

What does a dialect look like?

When talking about dialects, we usually think of some specific linguistic features related to grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation that are typical for language use from a certain region or by a certain group of speakers. This worksheet focuses on particular dialect features in more detail. We will discuss people's associations with some words and uses of grammar. When talking about language features and their speakers, we should make sure to describe the language (taking a descriptive view) without evaluation (taking a prescriptive view). The latter, writes Trudgill (2016: 124-5), is oftentimes grounded in negativity and is related to the concept of linguisticism which refers to "negative sentiments towards, and discrimination against, individuals and groups of human beings because of their accent, dialect or native language".



Key terms

(non-)standard

prestige and stigma

descriptivism & prescriptivism

Task 1

In this task, we are going to look at some data from informal spoken conversation from a specific region in the UK. Look up the word *bruv* in BNClab and answer the following questions:

- What does this word mean? (Tip: Look at the use of the word in the Usage button)
- Where, in terms of region, is it used? (You will find this information under the Region button)
- Can you think of other words that express similar meaning? Are they used in particular regions in the UK? Check one or two of these words in BNClab.

Task 2

Dialect features often do not occur in isolation in language use. In other words, speakers often use a combination of dialect features related to their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Have a look at the concordance lines below which include the word *aye*. Can you identify other regional features, both lexical and grammatical, in these sentences?

S: . The other one was Christmas day !! I know ! S: Here 's our lady . Our resuscitation lady . S: Yes . That 's the only good'un int it ? S: Aye ,	aye	S: Who , who put that write up in the S: I have n't put it in . S: I thought you had . S: No ! No ! I have n't put it in . S: Nothing
S: did n't even say six month . He he did but he did n't . His mam 's been on the phone . S: Where to ? S: The doctor . S: The doctor 's ?	Aye	the doctor . S: And the doctor had n't said six months ? S: He did . He did he said that which he should n't have done . He says if you have another
S: is n't he like , he 's only had a couple of pints . first time you 've been able to talk to him properly . S: So is he still on valium ?	Aye	but he 's on next to nowt compared to what he was . S: What 's he drinking , lager ? S: Owt . Does n't make any difference just so long as it 's
S: n't touch spirits . S: Aye . S: But me and Jimmy was standing say like me and Jimmy have what seven or eight pints , a night . S: . S: When I go out ,	aye	, seven or eight pints . S: Oh . S: Jeff can only have three or four . So we says to him , why did n't he get a half of lager a a
S: ? S: Who ? S: . Have you heard of him dad ? dad ? S: What ? S: Have you heard of ? S: . S: Who ? S: . S: Where from ? S: at the end of the .	Aye	he used to be the S: His brother used to be his brother and all . S: He 's he 's one of the top notches of Shields him like . You would n't believe
S: Bye ! S: Mm . S: Oh no you 're flipping joking ! S: Catherine , have you seen our mother ? S: No . S: Oh God ! What a ! S: Alright ! S: Oh good ! Och	aye	! S: They 're going back the other way . S: Oh not again ! S: I can see them ! That 's them over there ! Put a S: Ca n't she get in from down
S: me poll tax and er I says to her , I says , I should be court to Monday oh she says you 've got a fifteen pound court thing , I says	aye	, she says oh well that 's fifteen pound , I says it 's not cos I 'm not paying it I says I 'm not paying the fifteen pound to the court

Task 3

Think of the different lexical and grammatical forms from Task 2. Do you consider them as part of standard or non-standard varieties of English? In pairs or small groups, come up with definitions for standard and non-standard varieties. Note down your definitions below:

Task 4

People are often evaluated by the way they speak and whether they use standard or nonstandard forms when they speak. Different ways of speaking may carry social prestige (positive evaluation) or social stigma (negative evaluation).

- Can you think of examples for prestige and stigmatized language features?
- In your opinion, how would the variety of English that you speak be evaluated by speakers from other parts of the UK?

Research bite

While thinking about standard language and prestige, it is important to keep in mind that the standardisation of language is a result of social processes. That means that the status of being the standard variety does not reflect the fact that this dialect is inherently better than other varieties, but because it is associated with society's structures of the time. So how does one variety of language become the standard form? Researchers have suggested that the dialect most often associated with subgroups such as educated people or people with high status and authority usually becomes regarded as the standard form of language (Mesthrie, Deumer & Leap, 2000: 20). In the UK, the southern seat of the government meant that southern dialects became the basis of what is considered Standard English now. Even today, people still think of RP-speakers more highly, in terms of intelligence and professionalism.



In an experiment in the 1970s, linguist Howard Giles gave two lectures with the exact same content, one in RP and one in a Birmingham accent. In the collected feedback, he found that students who had listened to the RP lecture rated Giles consistently as more intelligent as their counterparts did in the Birmingham accent lecture. Almost 40 years later, a similar study was carried out by the BBC Voices project and linguists Coupland and Bishop (2007). They found that tendencies to rate non-standard British dialects low in terms of prestige were still very much apparent, but that for younger participants, the trends were slowly shifting. Further, when testing for 'social attractiveness', RP scored behind regional dialects such as Scottish or Irish English.

Are there accents and dialects in the British Isles that you especially like?

Did you know...

People are generally aware of how others might view their accent and dialect. Speakers even shift to more standard dialects in order to appear more intelligent and prestigious, but this shift can actually go the other way, too! In recent years, several politicians have made headlines by trying to sound less posh and closer to their constituents – not always with great success!