

13. Modern English II

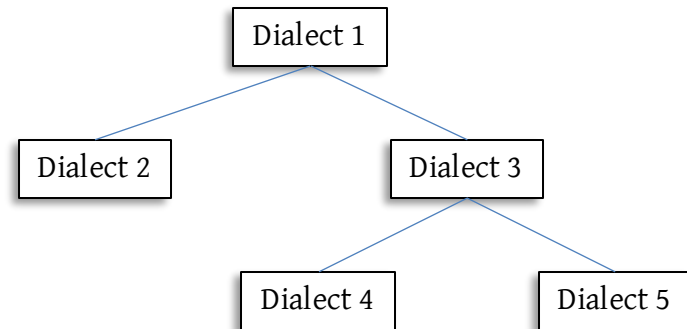
The History of English (Ling 390)

Prof. Pentangelo

Fall 2025

Quiz #11

1. Did this reading include a linguistic family tree diagram, kind of like the one shown below?



2. Did this reading discuss American Sign Language?

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD



Show me proof of having submitted it (NOT what your review actually was) for 1 extra credit point.

Complete Your Course Evaluations

Go to <https://csi.mce.cc>

Log in with your CUNYfirst credentials

Take the next 10 minutes.

Open until 15 December.



THE CITY UNIVERSITY
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Languages, Dialects, Variations

- Languages have a number of different varieties. There is no single way that all English speakers speak English, all the time, in all places. (Obviously.)
- What distinction does Algeo make between a **dialect** and a **register**?

“The variations that depend on the circumstances of use have to do with whether we are talking or writing, how formal the situation is, the subject of the discourse, the effect we want to achieve, and so on. Differences in language that depend on who we are constitute **dialect**. Differences that depend on where, why, or how we are using language are matters of **register**.”

Languages, Dialects, Variations

- Every speaker of a given language speaks one or more particular dialects and a number of different registers.

“Each of us also uses a variety of registers, and we change them often, shifting from one to another as the situation warrants, and often learning new ones. The more varied our experiences have been, the more various registers we are likely to command.”

- Different features (pronunciation, word choice, even orthography) are typical to different varieties.

What’s something you associate with American English?

What’s something you associate with British English?

Languages, Dialects, Variations

- What does Algeo call “standard English”?

“Standard English is the written form of our language used in books and periodicals and is therefore also called edited English. [...] Standard English is standard, not because it is intrinsically better than other varieties—clearer or more logical or prettier—but only because English speakers have agreed to use it in so many places for so many purposes that they have therefore made a useful tool of it and have come to regard it as a good thing.”

- Algeo contrasts this with regional varieties. There are many of these. General American is the sort of standard dialect in the USA, which exists in tension with many other regional varieties, like Southern or NY English.

What dialect do you speak?

- Before we return to last week's activity, let's try something.
- We'll each take the New York Times Dialect Quiz. It is linked to from the main page of our class website, or from this QR code.

