GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIAL VARIATION OF LANGUAGE

OBJECTIVES

This practice session introduces a topic in the variation of language. It explains the subject matter and methods of dialectology, and concerns with habitual varieties of language, which are either regional, or social (or a combination of these) in origin. It also discusses such important concepts as 'speech community', 'dialect' and 'accent', and proves that a dialect is an important and valid instrument of human communication, thus deserving serious investigation.

IN THIS SESSION, YOU WILL STUDY:

- about sociolinguistics and its branches that deal with language variation;
- that a dialect is a form of behaviour;
- how dialects differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

OUTLINE

1. The study of language variations: sociolinguistics, its branches, and cognate subjects.
    - 1.1. The subject matter of sociolinguistics.
    - 1.2. Dialectology and accentology.
    - 1.3. Geolinguistics and the geographical distribution of languages.
    - 1.4. Areal linguistics and the notion of *linguistic area*.
2. Geographical identity and linguistic identity.
3. The problem of mutual intelligibility.
4. Language change and variation.
    - 4.1. Factors speeding up language change and variation.
    - 4.2. Diachronic variation.
    - 4.3. Diatopic and diastratic variation of language.
        - 4.3.1. Regional and social dialects.
        - 4.3.2. Urban and rural dialects.
        - 4.3.3. Folk dialectology. Attitude and stigma. Stereotypes.
        - 4.3.4. Dialect chains / continua.
        - 4.3.5. Dialect vs accent vs lect.
5. Variation in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.
6. Pluricentric languages.
7. Standard, nonstandard, and vernacular language. Bidialectism and diglossia.

SELF-STUDY INSTRUCTIONS

Reading for this session on your own or partly alone, **it is important to give attention to the following issues**.

- Language is of the fundamental importance as it is linked to our cultural heritage and the way we think about the world.

- There are vast differences in how social and cultural groups interpret the world, themselves and other people.
- The concept of *speech community* is basic to the understanding of regional and social variation in language.
- Note that a dialect is a variety of language as well as a form of behavior.
- Dialectology, also called linguistic geography or dialect geography, deals with systematic study of all forms of dialects.
- Geolinguistics specializes on geographical distribution of languages in the world.
- Areal linguistics studies geographical areas characterized by shared linguistic properties.
- The term *community* implies both *social* and *linguistic community*.
- Differences in dialects are treated as linguistic variables.
- The difference between dialect and language is partly linguistic and partly a matter of opinion based on extra-linguistic considerations.
- There are various axes of language variation: diatopic (variation in language on a geographical level); diastratic (variation in language between social classes); diachronic (variation in language over time).
- It is important to distinguish several major forms of everyday communication: dialects, accents, lects and ideolects.
- Some speech communities would impose one form of speech as a standard.
- Some languages develop several interacting centers each of which is a national variety with codified norms.
- Pay attention to that some other terms are to be discussed in the context of language variation and inter-dialectal communication: *koine*, *vernacular*, *bidialectism*, *bilingualism*, *low variety*, *high variety*, *patois / patwa*.

🕮 RECOMMENDED READING

Crystal D. Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995. P. 24–26 (dialect, accent, dialect continua, mutual intelligibility, dialectology), 32–33 (linguistic variable, linguistic area); 284, 286–287 (the number of languages spoken).

Dollinger S., Huber M. Pluricentric languages: retrospect and prospect. 2024. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381032566_Pluricentric_Languages_Retrospect_and_Prospect

FURTHER READING

Trudgill P. A Glossary of Sociolinguistics. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003. 148 p.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Crystal D. How to Talk Like Shakespeare. 2014. - Access mode :https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lOFAzt8fMg

Handke J. Sociolinguistics. Language, dialect, variety [Electronic resource] / Jorgend Handke. – The Virtual Lingistics Campus, 2012. URL : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji6vURnWfrk

Hickey R. Variety studies [Electronic resource] / Raymond Hickley. URL: https://www.uni-due.de/ELE/VarietiesOfEnglish.pdf . – P. 1-4, 6-7, 9-10.

