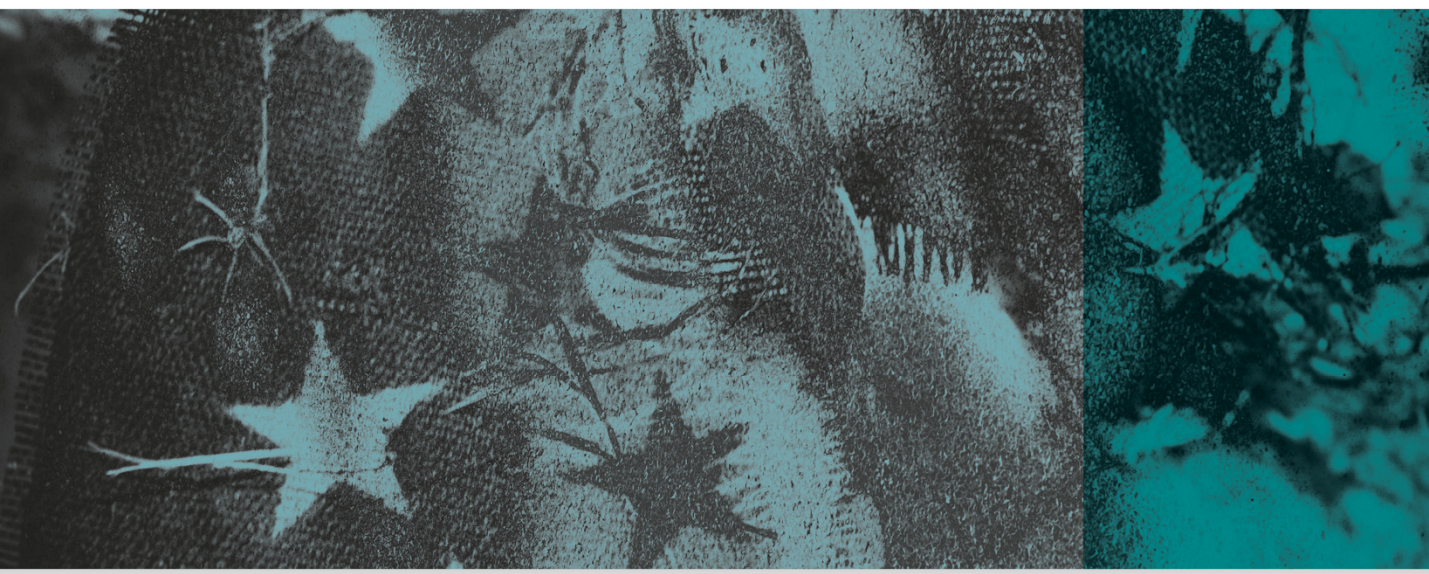
Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling

American English

Dialects and Variation

THIRD EDITION



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American English

DIALECTS AND VARIATION

Third Edition

Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling

Enhancements and Exercises by Caroline Myrick and Joel Schneier

WILEY Blackwell

This third edition first published 2016
© 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Inc

Edition History: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. (1e, 1998; 2e, 2006)

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available for this title

9781118390221 (paperback)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: fStop Images GmbH/Alamy

Set in 10.5/13pt Ehrhardt by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

1 2016

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Preface

The third edition of *American English: Dialects and Variation* offers yet another episode in the ongoing narrative of language variation in American English. It started for the first author more than four decades ago, with Walt Wolfram and Ralph W. Fasold's *The Study of Social Dialects in American English* (1974), and passed through Wolfram's *Dialects and American English* (1991) on the way to the first (1998) and second (2006) editions of *American English: Dialects and Variation*. The current edition is a thoroughly revised and updated version, but we hope that it is more than that. In addition to chronicling some of the breakthrough developments in the field, we have added a greatly expanded discussion of language and ethnicity, now its own chapter, and radically restructured a couple of other chapters. We now include separate sections on Jewish English and Asian American English to complement our coverage of African American English, Latino English, Cajun English, and Native American Indian English. The chapter on stylistic variation outlines the exciting new turns which the study of variation in the speech of individual speakers has taken since the publication of the second edition, including a sharpened focus on how individuals use language variation to shape themselves, their interactions, and their social worlds.