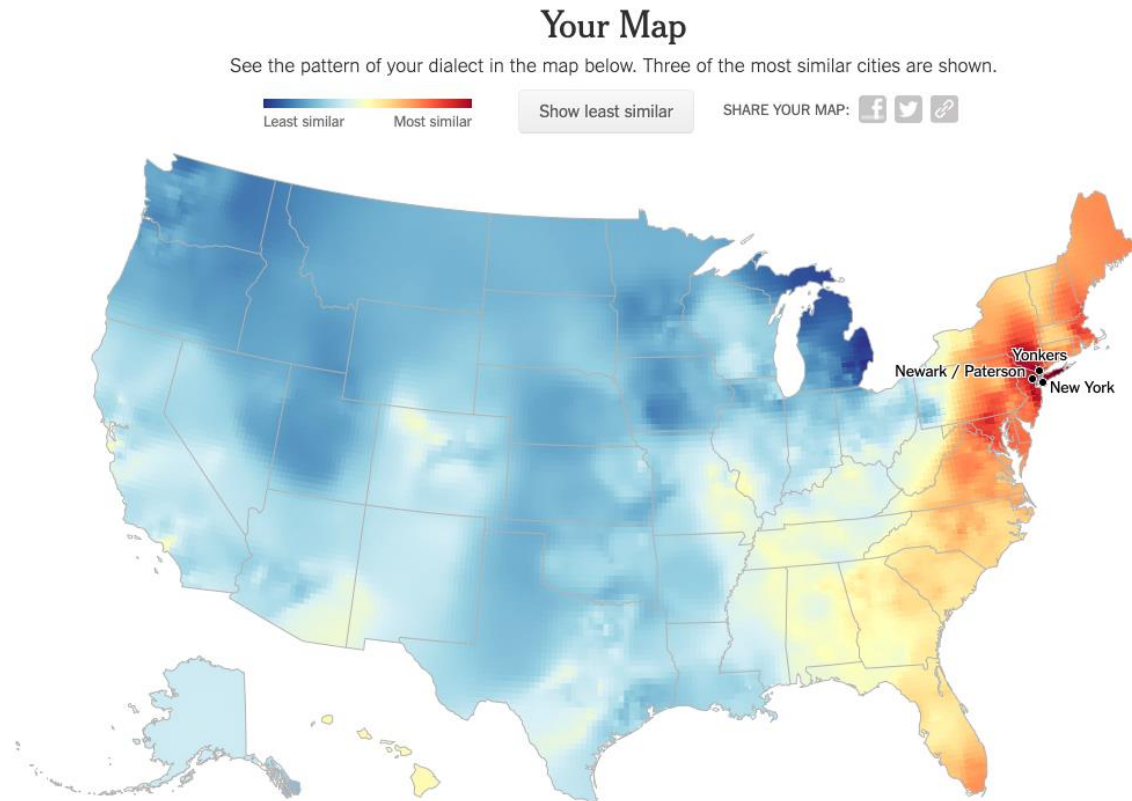


For the best results, answer on your own, without discussing with others. We'll all discuss together after we've all taken it.

Note: The quiz dates to 2013, so it doesn't really capture dialect changes that may have occurred over the last 10 years.

What dialect do you speak?

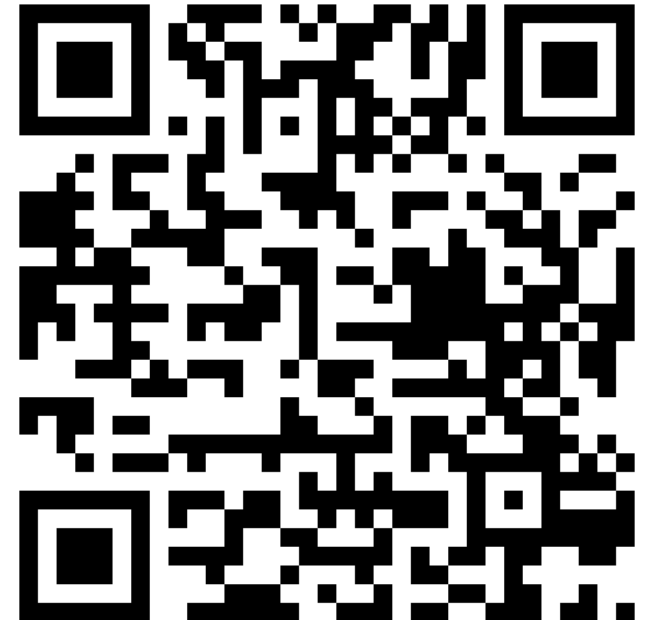
- My results from this afternoon:



How about you all?

Do you want to do more of this?

If yes:



What did I say?

Check your answers

Who wants to read a
scrambled list
themselves and see what
others think you said?

I need two volunteers.

