

Dialect and Vocal Variety

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the use of dialect and vocalics. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. A Dialect Is a Variety of a Language
 - a. Tips for the Speaker
2. Vocal Variety
 - a. Tips for the Speaker

1. A Dialect Is a Variety of a Language

A **dialect** is a variety of a language that is a characteristic of a particular group of the language speakers. A dialect is distinguished by its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (phonology, including prosody). Where a distinction can be made only in terms of pronunciation, the term accent is appropriate—not dialect.

The term dialect is applied most often to regional speech patterns. The major native dialects of English are often divided by linguists into three general categories: British, North American, and Australasian . American English is a set of dialects used mostly in the United States. Approximately two-thirds of the world's native speakers of English live in the United States and it is the most common language there.

Although the U.S. federal government has no official language, English is the common language used by the federal government and is considered the de facto language of the United States because of its widespread use. English has been given official status by 28 of the 50 state governments.

There are several dialects associated with the speech communities in different regions. You may have meet people from different parts of the country who speak a different dialect.

Some of the more common dialects are as follows:

- New England includes Boston and Vermont English
- Inland North American includes western and central upstate New York
- Mid-Atlantic includes Baltimore, New York, and New Jersey
- Inland North American includes Michigan, Northern Ohio, and Indiana
- North Central includes primarily Minnesota and Wisconsin
- Midland American covers Nebraska to Ohio

- Southern English across the Southeast
- Western English includes California and Hawaiian Pidgin



THINK ABOUT IT

What dialect do you speak? Are you currently living in your native dialect area? What differences of words or pronunciation do you hear from others in different parts of the United States?

Since there are so many dialects of English, it is difficult to say that one dialect is better than another. Some dialects may be spoken by persons holding powerful positions in an area, so those dialects are the ones that become a standard for others. People of one dialect may view speakers with dialects from different regions, social or cultural backgrounds negatively and treat them accordingly.

All dialects have communicative value within the particular dialect community; it is when the person moves out of their home dialect community that they may encounter negative evaluation.



TERM TO KNOW

Dialect

A variety of a language (specifically, often a spoken variety) that is characteristic of a particular area, community or group, often with relatively minor differences in vocabulary, style, spelling and pronunciation.

1a. Tips for the Speaker

1. It is important to consider whether the majority of the audience shares the same dialect as the speaker to make sure that the words and pronunciation match those of the audience.
2. If you are speaking to a national audience, you will want to make sure that your word choice and pronunciation is more widely used than that of your home dialect community.

2. Vocal Variety

Vocalics, or **paralanguage**, refers to the non-verbal elements of speech used to modify meaning and convey emotion. You achieve vocal variety by using any or all of the features of vocalics: the rate, pitch, volume, and pauses you use to change the way you deliver your message.

Here are methods to help you create variety in your delivery:

- Speak faster or slower at different times
- Speak at a slightly higher or lower pitch
- Use more force to speak louder or softer
- Pause at different points in your speech

Consider that emphasis allows you to compare and contrast. You might say one phrase at a faster rate in comparison to another phrase that you speak at a slower rate. You might speak louder at the end of your speech to create a contrast with the softer delivery in the preceding part of your speech. All of these vocal changes in paralanguage help you emphasize what is more important compared to another part that is less important.

The goal here is to avoid **monotony**, or an unvarying **tone**, that could bore your audience and fails to communicate your message clearly.



TERMS TO KNOW

Monotony

Tedium as a result of repetition or a lack of variety. The quality of having an unvarying tone or pitch.

Paralanguage

The non-verbal elements of speech used to modify meaning and convey emotion, such as pitch, volume, and intonation.

Tone

The manner in which speech or writing is expressed.

2a. Tips for the Speaker

1. Every speech has key points that you want to emphasize. Identify those points by changing the delivery so they stand out or contrast with the rest of the speech.
2. Change the rate meaningfully; do not speak faster to finish the speech or to avoid talking about a main point.
3. Change in rate is natural in conversation. Notice how you change the rate in your conversation and apply the natural changes while speaking in public.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that a **dialect is a variety of a language** that is characteristic of a particular group of the language's speakers and is distinguished by shared vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. All dialects have communicative value within the particular dialect community. When a person moves out of their home dialect community, they may encounter negative evaluations by those in powerful positions who speak a different dialect and have set a standard for others.

You achieve **vocal variety** by using any or all of the features of paralanguage—rate, pitch, volume, and pauses to change the way you deliver your message. An important **tip for speakers** is to consider how emphasis allows you to compare and contrast different parts of your speech. Vocal variety combats monotony, which results from having an unvarying tone in your speech.

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