We have also continued to adapt our style of presentation for an audience that includes the full range of the students who enroll in a "course on dialects." This extends from the curious student with no background at all in linguistics, students in allied disciplines who seek information about language diversity, and the student who may wish to specialize in sociolinguistics or the study of American English. For example, we now use a standard set of "keywords" (Wells 1982) to refer to vowel productions rather than the International Phonetic Alphabet for clarity of presentation in discussing the ever-shifting pronunciations and pronunciation patterns that are characteristic of American English dialects. Keywords appear in small caps. When we do use traditional IPA symbols, they are surrounded by PHONETIC BRACKETS brackets [ ] when they refer to particular productions of sounds. They are surrounded by PHONEMIC SLASHES // when they refer to phonemes, or units of meaning. For example, the vowel sound in words like *nice* and *time*, the PRICE vowel, is represented by the phonemic symbol /ɑi/, but may be produced differently in different dialects, for example, as an elongated LOT vowel [ɑ] in Southern dialects, or almost like an [ɔi] sound in the dialect of Ocracoke, North Carolina. In the text, small caps are also used in the first mention of a technical term that can be found in

the glossary. The glossary also includes some additional terms that readers might encounter in their reading about American English and language variation. In addition, we have constructed a useful website where readers can find illustrative audio and video clips, and answers to exercises. The clips allow readers to experience language and dialect rather than imagine it. The appendix of linguistic structures and the glossary are also located on the website, as well as in the book. Readers can access the website through a QR code on their smart phone or any device with a QR reader and then navigate to the audio/video vignettes and other material on the website.

Readers will notice that two emergent sociolinguists have been added as collaborators on this book: Caroline Myrick and Joel Schneier. They were primarily responsible for compiling the audio and video vignettes, assembling the answer keys, and revising the glossary and references; in addition, they provided invaluable assistance with just about everything else. They read and commented on the entire text, created new figures when needed, and proactively did what was necessary to complete the manuscript with a generous, supportive spirit. Perhaps most importantly, they added the perspective of the current, or "early-career," generation of sociolinguists. We think that the text profits from the authentic collaboration of three generations of sociolinguists who view language variation and American English in somewhat different but complementary ways.

Given the diverse backgrounds and interests of students who end up in a course on dialects, as well as the fact that the book is also used by established scholars around the world as a valuable source of information on American English, the challenge is to fashion a text that can meet the needs of a varied audience without oversimplifying the full complexity of language variation study or of the theoretical, empirical, and technological advances that have been made in the study of language variation over the past couple of decades. Such a text should combine an informed approach to the nature of dialect variation, descriptive detail about particular varieties, clear explication of a range of theoretical views, and a discussion of the broader cultural, political, and educational implications of language diversity in English. We integrate research from our current studies on regional and sociocultural varieties, as well as our ongoing investigation of stylistic variation across a range of varieties to balance and personalize the study of American English.

From our perspective, underlying principles of language variation are much more significant than their formal representation. There are, however, times when technical terms are needed to convey important constructs in the field. To help readers in this regard, the glossary of terms should be helpful. Students also should be aided by exercises that are incorporated into the text at relevant points in the discussion rather than at the conclusions of chapters. Answers to the exercises are available on the website, and the glossary is also available there in a searchable format as well as in the text. The text should be appropriate for both upper-level undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of fields. At the same time, we recognize the book's utility as a reference work on American English for established scholars, and we hope that our concise encapsulation of developments in and the current state of the art in each topic area will continue to prove useful to students and professional researchers in this regard.

Conceptually, the text is divided into four major sections. The first three chapters introduce students to basic notions about the nature of dialectal variation. The next chapter, Chapter 4, gives an overview of the history and development of American English dialects. Chapters 5 through 9 offer a descriptive account of some of the major social factors that relate to variation in American English, including region, social status, ethnicity, and gender. In Chapter 10, we discuss how language variation is used – and shaped – by individuals in interaction, since after all, it is in everyday interactions that larger, enduring patterns of variation, and their social meanings, are forged. We have tried to balance approaches from traditional dialectology with advances in the quantitative study of language variation while minimizing detailed discussion of the technicalities associated with current methods of analysis. The final section, chapters 11 and 12, considers the applications of dialect study beyond its scientific value – and its inherent interest to scholars and non-scholars alike as a fascinating area of inquiry. We focus on dialects and education but also discuss a variety of ways in which researchers can work collaboratively with communities from which they gather data for dialect study.

An updated summary of many of the grammatical and phonological structures that serve to distinguish various social and regional dialects from one another is included in an appendix to the book and in searchable online format on the companion website.