1. Mary
2. Caught
3. Collar
4. Merry
5. Pin
6. Ferry
7. Caller
8. Fairy
9. Vary
10. Stock
11. Very
12. Pen
13. Marry
14. Stalk
15. Cot

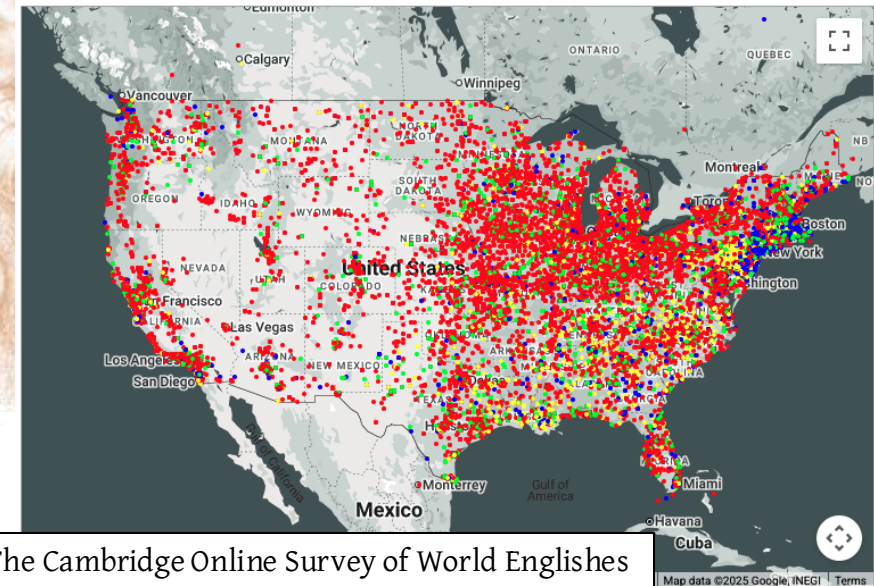
Merry, marry, Mary?

- Historically, these three words had three different vowel sounds.
- In most of America (57% of speakers as of 2003) and all of Canada, the distinction between the three has collapsed. They pronounce all three the same—there is no distinction in their pronunciation in General American.
- NYC was historically a holdout, preserving the three-way distinction.
- But alas...

[mɛri] [mæri] [meri]
merry marry Mary

How do you pronounce Mary/merry/marry?

- all 3 are the same (60%)
- Mary and marry are the same; merry is different (15%)
- all 3 are different (13%)
- Mary and merry are the same; marry is different (9%)



From The Cambridge Online Survey of World Englishes



Cot-caught merger

- The vowels in “cot” and “caught” were historically different.

[kat]

[kɔt]

Bot vs. bought?

cot

caught

- Throughout most of North America, many speakers no longer make this distinction.
- One historic holdout was New York City, along with other cities in the coastal northeast (Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Providence, too).
- And yet...

Variation and Style

- The point is that no two speakers, even living in the same place, pronounce the same words exactly the same way.
- For this reason, there is always some variability within each dialect.
- In addition to regional dialects, there are also **ethnic** and **social dialects**. Speakers of any of these dialects may also use different **styles** or registers when speaking.
- An example of an ethnic dialect is African American English (AAE), sometimes called African American Vernacular English (AAVE).
- What is slang?

“One stylistic variety that is of perennial interest is slang, primarily because it continually renews itself. Slang is a deliberately undignified form of speech whose use implies that the user is ‘in,’ with special knowledge about the subject of the slang term.”

Slang

- People sometimes incorrectly describe well-established features of AAE as being slang.

“He been done working.”

← Pre-recent, happened a long time ago (not the same as “He is done working” or “He finished working.”)
Part of AAE, is not slang.

- And sometimes, as an overcorrection, people will insist that a certain word or usage isn't slang if it developed in AAE. This is not right either. Slang is dialect-agnostic.

“Bling bling.”

← “Jewellery, something shiny.”
Comes from AAE, but is also actually slang.

Current Grades

- If you want to know your current grade, hang out after the last slide.

For December 15th:

- We'll wrap up Modern English. In groups, choose a text or work written in contemporary English that you like and would like to discuss with the class. It can be poetry, literature, journalism, nonfiction, whatever. Bring **printed copies** of an excerpt of the text (no more than 200 words) to share with the class.
- Come prepared for the final review!
- Extra credit assignment (optional) is due on Dec. 22nd. Details to come.