

# Language Awareness for Key Stage 3

## 18: Language Variation

Key Terms	Optional Terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Dialect</li> <li>• Language variation</li> <li>• Language family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romance</li> <li>• Germanic</li> <li>• Indo-European</li> </ul>

- Introduction: Language Variation
  - Today we will look at language variation
  - We will see how new languages emerge when a language changes differently in different places
  - We will see how similar variation can exist even within a single language
  - Different varieties of a language can be grouped into different dialects
- Language Variation
  - You may remember that in a previous lesson, we looked at how languages can change over time
  - This sort of change produces language families
  - We saw that as the ancient Romans spread out from Italy into France and Spain, they took their language with them
  - Over time, the language slowly changed in each of these places
  - Because they were so far apart, the language changed in different ways in each place
  - For example, people in different areas sometimes used different words for the same things

	Spain	France	Italy
‘house’	<i>casa</i>	<i>mansio</i>	<i>casa</i>
‘leg’	<i>perna</i>	<i>gamba</i>	<i>gamba</i>
‘work’	<i>trepalium</i>	<i>trepalium</i>	<i>labor</i>

- Even when the same word was used, it might be pronounced differently in different places
- These changes made the modern languages even more different from each other
- The result was the Romance language family

	Spanish	French	Italian
‘house’	<i>casa</i>	<i>maison</i>	<i>casa</i>
‘leg’	<i>pierna</i>	<i>jambe</i>	<i>gamba</i>
‘work’	<i>trabajo</i>	<i>travail</i>	<i>lavoro</i>

- English is part of a language family too, the Germanic family
- As we saw before, the Germanic and Romance families are related, and belong to the larger Indo-European language family (see Lesson 2)
- Variation in English
  - Many of the changes that we’ve been looking at happened long ago
  - For example, people have been speaking differently in Italy and France for nearly 2,000 years
  - But of course, change and variation in language didn’t stop then
  - Like the ancient Romans, people speaking English have spread out to many different parts of the world, taking their language with them

- As a result, English has taken on different forms in different countries:
  - British English
  - Irish English
  - American English
  - Canadian English
  - Australian English
  - Indian English
  - Jamaican English
  - etc.
- Even when we use terms like ‘British English’ or ‘American English’, this doesn’t mean that they refer to something homogeneous
- For example, people speak differently in London and Newcastle, or in New York and Texas
- Even within Northern Ireland, there are many different ways of speaking:



(from Harris 1984)

- Languages and dialects
  - a Even though English has developed differently in different places, it hasn’t split into different languages, like Latin did
  - People from opposite sides of the globe who speak ‘English’ can still understand each other — more or less

- However, people who speak Italian can only understand French if they study it at school or elsewhere, and vice versa
- Sometimes people make a distinction between the two degrees of difference
- The distinction is that French and Italian are different languages, but the various types of English are different dialects
- The difference between a language and a dialect can be hard to pin down
- Some ‘dialects’ of English might be different enough that people actually do have trouble understanding each other
- Some ‘languages’, such as Norwegian and Swedish, are actually similar enough that people can understand each other without needing to be taught
- In some cases, it can be hard to draw a firm line between languages
- For example, there’s a clear border between Germany and the Netherlands, but not such a clear border between German and Dutch
  - However, this doesn’t mean that Dutch and German are really two dialects of a single language
  - ‘Standard Dutch’ and ‘Standard German’, the languages you might see in books and newspapers from Amsterdam and Berlin, are quite different from each other
  - The ‘Dutch’ and ‘German’ that people speak at home with family and friends might not be quite like this.
  - But if people think of their language as ‘Dutch’, then sometimes they might sound more like someone from Amsterdam, but they wouldn’t start talking like someone from Berlin
  - And vice versa, if they think of their language as ‘German’
- The distinction between ‘languages’ and ‘dialects’ might not be black and white
- In the next lesson we’ll see more about how people speak differently in different situations
- However, the question of whether two people speak the same language is usually easy to answer in practice
- If you met someone from Australia and someone from France, it wouldn’t be hard to decide whether you all spoke one language, or two, or three
- Conclusion
  - Today we’ve looked at language variation
  - We’ve seen how variation within a language can lead to the emergence of new languages
  - We’ve seen how a single language can have more than one dialect
  - It is not always easy to draw a line between dialect differences and language differences