

محاضرة رقم ٧	
التربية للبنات	الكلية
اللغة الإنكليزية	القسم
Linguistics	المادة باللغة الانجليزية
علم اللغة	المادة باللغة العربية
الرابعة	المرحلة
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Regional Variation and Language 1	عنوان المحاضرة باللغة الانجليزية
التنوع الإقليمي واللغة ١	عنوان المحاضرة باللغة العربية
7	رقم المحاضرة
<i>The study of Language</i> by George Yule	المصادر والمراجع
<i>What is Linguistics</i> by John Lyons	
<i>Linguistics</i> by Jean Aitchison	

محتوى المحاضرة

Regional Variation and Language

Language is not monolithic; it varies across regions, communities, and social groups. This variation is a fascinating aspect of language study because it reveals how language interacts with geographical, social, and cultural factors. One of the most significant sources of linguistic diversity is **regional variation**—the differences in language use across different geographical areas. This includes variations in vocabulary, pronunciation (accent), grammar, and sometimes even the meaning of words.

In this lecture, we will draw on insights from George Yule's *The Study of Language*, which introduces and explores the concept of language variation, including regional variation, in depth. We will also cover key examples and types of variation, alongside the social factors that influence them.

1. What is Regional Variation?

Regional variation refers to the differences in language use that occur between different geographical areas. This can manifest in several ways:

1.Pronunciation (Accent): Different regions have distinct ways of pronouncing the same words.

2.Vocabulary: Certain words or expressions are used exclusively or predominantly in certain regions.

3.Grammar and Syntax: The structure of sentences and the way words are used may vary.

An example of **regional pronunciation** is the difference between how people from the southern United States pronounce the word "pen" (with a clear "e" sound) compared to people from the northern United States, who may pronounce it closer to "pin."

2. Types of Regional Variation

Yule outlines various ways in which regional variation can be observed. These include: **a)**

Dialect

A) **dialect** refers to a particular form of a language that is spoken in a specific geographical area. It includes distinctive features in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. English, for example, has numerous dialects: British English, American English, Australian English, etc. Even within a single country, dialects can vary significantly.

Example: In the UK, the word "biscuit" refers to what Americans would call a "cookie." Similarly, the word "boot" in British English means the trunk of a car, while in American English, the trunk is referred to as the "boot" in Australian English.

b) Accent

An **accent** specifically refers to differences in pronunciation. Accents are not necessarily associated with differences in grammar or vocabulary but indicate a

person's regional background based on how they pronounce words. A person from Boston, Massachusetts, has a different accent from someone from New York or Los Angeles.

Example: In some parts of the UK, "dance" is pronounced with a broad "a" sound, while in other regions, it's pronounced with a short "a," like the American version. **c)**

Isogloss

An **isogloss** is a geographic boundary that separates areas where different linguistic features (such as words or pronunciations) are used. It helps linguists map the extent to which a particular feature is spread in a given area.

Example: The use of the word "pop" to refer to carbonated soft drinks is common in the Midwest of the U.S., while people in the South may refer to the same thing as "Coke."

3. Factors Affecting Regional Variation

Regional variation is shaped by several factors:

a) Geographical Isolation

Geographical barriers such as mountains, rivers, or bodies of water can limit communication between regions, fostering the development of distinct language features. Communities that are geographically isolated will develop unique ways of speaking that reflect the local culture and environment.

b) Historical and Social Factors

Historically, different regions may have been influenced by different groups of people, including settlers, invaders, or colonizers. The social history of an area—such as immigration patterns, trade routes, or social hierarchies—can influence the development of regional dialects.

Example: In the United States, the Southern dialect has been influenced by a combination of African languages, English, and other immigrant languages due to the historical presence of enslaved Africans, European settlers, and Native American populations.

c) Language Contact

When people from different regions come into contact with each other, it can result in the blending or borrowing of linguistic features. This is known as **language contact** and can lead to new dialects or changes in existing ones.

Example: The influence of French on English in the UK, due to the Norman Conquest of 1066, led to a variety of vocabulary and pronunciation changes, some of which remain today.

4. Standard Language vs. Regional Dialects

In many countries, there is a **standard language**—a version of the language that is codified and used for official purposes, in education, and in media. However, regional dialects often differ from the standard. Standard languages are typically promoted by governments and institutions, and they often serve as a unifying force within a nation.

Example: In England, **Received Pronunciation (RP)** is often considered the standard accent, while regional accents, such as those spoken in Liverpool or Manchester, are often seen as non-standard or even "inferior."

However, regional dialects carry significant cultural and social identity for the people who speak them, and in many contexts, they are a source of pride.

5. Language Change and Regional Variation

Regional variation is not static; it evolves over time. As people migrate, as communities mix, or as media and technology influence language use, regional dialects may undergo significant changes.

Example: The spread of social media and mass communication has led to greater exposure to various dialects and accents, which can cause regional differences to blur in some cases. New slang words, for example, may quickly spread across regions via the internet, impacting even those in more isolated areas.