We are particularly grateful to our village of colleagues who provided invaluable insight into and feedback on topic areas covered in the text. These include North Carolina State University colleagues Agnes Bolonyai, Robin Dodsworth, Jeff Mielke, Jeffrey Reaser, and Erik R. Thomas, and Georgetown University colleagues Deborah Tannen, Jennifer Scalfani, Minnie Quartey Annan, Patrick Callier, Caitlin Elizondo, Sakiko Kajino, Jinsok Lee, Sinae Lee, and Anastasia Nylund. We would also like to thank our colleagues Kellam Barta, Kara Becker, Sara Bunin Benor, Phillip Carter, Katie Carmichael, Elaine Chun, May Chung, Carmen Fought, Jon Forrest, Michael Fox, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Angela Reyes, and Tracey Weldon for providing input on some of the new sections on language and ethnicity and ethnolinguistic repertoire, as well as Allan Bell for his inspiration and insight in revising the chapter on stylistic variation. Reviewers' comments were invaluable during the process of writing this new edition, even when we haven't shown enough sense to follow their advice. We also are indebted to those who guided us in other ways along our sociolinguistic path, from the first author's initial teacher in linguistics as an undergraduate student, Roger W. Shuy, to our current classes of students at North Carolina State University and Georgetown University. We have been fortunate enough to associate with a group of people who have taught us that professional colleagues can also be good friends: Carolyn Adger, Bridget Anderson, John Baugh, Robert Bayley, Allan Bell, Renee Blake, Charles Boberg, Erin Callahan-Price, Jack Chambers, Anne Charity Hudley, Becky Childs, Patricia Cukor Avila, Donna Christian, Clare Dannenberg, Sylvie Dubois, Stephany Dunstan, Connie Eble, Penny Eckert, Charlie Farrington, Ralph W. Fasold, Janet Fuller, Cynthia Gordon, Matthew Gordon, Lisa Green, Gregory Guy, Heidi Hamilton, Kirk Hazen, Tyler Kendall, Scott Kiesling, Mary Kohn, Bill Kretzschmar, Bill Labov, Sonja Lanehart, Jason MacLarty, Christine Mallinson,

Michael Montgomery, Jennifer Nycz, Otto Santa Ana, Dennis Preston, Paul Reed, John Rickford, Deborah Schiffrin, Edgar Schneider, Dani Schreier, Mark Sicoli, John Singler, Arthur Spears, Sali Tagliamonte, Ben Torbert, Anna Marie Trester, Peter Trudgill, Tracey Weldon, Alicia Wassink, Janneke Van Hofwegen, and Karissa Wojcik, among many others who should have been named as well. Thanks for your support and friendship. This cast of characters has made academic inquiry much more fun than we ever thought it could be. If students can catch just a little bit of enthusiasm for research into and respect for language diversity, then we are satisfied.

As we said in previous editions of this text, the writing of a good book is never done – and this is no exception. We hope, however, that this is a convenient time to pause and reflect once again on the rich diversity of American English and how much we've learned about it over the years. Who'da thunk it woulda came this far – and remain such an exciting linguistic adventure?

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Georgetown University

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Phonetic Symbols

Consonants

Symbol	*Keywords*	*Phonetic description*
[p]	***p**it, s**p**it, ti**p***	voiceless bilabial stop
[b]	***b**at, rab**b**it, ri**b***	voiced bilabial stop
[t]	***t**ip, s**t**op, pu**t***	voiceless alveolar stop
[d]	***d**oom, un**d**er, bu**d***	voiced alveolar stop
[D][ɾ]	*bu**tt**er, bu**dd**y*	voiced alveolar flap
[k]	***c**ap, s**k**ate, ba**k**e*	voiceless velar stop
[g]	***g**o, bu**gg**y, ba**g***	voiced velar stop
[ʔ]	*ki**tt**en, bu**tt**on* (in some dialects)	voiceless glottal stop
[f]	***f**ee, a**f**ter, lau**gh***	voiceless labiodental fricative
[v]	***v**ote, o**v**er, lo**v**e*	voiced labiodental fricative
[θ]	***th**ought, e**th**er, bo**th***	voiceless interdental fricative
[ð]	***th**e, mo**th**er, smoo**th***	voiced interdental fricative
[s]	***s**o, fa**s**ten, bu**s***	voiceless alveolar sibilant
[z]	***z**oo, la**z**y, fu**zz***	voiced alveolar sibilant
[š][ʃ]	***sh**oe, na**ti**on, bu**sh***	voiceless palatal sibilant
[ž] [ʒ]	*mea**s**ure, clo**s**ure*	voiced palatal sibilant
[h]	***h**at, be**h**ind*	voiceless glottal fricative
[č] [tʃ]	***ch**ew, pi**tch**er, **ch**urch*	voiceless palatal affricate
[ǰ] [ʤ]	***j**udge, ran**g**er, do**dg**e*	voiced palatal affricate
[m]	***m**y, **m**ommy, bu**m***	bilabial nasal
[n]	***n**o, fu**nn**y, ru**n***	alveolar nasal
[ŋ]	*si**ng**er, lo**ng***	velar nasal
[l]	***l**ook, bu**ll**y, **l**all*	lateral liquid
[r]	***r**un, bu**r**y, ca**r***	retroflex (bunched tongue) liquid
[w]	***w**ay, **qu**ack*	labiovelar glide
[y]	***y**es, **f**eud*	palatal glide

