What is a dialect?

1. A regional variety of language: a regional variety of a language, with differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.
2. A language spoken by class or profession: a form of a language spoken by members of a particular social class or profession.

What dialect of English do you speak?
Different kinds of dialects

• "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy."

• Non-standard dialect

• Virginia Piedmont dialect

• An upper-class dialect

What is an accent?

• A manner of pronunciation: a way of pronouncing words that indicates the place of origin or social background of the speaker

• Do you have an accent?

Different kinds of accents

• A Texas accent

• A British accent

• The customers will love your Italian accent.

• He greeted them in a Chicago accent.
How many dialects are there in the US?

- Social scientists estimate the number of US dialects range from a basic three - New England, Southern and Western/General America - to 24 or more.
- Some researchers go so far as to suggest it’s actually impossible to count the number of dialects in the United States because under a loose definition of the term, thousands of cities, towns and groups have their own varieties or dialects.
Dialects: Regional Varieties of English

Dialect features
• Northern
  – New England
  – Boston, New York City
  – Inland Northern
  – Upper Midwestern
• Western
  – Alaska
  – Pacific Southwest
  – Southwestern
• Hawai‘i

Dialect features
• General Southern
  – South Midland
  – Southern
  – Tangier
  – Gullah
  – Louisiana
    • Cajun English

Dialect Myths and Reality
• MYTH: A dialect is something that SOMEONE ELSE speaks.
• REALITY: Everyone who speaks a language speaks some dialect of the language; it is not possible to speak a language without speaking a dialect of the language.
Dialect Myths and Reality

• MYTH: Dialects always have highly noticeable features that set them apart.

• REALITY: Some dialects get much more attention than others; the status of a dialect, however, is unrelated to public commentary about its special characteristics.

Dialect Myths and Reality

• MYTH: Only varieties of a language spoken by socially disfavored groups are dialects.

• REALITY: The notion of dialect exists apart from the social status of the language variety; there are socially favored as well as socially disfavored dialects.

Dialect Myths and Reality

• MYTH: Dialects result from unsuccessful attempts to speak the "correct" form of a language.

• REALITY: Dialect speakers acquire their language by adopting the speech features of those around them, not by failing in their attempts to adopt standard language features.
Dialect Myths and Reality

• MYTH: Dialects have no linguistic patterning in their own right; they are derivations from standard speech.
• REALITY: Dialects, like all language systems, are systematic and regular; furthermore, socially disfavored dialects can be described with the same kind of precision as standard language varieties.

Dialect Myths and Reality

• MYTH: Dialects inherently carry negative connotations.
• REALITY: Dialects are not necessarily positively or negatively valued; their social values are derived strictly from the social position of their community of speakers.

How do dialects differ?

• In vocabulary
• In pronunciation
• In grammar
• In speech style
Examining Dialect Patterns: Vocabulary

- Vocabulary
- Take a regional DARE quiz!

Examining Dialect Patterns: Pronunciation

- *th* sounds
- How does this speaker from Brooklyn, New York City pronounce these words?
  - Nothing
  - There
  - That
  - Them
  - Everything

Examining Dialect Patterns: Pronunciation

- R and L
  - can for "car"
  - hep for "help"
  - wool for "wool"

- Consonant blends
  - was for "west"
  - ak for "act"
  - churt for "shirt"
  - ask for "ask"
  - lil for "little"
Examining Dialect Patterns: Pronunciation

- Vowels
- How does this speaker of British Received Pronunciation pronounce the vowels in these words?
  - Last
  - Experience
  - Two o'clock
  - Hour
  - Car
  - Down
  - Horse
  - Supernatural
  - Wrath

Examining Dialect Patterns: Grammar

- Absence of *be*
  - He at school.
  - They messing around.

- Verb endings
  - Yesterday they walk in the park.
  - She have a car.
  - He don't like it.

- Other endings
  - All them book
  - My friend book
  - Baddest

Examining Dialect Patterns: Grammar

- Past tense of irregular verbs
  - He knowed a lot.
  - I done it.
  - I have went already.
  - They brung him in.

- Habitual *be*
  - Sometimes they be acting silly.
  - We be playing basketball after school.

- Double negatives
  - It ain't about nothing.
Examining Dialect Patterns: Speech Style

- Loud or soft volume
- Fast or slow tempo
- Discrete or overlapping turns-at-talk
- Directness of indirectness
- High or low pitch
- Formal or informal style
- Voice qualities:
  - Breathiness
  - Falsetto
  - Creakiness
  - Harshness

Examining Dialect Patterns

- Listen to these three girls talking on the stoop. What features of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and speech style do you notice in their speech?

American Tongues
Learning Activity

- Transcribe the talk by this Boston Northender using the conventions of Conversation Analysis outlined in chapter 5 of Everyday Talk.