Holmes J. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics [Electronic resource] / Janet Holmes. – Access mode : https://abudira.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/full_summary_an_introduction_to_sociolinguistics.pdf

Labov W. American English is Changing Fast / William Labov. – David Pakman show, 2013. – Access mode : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aL0--f89Qds

Murray T. I Love English Language [Electronic resource] / T. Murrey. – aggslanguage, 2009. – Access mode : https://aggslanguage.wordpress.com/2009/09/21/peter-trudgill/

Nordquist R. Sociolinguistics Definition and Examples. Glossary of Grammatical and Rhetorical Terms [Electronic Resource] / Richard Nordquist. – ToughtCo, 2017. – Access mode : https://www.thoughtco.com/sociolinguistics-definition-1692110

Nordquist R. Speech Community in Sociolinguistics. Glossary of Grammatical and Rhetorical Terms [Electronic Resource] / Richard Nordquist. – ToughtCo, 2017. – Access mode : https://www.thoughtco.com/speech-community-sociolinguistics-1692120

Preston D. US Language Attitudes [Electronic resource] / Dennis Preston. – kmm 0010, 2008. – Access mode : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kW3K3OclnE.

Shakespeare: Original pronunciation [Electronic resource]. – Open Learn from The Open University, 2011. – Access mode : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPlpphT7n9s

Silverstein M. America's Tongues / Michael Silverstein. – Chicago Humanities festival, 2013. – Access mode : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeZ7h22feWE

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS AND TERMS IN THIS SESSION

- accent;
- areal linguistics;
- bidialectism;
- dialect chain;
- dialect continuum
- dialect;
- dialectology;
- dialectometry;
- diglossia;
- folk dialectology;
- geographical identity;
- geographical linguistics;
- historical change;
- koiné;
- lect;
- linguistic identity;
- linguistic variable;
- mutual intelligibility;
- national variety;
- nonstandard variety;
- patwa / patois;
- Patwa / Patois;
- pluricentric language;
- regional dialect;
- rural dialect;
- standard variety;
- social dialect;
- speech community;
- stigma;
- synchronic variation;
- urban dialect;
- variety.

SELF-STUDY ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1. Comment on the following quotations:



Edward Sapir
/səˈpɪər/
(1884–1939)
an American anthropologist-linguist, who is widely considered to be one of the most important figures in the early development of the discipline of linguistics

"Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations."

"Language: an Introduction to the Study of Speech"



Peter Trudgill
/ˈtrʌdgɪl/
(1943)
a sociolinguist, academic and author

"…social change can produce a corresponding linguistic change"

"Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society"



William Bryson
/ˈbraɪsən/
(1951)
a best-selling Anglo-American author of books on travel, the English language, science, and other non-fiction topics

"Language, never forget, is more fashion than science, and matters of usage, spelling and pronunciation tend to wander around like hemlines."

"The Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way"



Steven Pinker
/ˈpɪnkə/
(1954)
a Canadian-born American cognitive scientist, psychologist, linguist, and popular science author

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to compute it."

"***Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language***"



William Labov
/ləˈboʊv/
(1927)
An American linguist, widely regarded as the founder of the discipline of variationist sociolinguistics

"This African American Vernacular English shares most of its grammar and vocabulary with other dialects of English. But it is distinct in many ways, and it is more different from standard English than any other dialect spoken in continental North America."

"Congressional Testimony"

