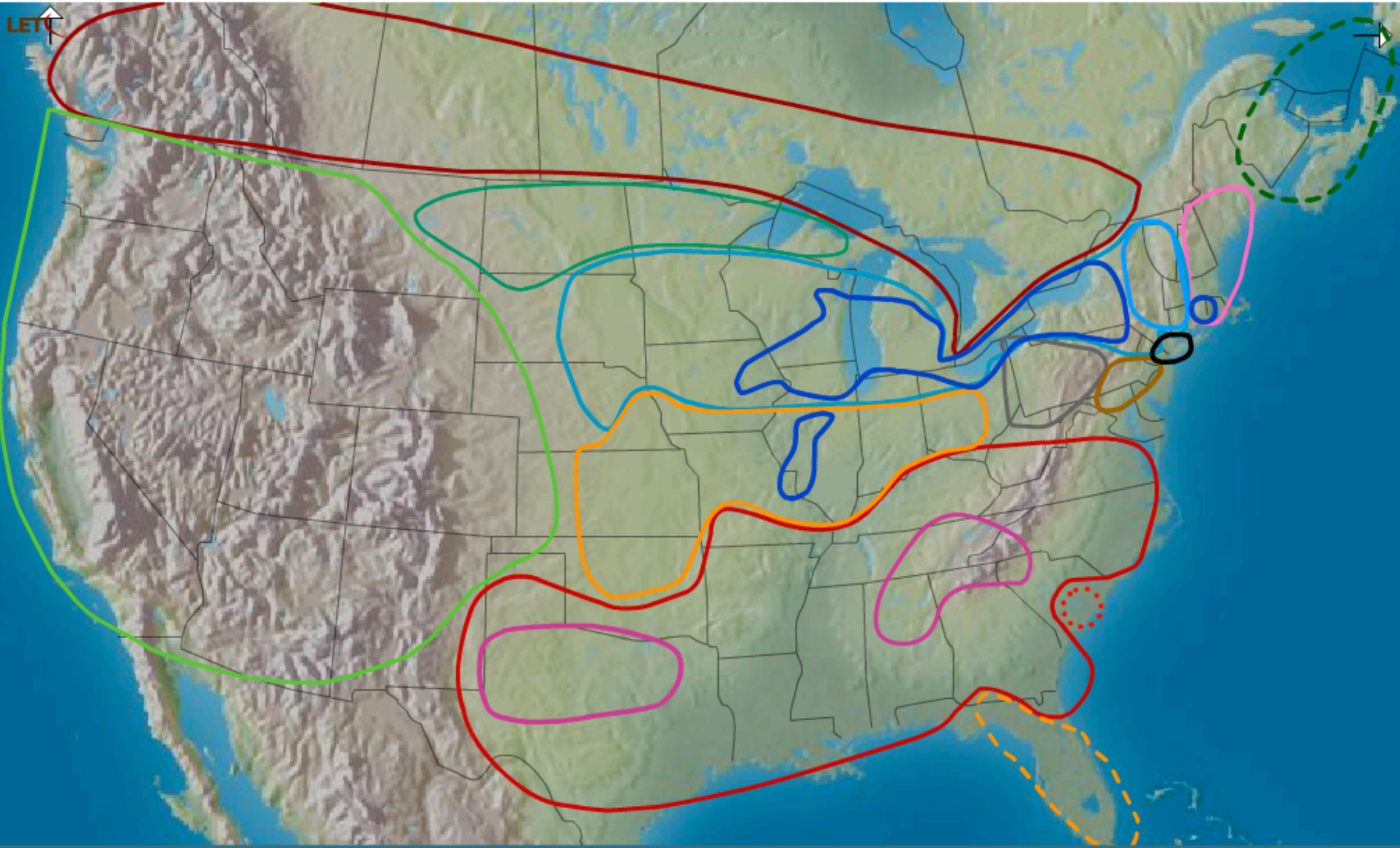


Dialects & Standards

LINGUIST 159 - American Dialects

September 25, 2014



Source: The Atlas of North American English (Labov, Ash, & Boberg 2005)

What is a dialect?

Wolfram and Schilling (p. 2):

Dialect is a neutral label to refer to any variety of a language that is shared by a group of speakers.

Dialect = Variety

Dialect = Variety = Language

"A language is a dialect with an army and navy." – Max Weinreich

Examples: Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Montenegrin; Swedish and Norwegian; Mandarin and Cantonese.

Popular understandings of Dialect

“We went to Boston for a vacation and the people there sure do speak a dialect.”

“I know we speak a dialect in the mountains, but it’s a very colorful way of speaking.”

“The kids in that neighborhood don’t really speak English; they speak a dialect.”

“The kids in this school all seem to speak the dialect.”

Dialect = Language

Dialects/varieties are fully-fledged language systems, not simply oddities, “broken English,” or “colorful” speech.

