

Dialects among us: how much do you know about them?

This worksheet looks at how people from different regions use language. When people talk about regional differences in language, they often confuse the terms 'accent' and 'dialect'. Peter Trudgill, who has conducted groundbreaking research on language variation in the use of British English, provides a handy definition for both terms: "The term dialect refers, strictly speaking, to differences between kinds of language which are differences of vocabulary and grammar as well as pronunciation. The term accent, on the other hand, refers solely to differences of pronunciation, and it is often important to distinguish clearly between the two" (2000:5).

In this handout, we will talk about questions such as whether it is easy to tell whether someone comes from a particular region and what makes their language different from the language of people in other parts of the UK and Ireland.



Key terms

accent

dialect

perceptual dialectology

Task 1

What accents and dialects in the UK do you know? Use your own experience and knowledge to create your own dialect map below. The dialect areas can be cities or regions.



Did you know...

The first study of dialect variation goes back to the second half of the 19th century, when Georg Wenker created an atlas of German dialects (1876).

Task 2

Compare your map with a partner. Have you identified similar dialectal areas?

- Think about what makes the dialects you identified different from each other.
- Can you justify the boundaries you have drawn on the map?

Task 3

Pick one of the dialects that you identified and list examples related to pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary that make it different from other dialects.

Grammar

Vocabulary

Pronunciation

Now go to BNClab, and search for the 2-3 words that you identified as belonging to this dialect. Use the Region button to check where in the UK these words are typically used. Make a note of your findings below:

1. word: _____ Regions in the UK _____
2. word: _____ Regions in the UK _____
3. word: _____ Regions in the UK _____

Compare your findings with a partner and discuss whether your lexical features were typical of the region that you identified.

Research bite



In recent years, traditional dialect maps have gone digital. With technological advances and the creation of online surveys and apps for phones and tablets, researchers are able to collect large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time. One example of such a dialect survey is the dialect app which maps current dialect in the UK, put together by a researcher at Lancaster University, Dr Adrian Leemann. In the app, users can click through a number of questions and by the end, the app should be able to guess where the speaker is from.

You can give it a go: <http://englishdialectapp.com/>