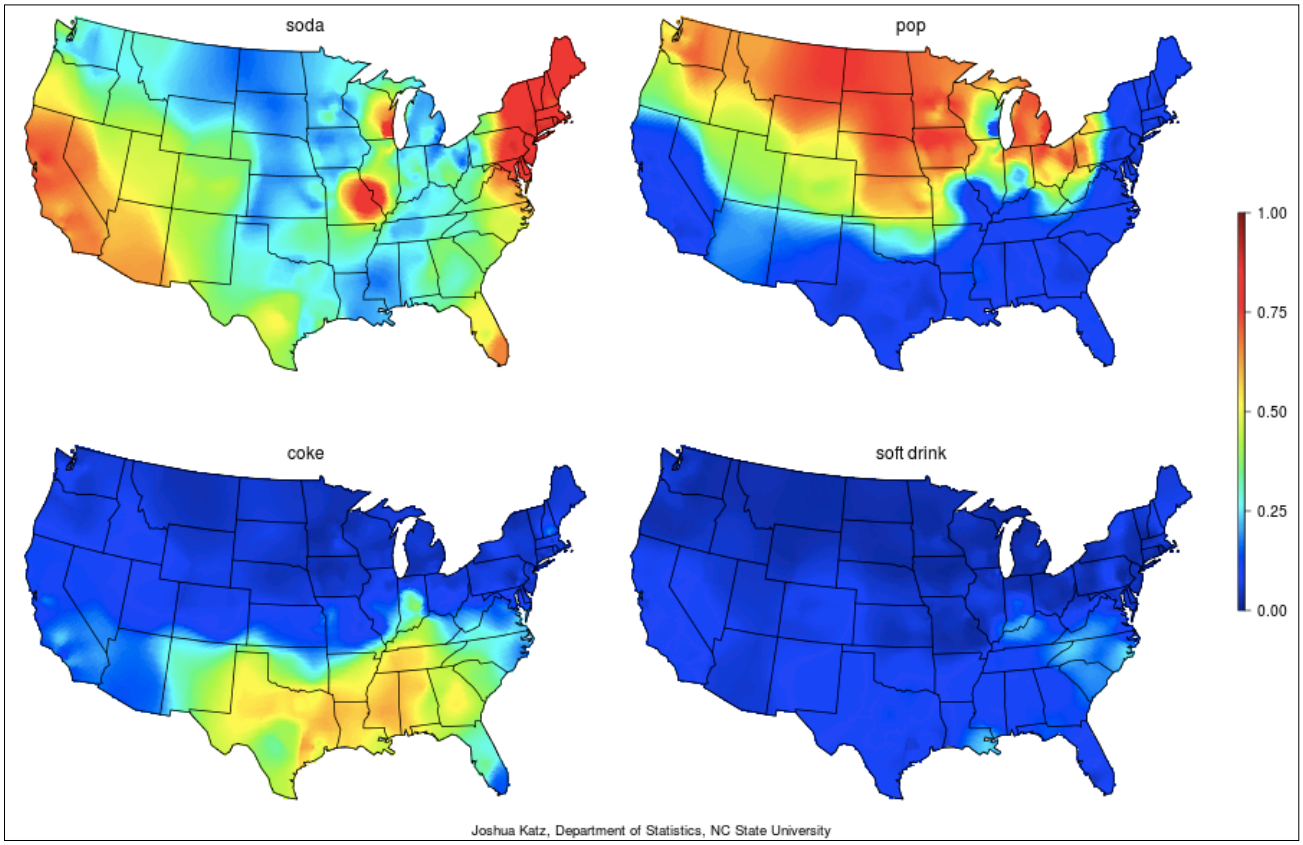
Assignment 2. What type of variation in Australian English is described below?

- *Cultivated variety* is a prestige one and marks education and high social class. There are traces of its decreasing use in recent generations;
- *General variety* is the most common type of English spoken in Australia. It is also prominent in urban areas and used as a standard form of speech in advertising, films, and on television;
- *Broad variety* is characterized by extreme Australian accent of rural areas and associated with working class speech.

Assignment 3. Work through the video lecture on *Language, Dialect, Variety* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji6vURnWfrk and mark the statements below as T (True) or F (False). Make the false ones correct.

• It is easy to distinguish between languages and dialects, or between languages and varieties.	
• If two speakers understand each other, they must speak varieties of the same language.	
• The varieties of one language may have different phonology.	
• The problem of mutual intelligibility is relevant to the varieties of one language.	
• The issue of intelligibility embraces the matters of direction, level, degree.	
• Mutual intelligibility is a sole criterion to distinguish a language.	
• Standardization, vitality, autonomy, reduction and norm are language criteria.	
• The term '*dialect*' is completely associated with a regional variety.	
• Professional attitudes and social ranks (a mine owner vs a miner) do influence language varieties.	
• The term '*phonological dialect*' is synonymous to the term '*accent'*.	
• North American English is defined phonologically.	

