



Expansion, Dialect,  
Standard English

The Politics of Grammar

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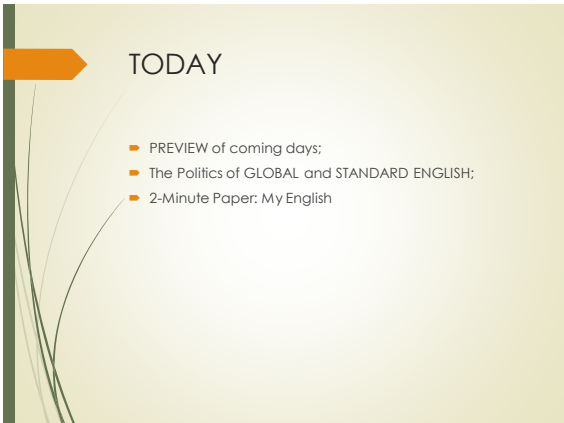
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TODAY

- PREVIEW of coming days;
- The Politics of GLOBAL and STANDARD ENGLISH;
- 2-Minute Paper: My English

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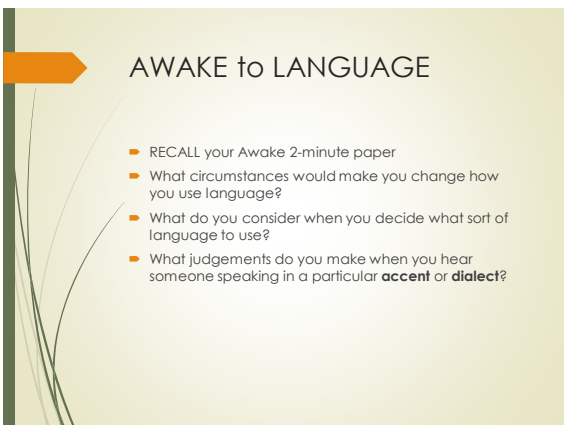
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AWAKE to LANGUAGE

- RECALL your Awake 2-minute paper
- What circumstances would make you change how you use language?
- What do you consider when you decide what sort of language to use?
- What judgements do you make when you hear someone speaking in a particular **accent** or **dialect**?

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## VARIATION vs LANGUAGE

- ▶ DIALECTS assume MUTUAL INTELLIGIBILITY:
  - ▶ Newfoundland English and Ontario English
  - ▶ Alabama English and Michigan English
  - ▶ Canadian and South African
  
- ▶ LANGUAGES assume the absence of mutual intelligibility:
  - ▶ English and French;
  - ▶ Anglo-Saxon and Norse;
  - ▶ Human and machine languages.

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## ENGLISH TODAY

- ▶ NON-NATIVE English speakers far outnumber native speakers
  - ▶ 400 million native English speakers
  - ▶ 1.6 billion non-native English speakers
- ▶ ENGLISH is the LINGUA FRANCA for international commerce, science, technology
  - ▶ 80% scientific journals are in English
- ▶ BRITISH EMPIRE
- ▶ AMERICAN CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DOMINANCE

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## ENGLISH DOMINANCE and COLONIZATION

- ▶ Official language of LAW and GOVERNMENT:
  - ▶ East Africa, South East Asia, Hong Kong
  
- ▶ EDUCATIONAL TARGET: "Standard English" as PRESTIGE language:
  - ▶ Canada's enforcement of English-only education in Residential School system (repression of Indigenous Languages);
  - ▶ Ireland/Wales: suppression of Gaelic to solidify England's control of Gaelic Britain;
  - ▶ U.S. Civil Rights movement: stressed "educational amelioration" for African Americans through integration of African Americans into white school system;
  - ▶ ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: for those aspiring to global communication in business

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## GLOBALIZATION vs NATIONALISM

- Language of EXPRESSION and CONNECTION to international community
  - Apartheid South Africa: the language of protest for the Black resistance
- Legacy of OPPRESSION and SUPPRESSION of NATIONAL IDENTITIES and CULTURE
  - "DERACINATION": the severing of a people from their history and culture usually through the suppression of language and cultural practices, rituals and community connection.

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## ORWELL and NEWSPEAK

- What is the role of "Newspeak" in the society Orwell describes in *Nineteen Eighty Four*?

'Has it ever occurred to you, Winston, that by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now?'

'Except-' began Winston doubtfully, and he stopped.

It had been on the tip of his tongue to say 'Except the proles,' but he checked himself, not feeling fully certain that this remark was not in some way unorthodox. Syme, however, had divined what he was about to say.

'The proles are not human beings,' he said carelessly.

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## DIALECT

- A set of linguistic features that identifies speakers as members of a particular speech community representing
  - A geographic region;
  - Social class;
  - Educational level;
  - Ethnic group.
- A complex web of phonetic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features that function interconnectedly and systematically.
  - Double negatives: "I don't got no shoes";
  - Lexical variation: chesterfield/sofa/couch; soda/pop/coke;
  - Verbal variation: "I am hearing you now"

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## ACCENT

- Variations in pronunciation, usually based on regional location:
  - Tomayto/Tomahto;
  - Prahcess/Prohcess;
- May reflect social class, especially if the particular regional accent is also associated with a power group:
  - New England English: John Kennedy;
  - "Posh" London, "Public School," BBC or Received Pronunciation

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## DIALECT and STATUS

You are listening to a policeman interview two suspects. Which suspect do you think will be more likely to get the benefit of the doubt?

A. "I never did nothing and I ain't gotta talk to you. Go git me a lawyer."

B. "I had nothing to do with it, and I invoke my right to remain silent. I request a lawyer."

Which speaker would you be more likely to sympathise with?

Would your answer be different if you were from a working class background or a middle class background?

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## STANDARD ENGLISH

- Educational target: enforced through formal education;
- Prestige dialect;
- Prescriptive;
- Conservative/resistant to change;
- Most prevalent in written English;
- Recognized as the standard, although difficult to describe in specifics.

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## Living your Language

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Standard English?
- Do you feel that it enables or inhibits the development of your identity as a social being?

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## WHEN DIALECTS MEET: ACCOMMODATION

- ACCOMMODATION: the tendency for dialects to converge when people of different cultural or social backgrounds interact
  - Often "accommodate up" to the prestige or dominant dialect
  - Middle English = an accommodated language

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## WHEN DIALECTS MEET: DIVERGENCE

- DIVERGENCE: the tendency for dialects to become less alike when people from different backgrounds meet;

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## WHEN DIALECTS MEET: CODE-SWITCHING

- CODE-SWITCHING: the tendency for a speaker to switch dialects based on circumstances;
  - this is not a "mish-mash" or blending of dialects, but a switching that maintains the integrity of each dialect.

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## LIVING IN YOUR LANGUAGE

In which circumstances are you more likely to ACCOMMODATE or DIVERGE:

- A. At a rowdy off-campus event with your friends, you run into one of your professors;
- B. You are riding a crowded bus with members of your team and a rival team gets on;
- C. During wildfire evacuations, you are working at the evacuation centre with exhausted families;
- D. You are a member of a minority group giving testimony to a courtroom about a hate crime;
- E. You are a news reporter covering a story for national television;
- F. You are protesting the construction of a pipeline across your traditional territory.

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## CORRECT ENGLISH

- HOW one speaks is often a greater determinate of status than WHAT one says;
- DIALECTS indicate VARIATION but are not linked to intelligence, morality or capability;
- "Correct" English is not necessarily STANDARD English:
  - Depends on the PURPOSE of speech, the AUDIENCE of speech, the CONTEXT of speech
  - "Correct" English may or may not be APPROPRIATE or EFFECTIVE.

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