

## Language Variation - Varieties

What do you mean by Language varieties? How do you classify Language Varieties?

If a number of utterances of a given language are linguistically investigated, we cannot find two of them to be identical. This variation is an important phenomenon of all natural languages. Of course, it is conditioned by varied factors activating development of the language. English language, for an example, is spoken not only in Great Britain but also in many other countries of the world. It is used as mother tongue or second language in foreign countries. But they use English in their own way, and they rightly do so, that results in many varieties of English. However, this variation is clearly discerned even among the British speakers of different area and different social status. Linguistic investigations reveal that region, education, social standard, subject matter, medium, attitude, etc affect the varieties of language. There are many kinds of variation within a language. One way of classifying these variations would be to group them into two broad categories.

(1) Synchronic and

(2) Diachronic

As the students of Descriptive linguistics we are certainly more interested in Synchronic Variation, variations of language as they exist at a given point of time. Synchronic variations may be of two kinds

(1) Variation of Register, variations according to use

(2) Variation of Dialect, variations according to the users.

The same individual can use different varieties of a language depending on the situation.

Registers are stylistic-functional varieties of a dialect or language. In other words, Registers are those varieties of language which correspond to different situations, different speakers, and listeners, or readers or writers and so on. Thus, the kind of language that a teacher speaks in the kitchen talking to his wife is not the kind of language he uses in the class room or among his colleagues. In fact, the teacher uses different registers in talking to his wife, students and colleagues. We can term them as the formal register, the informal register, the register of law and so on. What is important to be noted is that the same speaker is in command of varieties of register. The linguists, since the term Register was first coined by Reid, have offered

all kinds of classification of Registers. However, we propose to take up one of these classifications that of Halliday, as an illustration. Halliday talks about the field of discourse, the mode of discourse and the style of discourse.

The field of discourse refers to those Register Variations which are determined by the subject matter. So, we speak of the Register of Science, the Register of Linguistics, the Register of Law, the Register of medicine and so on.

The mode of discourse refers to Register Variations determined by the medium used. Thus, we have difference in spoken language and the written language. We can talk about the different varieties of language in telegraphic messages, telephone conversation, Radio, T.V., News papers and so on. A sentence like 'arriving tomorrow prepare reception' can easily be identified as a telephonic message.

The style of discourse refers to the relation between the addresser and the addressee. Registers classified according to the style of discourse include the colloquial style, the informal style, the formal style, the frozen style etc. depending between the relationship of the participants involved.

However, the field of discourse, the mode of discourse and the style of discourse are not mutually exclusive. A lecture on biology in a technical college would be in the scientific field, lecturing mode and polite style.

Dialect. A regional, temporal or social variety within a single language is a dialect. It differs in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary from the standard language. In other words, a dialect is a variation of language sufficiently different to be considered a separate entity, but not different enough to be classed as a separate language. That is, dialects are not because of linguistic reasons but because of political cultural reasons. So, it is customary to describe them as varieties of a language according to the users.

In fact, dialect is conditioned, not by the situation but by the social and geographical background of the speaker. If we talk about the differences between British and American English, we mean the geographical variations of language. In Britain itself we have numerous dialects of English such as Lancashire dialect, the Scottish dialect, the Yorkshire dialect etc. The same is true of the American English, too. We know that the Norfolk dialect is different from the Yorkshire dialect because once again there are grammatical, lexical and phonological

differences between the two dialects, even though they have core system of English in common

The dialectal variations are determined also by the social hierarchy. The aristocratic London, for example, uses one variety of English and the lower class another. The Cockney dialect is the lower class dialect. Dialects are also conditioned by religion and caste. In India this seems to be a major factor. Most Malayalam, for example, can be identified as Christians, Hindus or Muslims by the varieties of Malayalam they speak quite often. The Namboodiri is a Caste dialect.

The dialect and Registeral differences may be phonological, syntactic or semantic. Let us consider the dialectal differences between the general American and Received Pronunciation of England. In many words the Americans use /æ/ where the English use /ɑ:/.

	English	American
Last	[lɑ:s]	[læst]
dance	[dɑ:ns]	[dæns]
class	[klɑ:s]	[klæs]

At the syntactic levels we find that the Americans prefer "cater for" while the English prefer "cater to". An example at the level of lexis would be the word 'Petrol' in English and "gas" in America.

Idiolect: Further more, within a given dialect, we have differences of speech between individuals. No two speakers speak exactly alike. The term 'idiolect' is used to refer to the idiosyncratic peculiarities of an individual speaker. In other words, it is a variety of language used by one individual speaker, including peculiarities of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, etc. It has been defined as the individual's personal variety of the community language system. Thus, a number of idiolects constitute a dialect, and a number of dialects constitute a language. Since in a given idiolect the individual speaker is in command of a number of registers, we would say that a number of registers constitute an idiolect.

Thus Language  
Dialects  
Idiolects