Assignment 4. What type of variation in American English is plotted below? Are there clear-cut boundaries between *soda* and *pop*, *coke* and *pop*, or *coke* and *soft* drink areas? Study the maps and make a brief report on the differences in naming carbonated drinks in the USA.



Naming carbonated beverages
(*Source*: English Language Maps, 2013 in Open Culture, L.L.C., 2016-2017)

Assignment 5. Explain the reasons for the linguistic form choices (age, education, occupation, origins, sex, other) in the following cases described by R. W. Shuy in *Discovering American Dialects*, 1967 (Dialects: How they Differ, pp. 5-32).

- Older natives of some Northern dialect areas in the USA still may call a frying pan a *spider*, the term which remained in the vocabulary of the older generation long after the removal of the four legs which gave the descriptive title to this item. Although the thing does not any longer looks like a four-legged spider, the name is still being used by certain people.
- In Summit Country, Ohio, some natives refer to almost all nationality groups as *Hunkies*, regardless of whether or not they come from Hungary.
- Most high school boys are not likely to use *lovely*, *peachy*, *darling*, and many words ending in *–ie*.
- Speakers must reveal their background through the use of specialized vocabulary of psychology, electronics, or fishing before they become fully accepted as "insiders", and before they are fully involved in these professional areas.
- Calls to certain animals illustrate what might be called farm vocabulary, particularly for the older generation of farmers. The Illinois language studies showed that a male sheep was known as a buck only to farmers who had at some time raised sheep.
- Northerners use *pail* "a kind of metal container" whereas Midlanders prefer *bucket*.

Assignment 6. Compare the verses of St. Mattew's Gospel translated from Latin (Texts 1 and 2) or Greek (Texts 3 and 4). The texts come from different periods of the history of English. Note the diachronic variation they exhibit.

1. … Drihten[1], god ys us her to beonne[2]. ȝif ðu wylt, uton[3] wyrcean[4] her þrēo eardung-stowa[5], ðe ane[6], Moyse ane, and Helie ane. Him ða zyt sprecendum, and soþlice[7]! Ða beorht wolcn[8] oferscean[9]…

West Saxon Gospels, c. 1000

[1] Lord; [2] be; [3] let us; [4]make; [5] dwelling-places; [6] one; [7] truly; [8] cloud; [9] shone over;

2. ...Lord, it is good vs to be here. ȝif thou wolt, make we here three tabernaclis; to thee oon, to Moyses oon, and oon to Helie. ȝit hym spekynge, loo! a liȝty cloude shadewid hem…

Wycliffite Version, c. 1382

3. … Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them…

Authorized Version, 1611

4. … Lord, he said, it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow…

The Jerusalem Bible, 1966

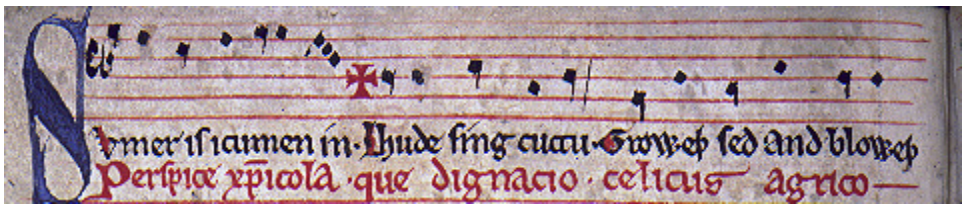
(*Source* : Fisiak, 2000, p. 13-14)

Assignment 7. Compare the versions of *Luke 8:22* translated into different Englishes. Note the variations they exhibit.

1. Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth (*New Testament. Luke 8:22)*;
2. One day Jesus jelled into a boat with his mushes, and rokkered to them, "Let's jell over the pani" (*Anglo-Romani*);
3. And it cam, that on ane o' the days, he gaed intil a boat, he and his disciples, and he said till them, "Lat us gang ower till the other side o' the Loch!" (*Lowland Scots*);
4. Long wanpela de Jisas i goap long wanpela bot wantaim ol disaipel bilongen. Na em I tok im ol, "Yumi go long hap sait bilong raunwara" (*Tok Pisin of Papua New Guinea*).