Vowels

Symbol	*Wells' keywords*	*Examples*	*Phonetic description*
[i]	FLEECE	*beet, leap*	high front tense
[ɪ]	KIT	*bit, rip*	high front lax
[e]	FACE	*bait, grade*	mid front tense
[ɛ]	DRESS	*bet, step*	mid front lax
[æ]	TRAP	*cap, bat*	low front tense
[ə]	COMMA	*about, afford*	mid central tense
[ʌ]	STRUT	*shut, was*	mid central lax
[ɑ]	LOT	*father, stop*	low central
[u]	GOOSE	*boot, through*	high back tense
[ʊ]	FOOT	*book, put*	high back lax
[o]	GOAT	*no, toe*	mid back tense
[ɔ]	THOUGHT	*oral, taught*	low back tense
[ɑu]	MOUTH	*crowd, bout*	low central back gliding diphthong
[ɑi]	PRICE	*buy, lie*	low central front gliding diphthong
[ɔi]	CHOICE	*boy, coin*	low back front gliding diphthong
[ɝ]	NURSE	*mother, bird*	mid central retroflex

1

Dialects, Standards, and Vernaculars

Most of us have had the experience of sitting in a public place and eavesdropping on conversations taking place around us. We pretend to be preoccupied, but we can't help listening. And we form impressions of speakers based not only on the topic of conversation but on how people are discussing it. In fact, there's a good chance that the most critical part of our impression comes from *how* people talk rather than *what* they are talking about. We judge people's regional background, social status, ethnicity, and a host of other social and personal traits based simply on the kind of language they are using. We may have similar kinds of reactions in telephone conversations, as we try to associate a set of characteristics with an unidentified speaker in order to make claims such as, "It sounds like a salesperson of some type" or "It sounds like the auto mechanic." In fact, it is surprising how little conversation it takes to draw conclusions about a speaker's background – a sentence, a phrase, or even a word is often enough to trigger a regional, social, or ethnic classification.

Link 1.1: Visit http://americanenglishwiley.com/ to hear linguist Boyd Davis discuss the complex characteristics that are associated with an accent.

Assessments of a complex set of social characteristics and personality traits based on language differences are as inevitable as the kinds of judgments we make when we find out where people live, what their occupations are, where they went to school, and who their friends are. Language differences, in fact, may serve as the single most reliable indicator of social position in our society. When we live a certain way, we are expected to match that lifestyle with our talk. And when we don't match people's expectations of how we should talk, the incongruity between words and behavior also becomes a topic for conversation.

American English: Dialects and Variation, Third Edition. Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling.
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Language differences are unavoidable in a society composed of a variety of social groups. They are a "fact of life." And, like other facts of life in our society, they have been passed down with a peculiar mixture of fact and fantasy.

1.1 Defining Dialect

Given the widespread awareness of language differences in our society, just about everyone has some understanding of the term DIALECT. However, the technical use of the term in linguistics is different from its popular definition in some important but subtle ways. Professional students of language typically use the term "dialect" as a neutral label to refer to any variety of a language that is shared by a group of speakers. Languages are invariably manifested through their dialects, and to speak a language is to speak some dialect of that language. In this technical usage, there are no particular social or evaluative connotations to the term – that is, there are no inherently "good" or "bad" dialects; dialect is simply how we refer to any language variety that typifies a group of speakers within a language. The particular social factors that correlate with dialect diversity may range from geographic location to complex notions of cultural identity. Furthermore, it is important to understand that socially favored, or "standard," varieties constitute dialects every bit as much as those varieties spoken by socially disfavored groups whose language differences are socially stigmatized. The technical definition of dialect as a variety of a language typical of a given group of speakers is not rigorous or precise, but it is a sufficient starting point in discussing language variation.

