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DET HUMANVITENSKAPELIGE FAKULTET

EXFAC03-AAS v11 Language

□ 6: Language Variation and Change

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Language variation

- Languages vary
 - from one place to another,
 - from one social group to another, and
 - from one situation to another
- Today's topics are therefore
 - geographical variation
 - social variation
 - contextual variation
- Variation has political implications, so we also discuss language policy.
 - Two examples
 - Cameroon and Korea
- These topics are the domain of sociolinguistics.

The Three Dimensions of Variation

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Some basic terminology

- Terms like 'language', 'dialect', 'sociolect', 'accent', 'jargon' and 'register' are hard to define
- For example, defining dialect as a geographical subdivision of a language begs the question
- More basic terms required:
 - Linguistic item - Any basic unit of language
 - e.g. words, sounds, grammatical constructions
 - Language variety

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Language variety

- Definition:
 - A set of linguistic items with similar social (including geographical and cultural) distribution
- May refer to
 - a full-fledged language or dialect
 - a small set of linguistic items (e.g. slang)
 - anything in between (e.g. sociolect, idiolect)

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Varieties of English

(a) Standard English No one has gone to the post office yet.
(b) Jamaican Creole Nobadi no gaan a puos yet. 'No one has gone to the post office yet.'
(c) Southern US white Non-Standard dialect from Atlanta Nobody don't like a boss hardly. 'Hardly anybody likes a boss.'
(d) Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin) Papa, min bin mekim sin long God na long yu. 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you.'
(e) Older Standard English of the 'King James version' Bible Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight.
(f) Scots, from Leith When ah wis a boy ma mither an faither died. 'When I was a boy my mother and father died.'
(g) Standard English & English slang Walking 5 miles to work is a real ball-ache. 'Walking 5 miles to work is really inconvenient.'

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□ Questions:

1. Do these varieties represent the same or different languages?
2. Do these varieties represent the same or different dialects of the same language?
3. How many languages are actually represented here?

□ There are no unique ("correct") answers!

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Geographical variation

- Topics
 - Language vs. dialect
 - Dialect continuum
 - Isoglosses

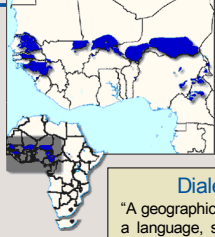
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The example of Fula

- A Niger-Congo language
 - Spoken in 17 countries
 - Mostly in West Africa, especially the Sahel
 - Mauritania and Senegal in the west, through Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and neighbouring areas
- Not geographically continuous
 - Interrupted by many areas with hundreds of other languages
- Generally assumed to be a single language with a number of different dialects



Dialect


"A geographical variety of a language, spoken in a certain area, and different in some linguistic items from other geographical varieties of the same language."

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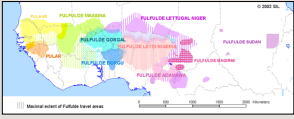
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Dialects of Fula



- Different Fula-speaking areas can be referred to as dialect areas
- Between ten and fifteen major dialects; most important:
 1. Northern Senegal, Southern Mauritania
 2. Guinea
 3. Mali
 4. Burkina Faso, Western Nigeria, Western Niger
 5. Central Nigeria
 6. Eastern Nigeria, Northern Cameroon



- Speakers from neighbouring areas can communicate without problems
 - Each speaks his/her own native variety
- But speakers from one end of West Africa have problems communicating with speakers from the other end
 - Abilities vary from person to person depending on degree of exposure to other dialects

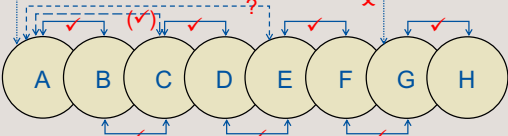
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Dialect continuum

- A dialect continuum is a chain of dialects, let us say dialects A–H:
 - Speakers of dialects A and B understand each other extremely well
 - The same applies to B and C, to C and D, etc.
 - Speakers of A and C understand each other rather less well
 - Speakers of dialect A and dialect E less well again
- There comes to a point, say at dialect G, where dialect A is no longer intelligible to the local people and vice versa.



