CHAPTER SIX

REGIONAL AND SOCIAL VARIATION

Sources:
An Introduction to Sociolinguistics By Janet Holmes
Introducing Sociolinguistics By Miriam Meyerhoff

Darene Almalki
KNOWLEDGE OF A VARIETY

- Types of knowledge of a variety:
  - Passive Knowledge: The ability to understand a variety but NOT speak it.
  - Active Knowledge: The ability to produce and use a variety and not only understanding it.

- When sociolinguists want to study a variety, they collect and study authentic data. They record people talking in that variety but they end up being in the situation of the Observer’s Paradox.
Observer’s Paradox: The paradox in which the observation of an event is influenced by the presence of the observer.

- The term is coined by Labov.
- As soon as a sociolinguist starts recording the participant, the participant becomes aware of being recorded and does not talk as he/she usually does.
To overcome this:

1- Participant Observation: Some sociolinguists spend much time working or living with the participants so that they get used to them and talk around them as they do with family and friends.

2- Surreptitious Recording: Recording participants without their prior knowledge of the recording i.e. using a hidden device and recording the participant secretly.
   - It is considered a violation of privacy.
INTRODUCTION TO VARIATION

- People use a variety to signal membership of a particular group and construct social identity.
  - The social identity includes:
    1. Social status
    2. Gender
    3. Ethnicity (race)
    4. Education
    5. Occupation
    6. Religion ...etc.
Telephone rings.

Pat: Hello.
Caller: Hello. Is Mark there?
Pat: Yes. Just hold on a minute.
Pat (to Mark): There’s a rather well-educated young lady from Scotland on the phone for you.

- When we answer the phone, we are aware of the non-linguistic information the caller is conveying. Although the speaker says nothing explicitly about his/her age, gender and education, we make pretty good guesses about them.
We can distinguish whether the speaker is a child or a male or female adult.

If the speaker has a distinctive regional accent, we can tell where he/she comes from even from a short utterance.

No two people speak exactly the same.

- Even a single vowel can be pronounced in hundreds of very slightly different ways that cannot be noticed by the listener.
  - They are measured by a sound spectrograph
DIALECTS AND ACCENTS

- **Dialects**: Linguistic varieties which are distinguishable by their **vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation**.
  - A dialect can be of a particular district (regional dialect), a class (social dialect) or a group of people (ethnic dialect).

- **Dialects** are different from **accents** in that **accents** are only about **pronunciation** whereas **dialects** include difference in **pronunciation**, **grammar** and **vocabulary**, too.
  - **Example**: In Arabic, we have Saudi dialect, Egyptian dialect ...etc. Within these dialects we can have different accents.
A speaker speaks one language but differs in the varieties of that language. Differences can be due to:

1- Regional variation: It identifies the speaker regionally or geographically.

2- Social variation: It identifies the speakers’ status in society.

3- Register: It is the variety used by a group of people with common interests or jobs.

4- Style of language: It is to change the variety across the formality scale i.e. from formal to informal and vice versa.
Regional variation develops because people are separated by a common barrier like physical barriers, historical barriers, racial barriers or religious barriers.

Book, example 2, P:128
A British visitor to New Zealand decided while he was in Auckland he would look up an old friend from his war days. He found the address, walked up the path and knocked on the door.

“Gidday,” said the young man who opened the door. “What can I do for you?”
“I’ve called to see me old mate Don Stone,” said the visitor.
“Oh, he’s dead now mate,” said the young man.

The visitor was about to express condolences when he was thumped on the back by Don Stone himself. The young man said “here’s dad now mate,” as his father came in the gate.

Differences in pronunciation only are attributed to accents:
- Example: New Zealand’s “dad” sounds like England’s “dead”.

Differences in vocabulary and grammar are attributed to dialects.
- Example: England’s “single parent” = Australia’s “sole parent” = New Zealand’s “polo parent”
## British English vs. American English:

### Examples of Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>BrE</th>
<th>AmE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- car /kɑː/</td>
<td>/kɑːr/</td>
<td>/kɑːr/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- home /həʊm/</td>
<td>/houm/</td>
<td>/houm/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- class /klɑːs/</td>
<td>/klæs/</td>
<td>/klæs/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- stop /stɑːp/</td>
<td>/stɑːp/</td>
<td>/stɑːp/</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>BrE</th>
<th>AmE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Pavement</td>
<td>Sidewalk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Autumn</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Flat</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Lift</td>
<td>Elevator</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>BrE</th>
<th>AmE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Have you <strong>got</strong> a pen?</td>
<td>Do you <strong>have</strong> a pen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- She has <strong>got</strong> used to that.</td>
<td>She has <strong>gotten</strong> used to that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- He <strong>dived</strong> into the sea.</td>
<td>He <strong>dove</strong> into the sea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Have you eaten?</td>
<td><strong>Did</strong> you eat?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**EXAMPLE 3**

_Book, example 7, P: 136_

**Diana:** Have you heard - Jonathan’s engages to that girl from Cumbria!

**Reg:** She may be northern but I assure you she is very acceptable. Her father is a lord and a rich one at that! She has had the best education money can buy. Those traces from northern accent are fashionable these days my dear!
Cumbrian dialect is socially thought to be less prestigious in England. It is a Northern rural dialect. Northern dialects exchange:

- /ʌ/ with /ʊ/. Example: cut /kʊt/ instead of /kʌt/.