1.2 Dialect: The Popular Viewpoint

At first glance, the differences between popular and technical uses of the term "dialect" seem inconsequential, but closer inspection reveals that its popular uses often carry assumptions that conflict with its technical meaning. At the same time, its popular use gives insight into how language variation is perceived in our society. Consider some commonly held beliefs about dialects conveyed in the following quotes:

1 "We went to Boston for a vacation and the people there sure do speak a dialect."
2 "I know we speak a dialect in the mountains, but it's a very colorful way of speaking."
3 "The kids in that neighborhood don't really speak English; they speak a dialect."
4 "The kids in this school all seem to speak the dialect."

In one popular use, the term "dialect" refers simply to those who speak differently from oneself (Quote 1 above). When the authors of this book were children, growing

up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the Eastern Shore of Maryland, respectively, they didn't necessarily realize that they spoke dialects; they presumed they spoke "normal" English and that dialects were spoken by people from other areas. Of course, we came to realize that this perception could be a two-way street when we attended universities in different states, and classmates pointed out how different our dialects were to them.

The perception that only other people speak dialects is obviously shaped by personal experience, as one group's customary way of speaking often turns out to be another group's language peculiarity. Southerners' use of *might could* in sentences such as *I might could do it* sounds strange to people from the North, but a sentence like *The house needs washed* sounds just as strange to people from the South even though it is perfectly "normal" to people in Western Pennsylvania and Ohio. Most people are surprised when they go to a different region and are told that they speak a dialect, since they take for granted that it is other people who speak dialects. But we all routinely speak dialects whether we recognize it or not. It is impossible, for example, to say a word like *caught* or *bought* without choosing a vowel pronunciation associated with some variety of English. Some people might pronounce the THOUGHT vowel in *caught* the same as the LOT vowel in *cot*; others might use a glided pronunciation like *cawt* closer to the MOUTH vowel, common in the rural South; and still others might use more of a stereotypical New York City pronunciation, as in something like *cowt* for *caught* or *cowffee* for *coffee*. No matter what, it is impossible to pronounce this word without selecting a vowel production associated with a dialect. Or, we may order a *soda, pop, coke, co-cola, tonic,* or *soft drink* along with our *submarine sandwich, sub, hoagie, grinder, torpedo*, or *hero*, but we won't eat or drink unless we make a dialect choice in ordering our sandwich and carbonated drink. Dialects are inevitable and natural, and we all speak them.

Exercise 1.1

Link 1.2: Visit http://americanenglishwiley.com/ to hear a clip of speakers pronouncing words with the THOUGHT vowel (i.e. *bought* and *talk*) in different ways.

Based on each speaker's pronunciation of the THOUGHT vowel, where do you think each speaker is from? Which speaker's pronunciation is closest to your own pronunciation of the THOUGHT vowel?

In another common use, the term "dialect" refers to those varieties of English whose features have, for one reason or another, become widely recognized – and usually stereotyped ("We speak a dialect"). In the United States – and beyond – people widely recognize a "Southern drawl," a "Boston accent," or a "New York City accent." If a language variety contains some features that are generally acknowledged and commented upon, then it

may be recognized as a dialect even by the speakers themselves. If someone keeps telling you that you speak a dialect, after a while you start to realize that you do. Thus, native New Yorkers often know that they speak a dialect, because their dialect has become a topic of widespread public comment in American society. Similarly, speakers of an Appalachian dialect, or "Mountain Talk," might recognize that they speak a dialect because of the caricatures and comments that so often appear in the media. On the other hand, the same perception does not hold true of middle-class residents of Ohio or Oregon whose speech does not receive popular attention. For a variety of historical and social reasons, some dialects have become much more marked than others in American society, and speakers of those varieties may therefore accept the dialect label assigned to their speech.

In the most extreme case ("[They] don't really speak English; they speak a dialect"), dialect is used to refer to a kind of deficient or "corrupted" English. In this case, dialect is perceived as an imperfect attempt to speak "correct" or "proper" English. If, for example, members of a socially disfavored group use phrases like *three mile* instead of *three miles*, or *Her ears be itching* instead of *Her ears always itch*, it is assumed that they have attempted to produce the standard English form but simply failed. The result is incorrectly perceived as a "deviant" or "deficient" form of English. However, based upon the careful examination of the structures of varieties considered to be NONSTANDARD, linguists have demonstrated that these dialects are *not* deviant forms of language, but simply different systems, with distinct subsets of language patterns. When we talk about language patterning, we are referring to the fact that language features are distributed in systematic and orderly ways rather than used randomly. That is, for any given language feature, there are systematic LINGUISTIC RULES that govern its usage. The appendix of the book describes many of the patterns or "rules" that apply to the use of different dialect forms. Many linguistic rules are not categorical but apply only in specific cases, for example, to sounds in certain word positions, or to words in certain grammatical structures. Forms that have regular patterns of variability are called LINGUISTIC VARIABLES; each different realization of a given variable feature is called a VARIANT. In Exercise 1.2 you will uncover the variable patterning of a variable feature called *a-* prefixing. This feature has two variants, one that occurs with the *a-* prefix, in forms such as *a-huntin' and a-fishin'*, and one that occurs without the prefix: *huntin' and fishin'*.