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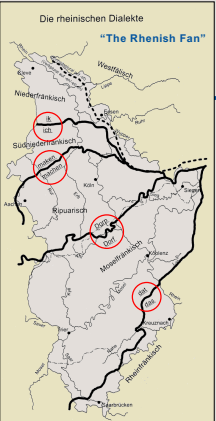
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Isoglosses

- Dialects can be mapped using isoglosses
 - Lines on a map mark the boundary between different linguistic items
 - Usually no clear boundary between dialects
- The Rhenish Fan in Germany
 - Varieties: Low, Middle and High German
 - Linguistic items: 'ik-ich', 'Dorp-Dorf', 'dat-das'

↑	'make'	'village'	'that'	'apple'	'pound'	
ik	make	dorp	dat	appel	pund	Low German
ich	machen	dorf	dat	appel	pund	
ich	machen	dorp	dat	appel	pund	Middle German
ich	machen	dorf	dat	appel	pund	
ich	machen	dorf	das	appel	pund	High German
ich	machen	dorf	das	apfel	pfund	



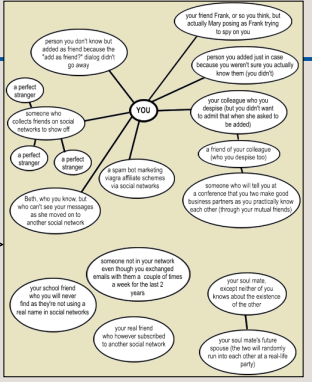
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Social variation

- Geographic distance leads to language variation
- Social distance also leads to language variation
- Topics
 - Social organization
 - Social networks
 - Social stratification
 - Sociolect
 - Slang
 - Jargon



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Social stratification

- ❑ Hierarchical structure of a society
 - Arising from inequalities of wealth and power
- ❑ Different types of hierarchy
 - Rank society
 - Class society
- ❑ Europe after ca. 1800
 - Change from hierarchy of rank to hierarchy of class
- ❑ Rank society
 - People born with certain rank, low social mobility
 - Speak language of birth throughout life
- ❑ Class society
 - People born into certain class, high social mobility
 - Change their language in order to improve social status

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Sociolects

- ❑ Language varieties used by particular societal strata
- ❑ Most language varieties have geographical as well as social distribution
- ❑ Geographical variation now larger among lower classes than middle and upper classes

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Slang

- ❑ Very informal language variety
 - Includes new and sometimes not polite words and meanings...
- ❑ Often used among particular groups of people
 - e.g. teenagers or professional groups
 - Not commonly used in serious speech or writing
- ❑ Some expressions contain ordinary words with a special meaning
 - e.g. khyber, kisser and knocking
 - New meanings, often based upon fanciful and creative metaphors and metonymies – e.g. Cockney rhyming slang
- ❑ Other expressions contain special words with no «non-slang» meanings
 - e.g. kooky

British slang (<http://www.peevish.co.uk/slang/>)

kerb crawler *Noun*. A person who drives slowly to view street prostitutes, with the intention of procuring their services. (Informal).

khyber (pass) *Noun*. Buttocks, anus. Cockney rhyming slang on 'arse'.

kiddle fiddler *Noun*. A paedophile. *Derog.*

kipper *Noun*. The face. E.g. "Did you see the miserable kipper on that idiot stood at the back?" [Liverpool/North-west use.]

kisser *Noun*. Mouth. Origins in boxing.

knocking shop *Noun*. A brothel.

kooky *Adj.* Crazy, eccentric.

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Jargon

- ❑ A set of vocabulary items used by members of particular professions
 - i.e. their technical terms
- ❑ Linguists have a large vocabulary that is not well understood by non-linguists
 - (ref. these lectures...)
- ❑ Other typical examples
 - Computer jargon
 - scroll bar, SCSI, short cut, spam...
 - Printers' jargon
 - NOR: slis, drittel, enke, horeunge...
- ❑ All professions have their own jargons
 - Farmer's jargon
 - Jargon of Fulani shepherds...

guddiri 'bull without a tail'

wudde 'cow without a tail'

jaabuye 'cow with a large navel'

lelwaaye 'cattle with eyes like a gazelle'

gerlaaye 'cattle that is like a bush-fowl'

happuye 'cow in milk after her calf has died'

mbutuye 'cow whose calf has been killed so that she may be fattened'

elliinge 'cattle with upright horns'

gajje 'cattle with horns twisted back' (also called **mooro**)

hippe 'cattle with horns drooping forward'

hogole 'cattle with horns almost meeting'

lettooye 'cattle with one horn up and the other drooping'

wijaaye 'cattle with horns drooping towards the ears'

tolle 'cow with one horn'

wumale 'cow without horns'

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Discussion Questions

- ❖ What role does language policy play in promoting or hindering language variation and multilingualism?
- ❖ How has globalization and technology affected language variation and the spread of different dialects and languages?

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Discussion Questions

- ❖ How does language variation impact communication and understanding between speakers of different dialects or languages?
- ❖ In what ways does language variation reflect social, economic, and political power dynamics in a society?
- ❖ How does language variation impact language learning and teaching, particularly in multilingual and multicultural classrooms?

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