(*Source*: EWL, 1982, p. 3)

Assignment 8. Diachronic variation of language is observable between earlier and modern language patterns. Compare the Middle English and Modern English variants of the song. Answer the questions that follow.



***Sumer is icumen in* a manuscript written in mensural notation**
(Image taken from Summer Canon [Reading Rota]. Originally published/produced in England [Reading Abbey, co. Berks.]; mid 13th century)

ORIGINAL TEXT	**TRANSCRIPTION**
Svmer is i-cumen in;	[sʊmər ɪs ɪkʊmən ɪn
Lhude sing cuccu!	lu:də sɪŋg kʊkkʊ
Grōweþ sēd, and blōweþ mēd,	grɔ:wəθ se:d and blɔ:wəθ me:d
And springþ þe wude nū.	and sprɪŋgθ ðə wʊdə nu:]
Sing cuccu!	

TRANSLATION
Summer has come in;
Loudly sing, cuckoo!
Seed grows and meadow blooms
And the wood grows now,
Sing, cuckoo!

- What vowel in the Middle English corresponds to the vowel in the Modern English ***loud***?
- Consult the table of the vocalic changes and find other words in the poem that reflect the Great Vowel Shift.

Pronunciation changes resulting from the Great Vowel Shift

	Middle English	Present-day English
cow	u:	ɑʊ
sweet	e:	i:
stone	ɔ:	əʊ
moon	o:	u:

- What affix was employed in the Middle English to convert an adjective into an adverb (*loud* > *loud**ly***)?
- Are there any syntactic changes? How has the relative ordering of the subject and verb changed?
- Can you trace any change in the third person singular present tense marker since Middle English?

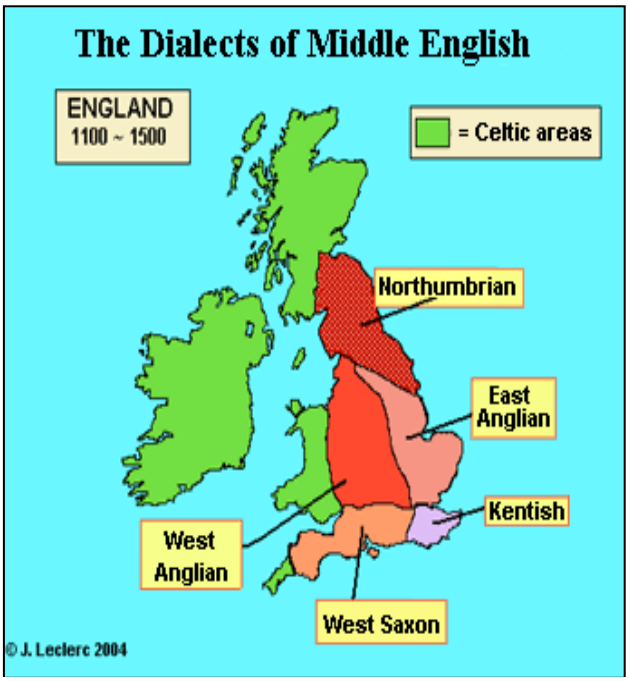
Assignment 9. Read the line from *Troilus V* by *Geoffrey Chaucer*. What can you say about the semantic and phonological changes since Middle English? Look at the meaning of *ghost* and the pronunciation of *ghost* and *light*.

ORIGINAL TEXT : His lighte goost ful blisfully is went.
TRANSCRIPTION : [hɪs liçtə gɔ:st fʊl blɪsfʊlli ɪs wɛnt]
NOTE: [ç] – a voiceless palatal fricative
TRANSLATION : "His light spirit has gone very blissfully".