Exercise 1.2

In rural dialects of the United States, including in Southern Appalachia, some words that end in *-ing* can take an *a-*, pronounced as *uh*, attached to the beginning of the word (Wolfram 1980, 1988). We call this *a-* prefixing because the *a-* is a PREFIX attached to the front of the *-ing* word. The language pattern or "rule" for this form allows the *a-* to attach to some words but not to others. In this exercise, you will figure out this fairly complicated rule by looking at the kinds of *-ing* words that *a-* can and cannot attach to.

Use your inner feelings, or "gut reactions," about language. These inner feelings, called INTUITIONS, tell us where we *can* and *cannot* use certain structures. As linguists trying to describe a dialect, our task is to figure out the precise structural reasons for these inner feelings and to state the exact patterns that characterize the usage pattern.

Look at the sentence pairs in List A and decide which sentence in each pair sounds better with an *a-* prefix. For example, in the first sentence pair, does it sound better to say *A-building is hard work* or *She was a-building a house*? For each sentence pair, just choose one sentence that sounds better with the *a-*.

List A: Sentence pairs for a- *prefixing*

1 a Building is hard work.
  b She was building a house.
2 a He likes hunting.
  b He went hunting.
3 a The child was charming the adults.
  b The child was very charming.
4 a He kept shocking the children.
  b The story was shocking.
5 a They thought fishing was easy.
  b They were fishing this morning.

Examine each of the sentence pairs in terms of the choices for the *a-* prefix and answer the following questions:

Do you think there is some pattern that guided your choice of an answer? You can tell if there is a definite pattern by checking with other people who did the same exercise on their own.

Do you think that the pattern might be related to parts of speech? To answer this, see if there are any parts of speech where you *cannot* use the *a-* prefix. Look at *-ing* forms that function as verbs and compare those with *-ing* forms that operate as nouns or adjectives. For example, look at the use of *charming* as a verb (a) and as an adjective (b) in sentence 3.

The first step in figuring out the pattern for the *a-* prefix is related to the part of speech of the *-ing* word. Now let's look at another difference related to prepositions such as *from* and *by*. Based on the sentence pairs in List B, state whether or not the *a-* form can be used after a preposition. Use the same technique you used for List A. Select the sentence that sounds better for each sentence pair and say whether it is the sentence with or without the preposition.

List B: A further detail for a- *patterning*

1 a They make money by building houses.
  b They make money building houses.
2 a People can't make enough money fishing.
  b People can't make enough money from fishing.
3 a People destroy the beauty of the mountains through littering.
  b People destroy the beauty of the mountains littering.

We now have another detail for figuring out the pattern for *a-* prefix use related to prepositions. But there is still another aspect to the pattern of *a-* prefix use. This time, however, it is related to pronunciation. For the following *-ing* words, try to figure out what it is about the pronunciation that makes one sentence sound better than the other. To help you figure out the pronunciation trait that is critical for this pattern, the STRESSED or accented syllable of each word is marked with the symbol ´. Follow the same procedure that you did above and choose the sentence in each pair that sounds better.

List C: Figuring out a pronunciation pattern for the a- *prefix*

1 a She was discóvering a trail.
  b She was fóllowing a trail.
2 a She was repéating the chant.
  b She was hóllering the chant.
3 a They were figuring the change.
  b They were forgétting the change.
4 a The baby was recognízing the mother.
  b The baby was wrécking everything.
5 a They were décorating the room.
  b They were demánding more time off.

Say exactly how the pattern for attaching the *a-* prefix works. Be sure to include the three different details from your examination of the examples in Lists A, B, and C.

In List D, say which of the sentences may take an *a-* prefix. Use your understanding of the rule to explain why the *-ing* form may or may not take the *a-* prefix.

