

- Northern
- Midland
- Southern
- Western

Some sociolects:
- Yiddish
- Pennsylvania Dutch
- Chicano English
- Vietnamese English

**isogloss**: a linguistic feature marking out the areal limits of a dialect area; or the boundary itself. (several form an “isogloss bundle”)

http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_maps/namerica.php
http://www.ku.edu/~idea/northamerica/usa/usa.htm