The Linguistic Facts of Life

What is Language and What Does it Do?
- Introduction
- Why study language?
- What is language?
  - A system
  - The potential to create new meanings
  - Multiple functions
  - Language diversity
  - Power and society

The Linguistic System
- Phonetics and Phonology
- Syntax
- Morphology
- The Lexicon
- Semantics
Phonetics and Phonology

**Phonetics** is the study of...
- Speech sounds
- How they are produced in the vocal tract (articulatory phonetics)
- Their physical properties (acoustic phonetics)
- How they are perceived (auditory phonetics)

Phonology is the study of...
- The sound system of a language
- How the particular sounds contrast in each language to form an integrated system for encoding information
- How sound systems differ from one language to another

**Phonetics**
- What sounds have you heard in other languages that are not in English?
- Exactly how do you move your articulators to pronounce the **tt** sound in *butter*?
- What two English sounds are often confused when they are heard on the telephone?
Phonology

• How does the pronunciation of \( s \) differ in “he talks” and “she snores”?
• What English sounds never occur at the beginning of words?
• How can you say “That looks interesting” as
  • A statement?
  • A question?
  • Ironically?

Morphology

Morphology is . . .

• The structure of words in a language, including patterns of inflections and derivation
• The study of how words are formed in a language

• Identify the morphemes in Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
• Which morphemes are derivational?
• Which morphemes are inflectional?
• Is this potentially an English word?
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Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar
- Descriptive grammar is the objective description of a speaker's knowledge of a language (competence) based on their use of the language (performance).
- Prescriptive grammar is a set of rules designed to give instructions regarding the “correct” or “proper” way to speak or write.

Descriptive or prescriptive?
- Never end a sentence with a preposition.
- In casual styles of speaking, people frequently end sentences with prepositions, but this is generally avoided in formal styles.
- Between you and me is correct; Between you and I is ungrammatical.

Variation in Modern Spoken English
- “Ain’t no way he’s gonna.”
- “Danny gone - he be working down to the factory.”
- “Whatsa matter you?”
- “He said he may can have these by the first of the month.”
- “Between you and I, he’s wrong.”
- “Coffee I can always drink, so pour me.”
- “Meat’s so expensive anymore that we eat a lot of macaroni.”
- “Down the shore everything’s all right.”
Variation in Modern Spoken English

- “Those boots sure are fly.”
- “If you’re going out, I’m coming with.”
- “Mr. Vincent took a heart attack.”
- “Those boots sure are fly.”
- “If you’re going out, I’m coming with.”
- “Mr. Vincent took a heart attack.”
- “So she goes, like, no, it’s way late for that.”
- “The data shows that the hypothesis can’t be supported.”
- “Put it in your pocket.”

English Changes Over Time

Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre, m i n r es y l f r es i ð .  I cþ æ ts e c g a nm æ g , hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up weox, niwes oþþe ealdes, niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.

From “The Wife’s Lament” (before 1072)
English Changes Over Time

• In English tongue I schal yow telle, yif ye wyth me so longe wil dwelle. No Latyn wil I speke no waste, But English Pat men use mast, Pat can eche man ynderstande, Pat is born in Ingelande; For Pat langage is most chewyd Os wel among lered os lewyd.

setTimeout('window.location.reload()',100)

• Speculum Vitae, 1325

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English Changes Over Time

• ... at the lest way ... speke none englisshe but that which is cleane polite, perfectly and articulately pronounced, omittinge no lettre or sillable, as fellshe women often times do of a wantonnesse, whereby diuers noble men and gentilmennes chyldren (as I do at this daye knowe) have attained corrupte and foule pronunciation.

setTimeout('window.location.reload()',100)

• The Boke Named the Governour, 1531

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English Changes Over Time

• As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard; for the taste of her writers is already corrupted, and her language on the decline. But if it were not so, she is at too great a distance to be our model, and to instruct us in the principles of our own tongue.

setTimeout('window.location.reload()',100)

• Dissertations on the English Language, 1789
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English Changes Over Time

Like, oh my god!
Like – totally
Encino is like so bitchen
There’s like The Galleria
And like all these like really great shoe stores
I love going into like clothing stores and stuff
I like buy the neatest mini-skirts and stuff
It’s like so bitchen cuz like everybody’s like
Super-super nice
It’s like so bitchen

“Valley Girl” by Frank Zappa and Moon Unit Zappa (1982)

Lexical Variation in Modern English

• Lexical change over time
  • hot, like, kosher, tight, word
• Lexical variation over space
  • soda vs. pop
  • seesaw vs. teeter-totter
  • bubbler vs. drinking fountain
  • tennis shoes vs. gym shoes vs. sneakers
• Doublespeak

Phonological Variation in Modern English

• The cot-caught merger
  • Cot/caught, hock/hawk
  • Mary, merry, marcy
• The short-forty and the perk the car variables
• The walkin’ and talkin’ variable
• The coupon variable
  • coupon, due, news, duke
Syntactic Variation in Modern English

- Multiple negation
  - "We ain't never had no trouble about none of us pullin' out no knife."
- Invariant forms of 'to be'
  - "We was in an ideal place for it."
  - "Was you a majorette?"
  - "There was twenty dollars in my purse when I last looked."

Why Does Your Language Vary?

- It depends who you are.
Why does your language vary?
  - It depends who you are.
  - It depends what you're doing.

Postvocalic (r) by gang members in Harlem
Why does your language vary?

- It depends who you are.
- It depends what you're doing.
- It depends who you are.
- It depends what you're doing.
- It depends where you live.
Why does your language vary?
- It depends who you are.
- It depends what you’re doing.
- It depends where you live.
- It depends how old you are.

The cot-caught variable in OK

The cot-caught variable for older speakers born before 1945
The cot-caught variable for younger speakers born after 1945

Why does your language vary?
- It depends who you are.
- It depends what you're doing.
- It depends where you live.
- It depends how old you are.
- It depends what social class you come from.
- It depends on your gender.
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Multiple Negation in Detroit

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- It depends what you’re talking about.
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1. All spoken language changes over time.
2. All spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms.
3. Grammatical and communicative effectiveness are distinct and independent issues.
4. Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures.
5. Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level.

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Use of like by a Palo Alto teenager

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Learning Activity

• Listen to three samples from the DARE Audio Collection. Where do the speakers live? What phonological, syntactic, and lexical differences do you notice between your own variety of English and the variety used by these speakers?