List D: Applying the a- *prefix rule*

1 She kept handing me more work.
2 The team was remémbering the game.
3 The team won by playing great defense.
4 The team was playing real hard.
5 The coach was charming.

There have been heated debates in American society about the linguistic integrity of socially disfavored language varieties at various times over the past half-century. For example, during the late 1960s and 1970s, there were many debates in educational circles over the so-called DEFICIT–DIFFERENCE CONTROVERSY, with language scholars arguing passionately that dialect variation was simply a matter of *difference*, not *deficit*, while some educators argued that variation from the socially accepted standard constituted a fundamental deficiency in language. In the mid-1990s, the debate flared up again, this time centered on the status of the ethnic variety African American English. This time, the controversy even spread as far as a US Senate subcommittee hearing on the topic and state legislation about the legitimacy of this variety in school settings.

When dialect differences involve groups that are unequal in their power relations, it is quite common for the PRINCIPLE OF LINGUISTIC SUBORDINATION to come into operation (Lippi-Green 2012: 70) and for the language varieties of subordinate social groups to be relegated to subordinate linguistic status. When this happens, "ordinary" people feel insecure about their linguistic usages and come to rely on the authoritative guidance offered by language "experts" – those well known for good writing or familiarity with prescribed rules. In the process, misinformation about the presumed *linguistic* logicality and clarity of *socially* preferred forms may be perpetuated in order to validate evaluations of linguistic usages and language varieties that are actually grounded in social inequities. Most of us were instructed to avoid double negatives such as *She didn't do nothing* because "logic" dictates that two negatives equal a positive. In reality, though, language doesn't work like math, and what we are really being taught is to avoid using language structures associated with the language varieties used by socially disfavored speakers. (In fact, in some other languages, for example Spanish, French, and Italian, double negatives are perfectly acceptable, indeed the only way to form negative sentences "correctly."). When the dialects of socially disfavored groups become subordinated to the language forms preferred by the "right" people, non-mainstream dialects are trivialized or marginalized, and their speakers considered quaintly odd at best and willfully ignorant at worst. Furthermore, linguistic subordination comes with explicit promises and threats; opportunities will arise when we use a "standard" variety and doors will close when we speak a socially disfavored one. According to this principle, the speech of a socially subordinate group will be interpreted as linguistically inadequate by comparison with that of the socially dominant group.

Linguists, who study the intricate patterning of language apart from its social evaluation, stand united against any definition of dialect as a corrupt version of the standard variety. A resolution adopted unanimously by the Linguistic Society of America at its annual meeting in 1997 asserted that "all human language systems – spoken, signed, and written – are fundamentally regular" and that characterizations of socially disfavored varieties as "slang, mutant, defective, ungrammatical, or broken English are incorrect and demeaning."

When the term "dialect" is used to refer to a kind of corrupt or unworthy English, it obviously carries very strong negative connotations. A clause such as "but it's a very colorful way of speaking," as in Quote 2 above, may soften the negative associations, but

such statements must be made explicit to mitigate the commonly held assumption that some dialects aren't as good as others. Typically, the popular use of the term "dialect" carries connotations ranging from mildly to strongly negative.

Finally, the term "dialect" may be used popularly to refer to a specific, socially disfavored variety of English. A person speaking a recognized, socially stigmatized variety of English may be said to speak "the dialect" ("The kids … speak the dialect"). Such designations have, for example, been used to refer to the speech of low-income African Americans or rural Appalachians as a kind of euphemistic label for the varieties spoken by these groups. With the inclusion of the definite article, "the dialect" functions more like a proper noun than in the generic, neutral sense in which the term is used by linguistic scientists.

1.3 Dialect Myths and Linguistic Reality

What do these popular uses of the term "dialect" say about the general public's perception of dialect, especially as it differs from the neutral technical definition presented earlier? As the preceding discussion points out, there is a popular mythology about language differences that is at odds with the linguistic facts about language diversity. Following are some of these myths, as they contrast with linguistic 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. Some dialects get much more attention than others, but this social recognition is unrelated to dialect status.

MYTH: Dialects result from unsuccessful attempts to speak the "correct" form of a language.
REALITY: Dialect speakers acquire their language by adopting the speech patterns of those around them, not by failing in their attempts to adopt mainstream language features. Dialects, like all language systems, are systematic and regular; socially disfavored dialects can be described with the same kind of linguistic precision as socially favored, prestigious language varieties; they are not "a collection of mistakes."

