Topic 5
DIALECTS and ACCENTS

Dialects and accents are related yet distinct features of language. While **dialects** include differences in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary**,** **accents** are variations in pronunciation.

Dialect

A **dialect** is a specific form of a standard language. It is like a compass that signals where a speaker comes from (regional dialect), the speaker's social background (class dialect) and/or the speaker's occupation (occupational dialect). A **dialect** follows many of the rules of the standard language, but also has its own vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. While all languages have **dialects**, it is difficult to definitively say how many dialects there are in the world. This is because linguists often disagree as to the definition of a separate and different language and that of a dialect. Here are some examples: English has about 160 dialects. Of all the international English dialects, American English has the most speakers. Three Chinese dialects, often referred to as languages, are Mandarin, Cantonese and Hakka. Germany has approximately 250 dialects, Italy, over 30, and India has over 1,000.

Some **dialects** are mutually intelligible, which means that dialect speakers can understand other dialect speakers without any prior knowledge or effort, or they are mutually unintelligible where different dialect speakers cannot understand other dialect speakers due to significant pronunciation and vocabulary differences. Distance between dialect speakers often determines whether speakers will understand one another.

Even though **dialects** are sometimes viewed negatively and seen as sub-standard varieties of a language, spoken only by lower-status groups, it is important to remember that dialects express speakers' identity and also unique characteristics of a particular region. In addition to this, there is promising research news about children's use of two dialects. Recent studies (Antoniou & Katsos, 2017; Antoniou et al, 2020) found that bi-dialectalism, or speaking two dialects of the same language, a widespread practice found in many parts of the world, *trains the brain in the same way as bilingualism*. This means that the human mind does not significantly differentiate between dialects and language, and that children who speak two dialects share similar cognitive advantages, as do children who speak two different languages. The authors of these

studies conclude that dialects are under-recognized and undervalued and that bi-dialectalism is as advantageous as bilingualism.

Accents

An accent refers to the pronunciation of speech sounds. Like a dialect, an accent reflects a speaker's geographic location, occupation, ethnicity, social background and/or a language environment. Often viewed as part of a dialect, accents differ in quality of voice, distinction of vowels and consonants, stress, and prosody. It is safe to say that every language speaker has an accent, and everyone speaks a dialect (or multiple dialects). It's important to remember that dialects and accents are simply variations of language and not indicators of correctness or status. There is no single, universally accepted correct way to speak any language. Every speaker's accent is a unique combination of sounds and pronunciations.

References

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Language vs Dialect: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxR2188FvLE