



Today

- What is sociolinguistics?
- Language variation
- Dialects



Sociolinguistics

- The study of the relationship between language and society, of language variation, and of attitudes about language



Language variation

- No two speakers of a language speak exactly the same way
- No individual speaker speaks the same way all the time

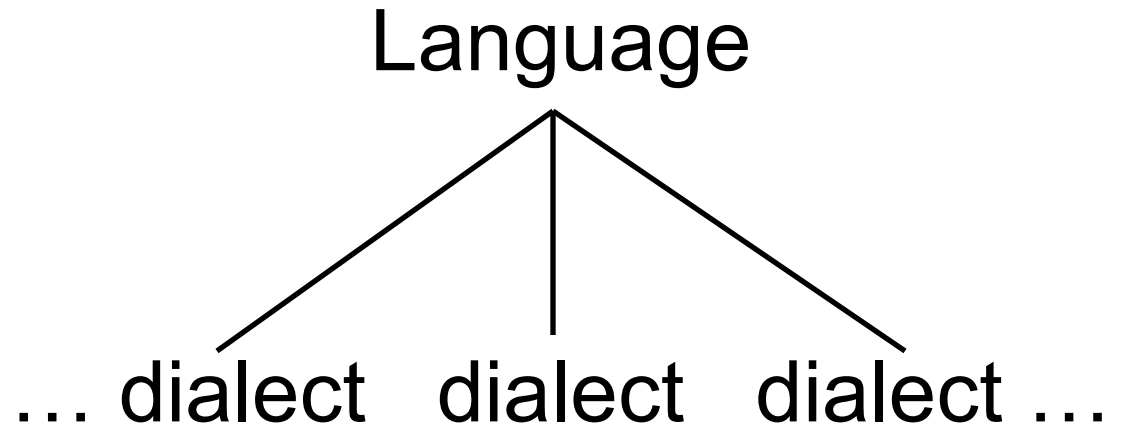


Dialect

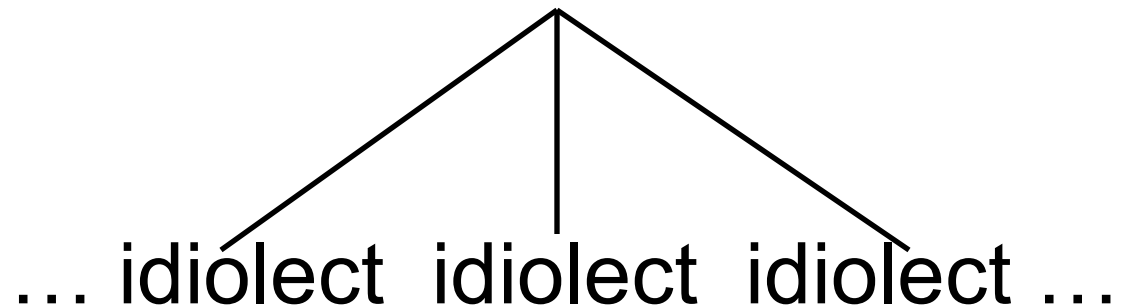
- A variety of a language spoken by a group of people that is characterized by systematic features (e.g., phonological, lexical, grammatical) that distinguish it from other varieties of that same language
- **Idiolect**: the speech variety of an individual speaker



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

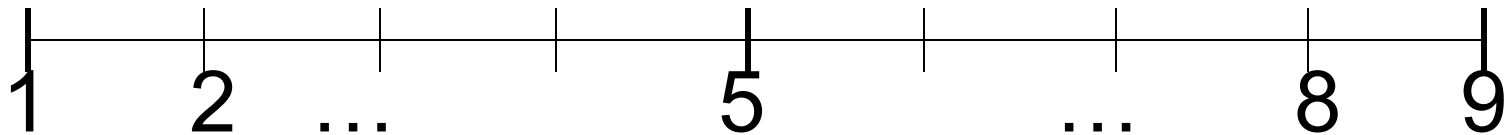
e.g., British vs. American vs. Irish vs. Australian
(= dialects of English)



Mutual intelligibility: Problems

- Degree of mutual intelligibility?

“Dialect continuum”





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



Factors that contribute to variation

- Geography
- Occupation
- Education
- Age
- Gender
- Social status/class
- Ethnicity



Regional dialects

- Dialects that are defined in terms of geographic boundaries

Regional U.S. dialects


- Northern
- Midland
- Southern
- Western



isogloss: a line drawn on a map separating dialect areas

http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_maps/namerica.php

<http://www.ku.edu/~idea/northamerica/usa/usa.htm>

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- Regional differences (along East coast) can be traced to dialects of British English during settling of America in 17th, 18th c.
 - **Dialect leveling:** ‘canceling out’ of dialect differences due to intermingling (i.e., in West)