MYTH: Dialects in the United States are receding due to the influence of the mass media and population mobility.
REALITY: Dialects are dynamic; while some once-isolated dialects are receding, others are intensifying and diversifying. For example, some island dialects on the Eastern coast of the United States are fading away, while others are becoming more distinctive. In addition, new dialects are developing on the West Coast, for example in California, Oregon, and Washington. Further, major United States dialect

divisions, especially that between the North and the South, are getting deeper, with the dialects becoming more rather than less different from one another.

MYTH: Speaking a dialect limits a person's ability to express precise ideas and abstract constructs.

REALITY: All language systems enable the expression of precision, complexity, abstractions, and artistry.

Though most dialect myths have negative connotations, there are occasional positive associations, though these are often based on romanticized notions of "quaint" or "pure" dialects. For example, some people believe that dialects in historically isolated regions, such as those in the Appalachian Mountains and in the islands along the Southeastern coast of the United States, preserve Elizabethan or Shakespearean English. Though some features from older forms of English may endure in these varieties, these dialects are constantly undergoing change as well. In fact, sometimes small, relatively isolated dialects may change more rapidly than more widespread language varieties. Language is a dynamic phenomenon, and the only static variety of language is, in reality, a dead one.

Link 1.3: Visit http://americanenglishwiley.com/ to hear a discussion of the relationship between older forms of English and current Appalachian speech.

As we see, the popular uses of the term "dialect" strongly reflect the attitudes about language differences that have developed in the United States over the centuries. For this reason, some groups of educators and language scientists prefer to avoid the use of the term "dialect," using terms such as "language difference," "language variety," or "language variation" instead. Regardless of the label, we still have to confront the significant discrepancy between the public perception of linguistic diversity and the linguistic reality. In fact, given popular attitudes about dialect diversity, there is a good chance that whatever euphemism we use will eventually take on the kinds of pejorative connotations that are associated with the current popular uses of the term "dialect." Throughout this book, we will use the term "dialect" in its linguistically neutral sense and confront the issue of public education about language diversity as a separate matter. For the time being, it is sufficient to set forth the technical and popular uses of the dialect label and see how its popular uses have come to reflect some predominant attitudes and beliefs about dialect diversity in American society.

1.4 Standards and Vernaculars

In the preceding discussion, it was difficult to avoid some reference to the dialect of English often referred to as STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH (SAE) or MAINSTREAM AMERICAN ENGLISH (MAE). The notion of a widespread, normative variety, or STANDARD DIALECT, is an important one, but it is not always easy to define in a precise way – especially

for American English. In some countries, such as France and Spain, language academies have been established and these institutions are responsible for determining what forms are considered acceptable for the normative "standard." They determine, for example, which new words are allowed to be included in official dictionaries and which grammatical forms and pronunciations are to be recognized as standard. In the United States we do not have such an institution, and various attempts to establish this type of agency have failed repeatedly (Heath 1976). Labels such as "standard English" and popular terms such as "correct English," "proper English," or "good English" are commonly used but not without some ambiguity. At best, we can discuss how the notion of Standard American English, or Mainstream American English, is used and then offer a reasonable definition of the term based on how it seems to operate practically in our society.

Exercise 1.3

Common popular labels for what we call Standard American English (SAE) or Mainstream American English (MAE) are "correct English," "proper English," "good English," and "grammatical English." What do these labels tell us about the public perception of standard dialects in terms of the myths about dialects we discussed above? What do they say about the ideology that informs the interpretation of dialects in our society? By LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY here, we mean ingrained, unquestioned beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language. What implications do these terms have for those dialects that are considered "corrupt," "bad," or "ungrammatical" versions of the standard?

Before we get too far into this discussion, we should note that language standardization of some type seems inevitable, whether or not there are specific institutions for establishing language norms. Ultimately, we can attribute this to underlying principles of human behavior in which certain ways of behaving (dressing, speaking, treating elders, and so forth) are established as normative for a society.

As a starting point, it is helpful to distinguish between how the notion of standardness operates on a formal and an informal level. In formal standardization, language norms are prescribed by recognized sources of authority, such as grammar and usage books, dictionaries, style guides produced by publishers, and institutions like language academies. In the United States, we don't have a language academy, but we have many grammar and usage books and internet grammar sites that people turn to for the determination of "proper" forms. The keywords here are "prescribed" and "authority," so that the responsibility for determining standard forms is largely out of the hands of most ordinary speakers of the language. Whenever there is a question as to whether or not a form is considered standard English, we can turn to an "authoritative" guide. If, for example, we have a question such as where to use *will* versus *shall*, we simply look it up in our usage guide, which tells us