If a person speaks with a regional accent in England, he is most unlikely to belong to the upper class as people from the upper class would go to private schools and learn the standard English and therefore have NO regional accent.

Standard English = RP (Received Pronunciation), (the Queen’s English), (BBC English)

So RP (i.e. Standard English) is a SOCIAL ACCENT and not a regional one because it hides the speaker’s regional origins.

- It is used by well-educated English speakers worldwide and NOT bound to a certain region.
SOCIAL VARIATION

- **Standard English vs. Non-standard English:**
  
  *Linguistic forms* which are *not* part of *standard* English are by definition *non-standard*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIALLY</th>
<th>LINGUISTICALLY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because <em>non-standard</em> forms are <em>associated</em> with the speech of <em>less prestigious</em> social groups, the label (<em>non-standard</em>) acquired <em>negative connotation</em>.</td>
<td>There is <em>nothing inferior</em> about the <em>non-standard</em> forms. They are simply <em>different</em> from the forms which are used by the more socially <em>prestigious</em> speakers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To avoid that implication the label (*non-standard*) has, sociolinguists use the term **“vernacular”** to refer to *non-standard* forms.
Social dialect: A dialect that varies according to the speaker’s social class.

Class: The speaker’s social prestige, status, or respect within the community.
- The definition of class depends on the society speakers belong to.

So, the speakers’ socio-economic level will affect the way they speak.
- The lower the socio-economic level is, the more regional variation there is. The higher the level is, the less regional variation we have because upper class people mostly use RP.
In the 1950s in England, many pairs of words were to identify the social group the speaker belongs to. The word either placed the speaker in the “U speakers” or the “non-U speakers”. “U = upper-class”

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U speakers</th>
<th>Non-U speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sitting room</td>
<td>lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lavatory</td>
<td>toilet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sofa</td>
<td>settee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SOCIAL CLASS - PRONUNCIATION AS A SOCIAL MARKER

Book, example 11, P: 142

Kim: Only uneducated people drop their h’s.

Stephen: Let’s hear you say “Have you heard about Hilda’s new house that her husband left her? It cost her a heck of a lot to fix up.” If you don’t drop a single “h” in that sentence, you’ll sound like one of Monty Python’s upper-class twits!

- Dropping the /h/ in the beginning of a word (e.g.: have, heard, house, husband) is thought to be less prestigious.
In New York City in 1964, a man was observed in three different department stores asking one store worker after another: “where are the women’s shoes?” The man appeared not only to have a short memory, since he repeated his question to a shop assistant in each aisle on several different floors, he also appeared to be slightly deaf since he asked each person to repeat their answer to him. After receiving the answer he would scurry away and scribble something in his notebook. Oddest of all, when he finally made it to the fourth floor where the women’s shoe were, he showed absolutely no interest in them whatsoever but wandered around the floor asking. “Excuse me, what floor is this?”. When questioned by a puzzled store detective, he said he was a sociolinguist!
In 1964, Labov went to 3 different department stores in NY, USA and asked the workers there the question: “Where are the women’s shoes?” The answer was “the fourth flour”. He was interested in the pronunciation of the post-vocalic /r/. He concluded that:

1. People with higher socio-economic level would keep the post-vocalic /r/.
2. People with lower socio-economic level would drop the post-vocalic /r/. 
Whina is 8 years old and she is telling a visitor the story of a film she has seen.

“And then these little flies went to go and they made a house by theirself, and this big fly was playing his guitar. He play and play. Then the little flies was making the house, and then the flies um sew um these leaves up all together.”
In English speaking communities, it was found that children from lower-class families used more vernacular verb forms than children from middle-class families.

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Higher-class</th>
<th>Lower-class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present tense</td>
<td>Michael walks to school every day.</td>
<td>Michael walk to school every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative forms</td>
<td>Nobody wants any chips.</td>
<td>Nobody don’t want no chips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ain’t form</td>
<td>Jim isn’t stupid.</td>
<td>Jim ain’t stupid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Social Variation - Terms**

- **Sociolect (social dialect):** A dialect that varies according to the speaker’s social class.
  - A sociolect is different from a dialect because dialects belong to certain regions geographically (regional variation).

- **Idiolect:** A variety of a language that is unique to a person.
  - No two speakers speak the same.
  - A person’s idiolect depends on:
    - Regional background
    - Ethnic background
    - Education
    - Occupation
    - Religion
    - Psychology
    - Personality
Ethnic dialect: A variety of a language spoken by a particular ethnic group.
- Using an ethnic dialect with speakers of the same ethnic background generally signals solidarity.
- Example: African American Vernacular English (AAVE).
  - Also called “Black English” or “Ebonics”.
  - It is spoken by African Americans in the USA.
  - It arose from creoles used by slaves.

Characteristics:
- Absence of copula “be”.
- Multiple negation: “You ain’t heard nothing”, “I don’t know nobody”
- Final consonant cluster reduction, no voiceless stops: list, cold “/lɪs/” “/kɔʊl/”.
- Omission of third person -s and plural -s: “he like reading”, “seven car”
- Slang Expressions: “what’s poppin’?” = a greeting
- Use of slang words: “dope” = cool
- Phonological features such as exchanging /ð/ with /d/: the “/də/” and /aɪ/ with /aː/: “/haː/”