Phonological differences

- Northern: ‘r-less dialects’
 - NY: ‘toidy-toid (33rd) street’
 - Boston: ‘Pahk the cah in Hahvahd yahd’
- Midland: stress shift
 - Appalachian: Détroit, cígar, dírectly, Nóvember
- Southern: [ɛ] → [ɪ] / ____ nasals
 - ‘t[ɪ]n o’clock’, [pɪn] ‘pin, pen’



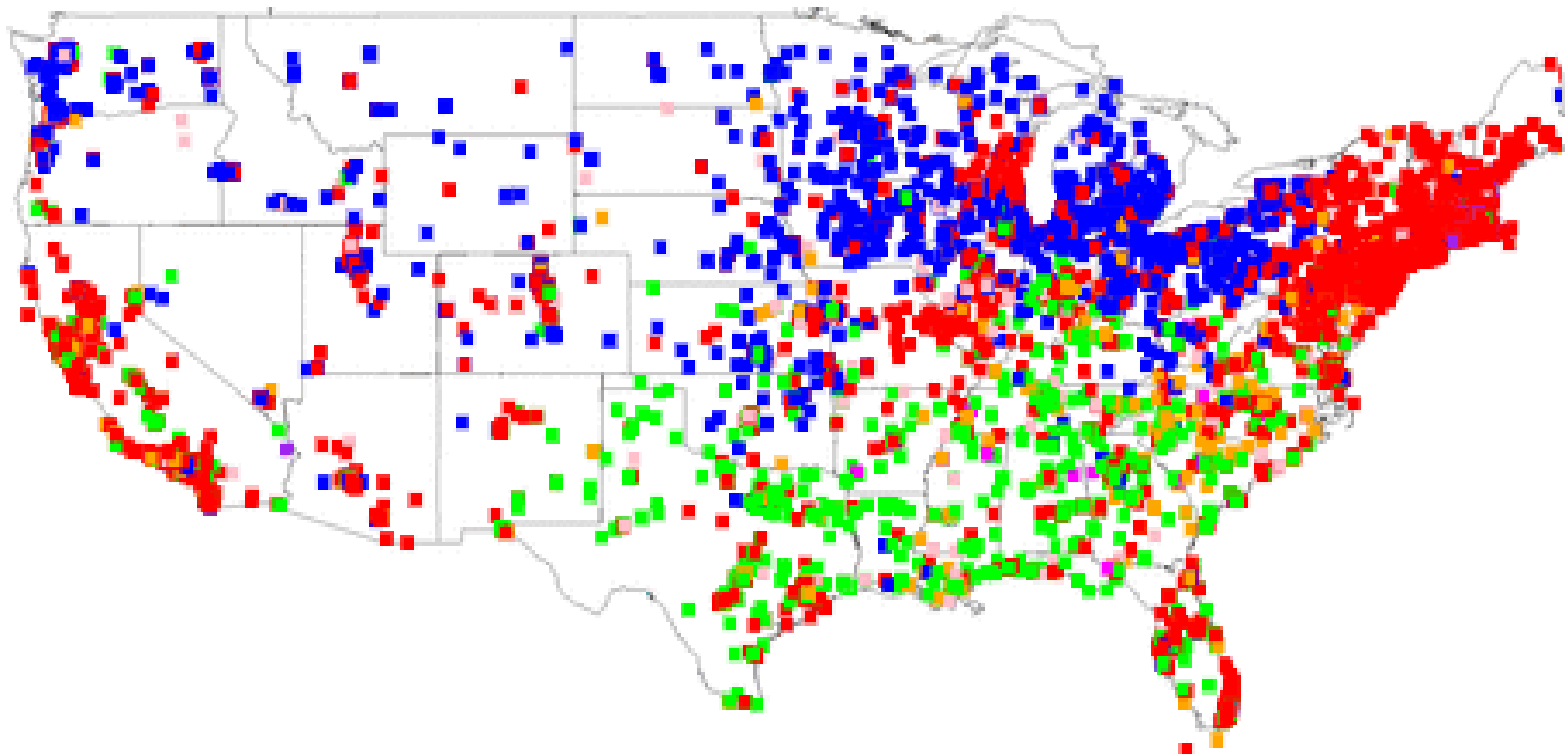
Syntactic differences

- Appalachian (Midland):
 - Double modals: *might could, use to could*
 - *a*-prefix: *go a-fishin', come a-runnin'*
 - Past tense: *'clumb'* (=climbed), *'et'* (=ate)
- Southern
 - Aux. *'done'*: *She done already told you.*



Lexical differences

- Words for ‘sweetened carbonated beverage’
 - ‘Coke’ – CA, New Eng.
 - ‘Soda’ – South
 - ‘Pop’ – Northern, N.W.
 - ‘Tonic’ – Boston
 - ‘Cocola’ – Georgia, Tennessee



coke
soda

pop
tonic

soft drink
cocola



Lexical differences

- Southern
 - French influence: *armoire, bayou, bisque*
- Midland
 - German influence: *'dunk', 'spritze', 'schmear'*
 - Elizabethan English: *flapjack, greenhorn, reckon, ragamuffin*
- Western
 - Spanish influence: *patio, plaza, padre, mesa*