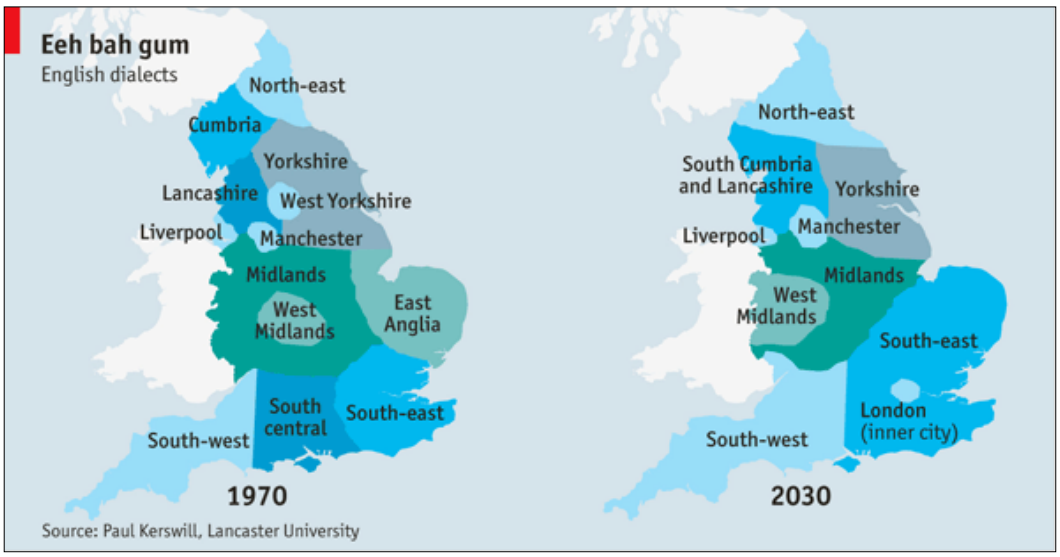
Assignment 10. Compare the dialectal maps of English in Britain. What diatopical changes are observable? Are they related to diachronic variation in English?



Source: Old English Overview



Source: Middle English. Weebly.



Source: British Dialects in the Popular Media, 2011.

Assignment 11. Linguistics Expert David Crystal is talking about Shakespeare's accent: *How to Talk Like Shakespeare* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lOFAzt8fMg.

What did English sound like in Shakespeare's day? Was it different from today's BBC accent? What are the differences between Early Modern English accent and the English accent of today. Find out more in *Shakespeare: Original pronunciation* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPlpphT7n9s

Assignment 12. Diastratic variation of language is actualized in many different ways. According to P. Trudgill, not only regional features are an important part of linguistic identity, but also social ones. Having investigated the dialects of England and their speakers, P. Trudgill argues that the sex as well as the class of the speaker can be marked by the use of the overt or covert prestige language variants.

Read the article by T. Murray *I Love English Language* at https://aggslanguage.wordpress.com/2009/09/21/peter-trudgill/ and work through the findings about the differences in male and female speech. What differences between male and female ways of speaking are evident in the samples provided by T. Murray? Do you agree that:

- we all speak with an accent and we all speak a dialect?
- language variation is a natural and inevitable process?
- all dialects, both traditional and modern are equally grammatical and correct; they only differ because of their social significance?
- gender differences in speech have to do with overt and covert prestige?

Overt prestige comes with using the type of language that is nationally recognized and is used in official and educational contexts. Speakers who use standard English are therefore considered well educated, intelligent because they are using the "correct" and "best" version of English.

Covert prestige comes from not identifying with the standard language but with group loyalty and solidarity. Working-class speakers show their solidarity with their class and region by sticking to non-standard norms.

- speakers tend to use accent and dialect more in informal situations like at home, with friends and family?
- there are prestigious and stigmatized types of speaking?
- men and women as well as upper and lower class are aiming to speak a different type of language (*Please pay your attention at the language forms marked with blue* (erm)*and yellow*(**av**)*in the Samples below*). Women are socially insecure so they are more careful to use the overtly socially prestigious forms than men?
- using the nonstandard variable is a male thing because it is associated with being macho and tough?

SAMPLES

(Tape scripts of the interviews with males and females of the same age and similar backgrounds)

The FemaleQ: What did you get up to in your summer holidays?

A: Well I work at a school and erm I get all the school holidays off so the first week **n** a half I was just pottering about around the house and getting ready for my holidays and then erm on the 4th of August we went to Tenerife for two weeks and we

went with three other families and erm their children also. We had a really nice time we've never been to Tenerife before and erm we really like the place so much so that when we came back we tried to get in for the October half term break but it was already full up the place that we stayed **at**. Erm then when we got back from Tenerife after two weeks in the sun which was really nice erm I had to get the children ready then for school so I had to go **n** take my youngest daughter to buy some shoes which was an absolute nightmare and erm get ready for school really get uniforms sorted out and **everythink** ermbecause I work in a school at the beginning of the holidays I always think to myself **ooo**I've got 5 weeks off now and erm I'll get loads of jobs done **n** jobs that I **av** set in my mind that I want to get done I've never ended up doing **n** the time went so quickly.

The MaleQ: What did you get up to in your summer holiday?

A: Well on **the** August the 4th we went away for two weeks to Tenerife in a place called Fanabeer it was very nice about 15 of us went the weather was **really really** hot for the fourteen days we were there the erm the only trouble was the beach was a bit **black sand coz volcanic** which I **dint** really like much **n** the sea was **very very** rough erm managed to watch Manchester city (***missing an"a"***) couple **o** times **while** away luckily which they won. We would go out for a meal **n**then hopefully find a bar somewhere which normally had a singer **on** or karaoke which a few of the people had a go at **n** then we found a place called the Wigan Pier which we went to three or four times.

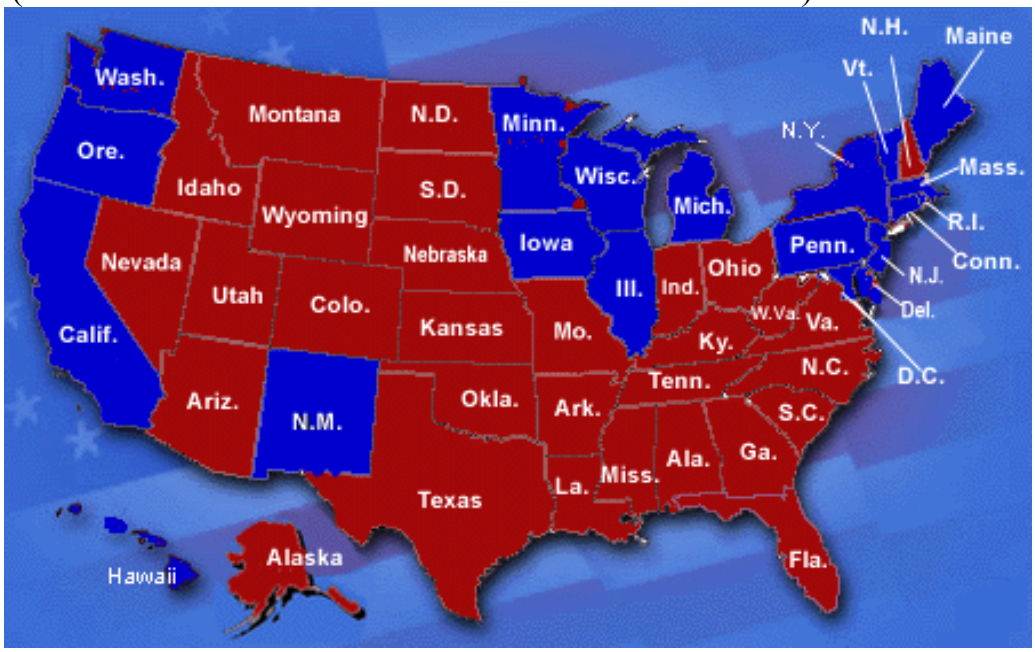
According to the speech samples, did both men and women use non-standard units?

- Within one minute, how many non-standard dialectal features each group used? Which social group tended to lean from non-standard usage?
- What non-standard English features appeared in male and female speech extracts?
- Which social group showed longer speech? Why? What does it tell you about the talking speed?
- Which social group tended to use more awkward space fillers (*er, erm*)? What factors influence pausation?
- Do these findings agree with those of P. Trudgill? Do women try to speak in a more standard way whereas men prefer to speak with a more non-standard dialect?
- Do the findings prove that social change/variation produces a corresponding linguistic change/variation?

Assignment 13. Watch the interview with William Labov *American English is Changing Fast* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aL0--f89Qds and answer the following questions:

- Who is Professor Labov?
- How many distinct dialects does William Labov identify in the US?
- Is there such a thing as General American, according to W. Labov?
- What do people refer to when they use the term '*General American*'?
- What American dialect(s) attract(s) negative connotations? How do those connotation about certain American dialects develop? What does W. Labov mean by '*negative prestige*"?
- What does W. Labov think about Southern dialect? Do speakers deliberately lose local phonologies?

- What changes are observable in modern American dialects?
- Is Southern American Accent disappearing?
- Are politicians injured by their local accents?
- What factors had a strong impact on the development of the low prestige of Southern Accent? Settlement pattern? Modern migrations? Other?
- What explains regional differences in pronunciation of *happen* (/hæpen/ > /hɛpen/), and *socks* (/sɔks/ > /sɑks/) etc?
- What is the *Vowel Merger (coat /*kəʊt/ > /kɔ:t/ *as in cought*)? What geographical areas does it mark?
- Does W. Labov believe that dialect splits will follow political lines like *blue* and *red states* (that is like more liberal and more conservative areas)?



Blue State / Red State Map (*Source*: Tiger Beer. City-Data.com, 2012)

- What is *Canadian Raising*? In what way is it connected with Modern American Accent?
- Are children marked by their parents' accents?

Assignment 14. Fill in the gaps in the following passage with appropriate words:

1. features
2. folk dialectology
3. linguistic geography
4. linguists'
5. mental
6. non-linguists'
7. perceptions
8. perceptual dialectology (2)
9. social
10. speech perception
11. subjective
12. variation and change (2)

To gain a full understand of language ---------- across regional and social space, it is also important to consider people's ---------- of regional dialect variation, including of dialect regions, regional features, and the people who use them. This line of inquiry is commonly referred to as ----------. It is also sometimes called ----------, since it can focus on ---------- "common sense" beliefs and --------- mental images rather than ---------- trained observations and analyses. Such beliefs and ---------- representations are important to linguists and other social scientists, since they enable us to gain a fuller understanding of language in its ---------- setting than do production patterns alone, including understandings and interpretations of the myriad social meanings that may attach to linguistic ---------- and the people who use them. In addition, (socio)linguistic perceptions may play an important role in shaping language ---------- across regional and social space. Furthermore, as with ---------- more generally, the subfield of ---------- is getting increasingly more methodologically and technologically sophisticated and now involves state-of-the-art experimentation and complex techniques for collecting and analyzing data on -------- (*Source*: RVE, SU, p.23).

Assignment 15. Dennis Preston, Professor of English and Linguistics, Michigan State University, is doing a project on perceptive dialectology to find out about what American people consider to be correct or incorrect English. Watch a video film about his field work: *US Language Attitudes*at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kW3K3OclnE . Write an abstract (250 words) about his studies. Cover the following points:

- purpose of the project;
- correct speech dilemma (insecurity of being incorrect vs American populism)
- interviewees
- method of material collection
- accent distribution and its representation
- evaluations of American accents by the speakers ("normal English" vs "southerness" etc.)
- conclusions

Assignment 16. Work through the lecture *America's Tongues* given by Michael Silverstein (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeZ7h22feWE). What conclusion can be made about the standardization in American English. Is it evenly distributed among the American population?

🗝 **Assignment 17**. Make up a glossary of the following terms: *folk dialectology; geographical identity; geographical linguistics; historical change koiné; linguistic identity; linguistic variable; mutual intelligibility; national variety; nonstandard variety; pluricentric language; regional dialect; rural dialect; standard variety; social dialect; speech community; stigma; urban dialect*.