Chapter 1, Exercise 2

Additional dialect exercises

(Boston)

Language Ideologies

Wolfram and Schilling (p. 10)

Language Ideologies: ingrained, unquestioned beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language. [Video](#)

Dialect = Language – isn't that itself an ideology?

Myths and Realities

Myth 1:

A dialect is something that someone else speaks.

Reality 1:

Everyone who speaks a language speaks some dialect of the language; it is not possible to speak a language without speaking a dialect of the language. Some dialects get much more attention than others, but this social recognition is unrelated to dialect status.

Myths and Realities

Myth 2:

Dialects result from unsuccessful attempts to speak the “correct” form of a language.

Reality 2:

Dialect speakers acquire their language by adopting the speech patterns of those around them, not by failing in their attempts to adopt mainstream language features. Dialects, like all language systems, are systematic and regular; socially disfavored dialects can be described with the same kind of linguistic precision as socially favored, prestigious language varieties.

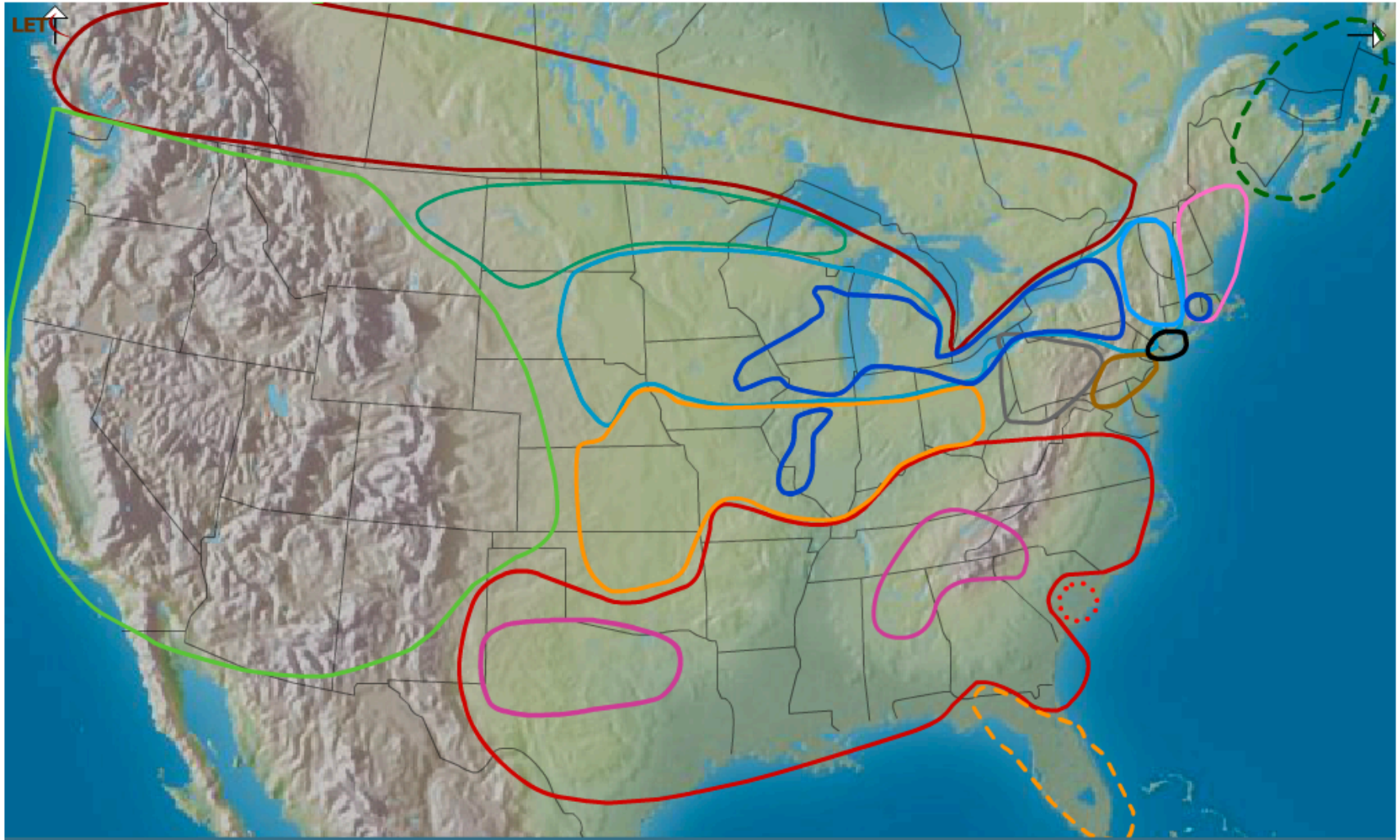
Myths and Realities

Myth 3:

Dialects in the United States are receding due to the influence of the mass media and population mobility.

Reality 3:

Dialects are dynamic; while some once-isolated dialects are receding, others are intensifying and diversifying.



Source: The Atlas of North American English (Labov, Ash, & Boberg 2005)

Dialect leveling: The reduction of dialectal distinctiveness through mixing with other dialects.

Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism

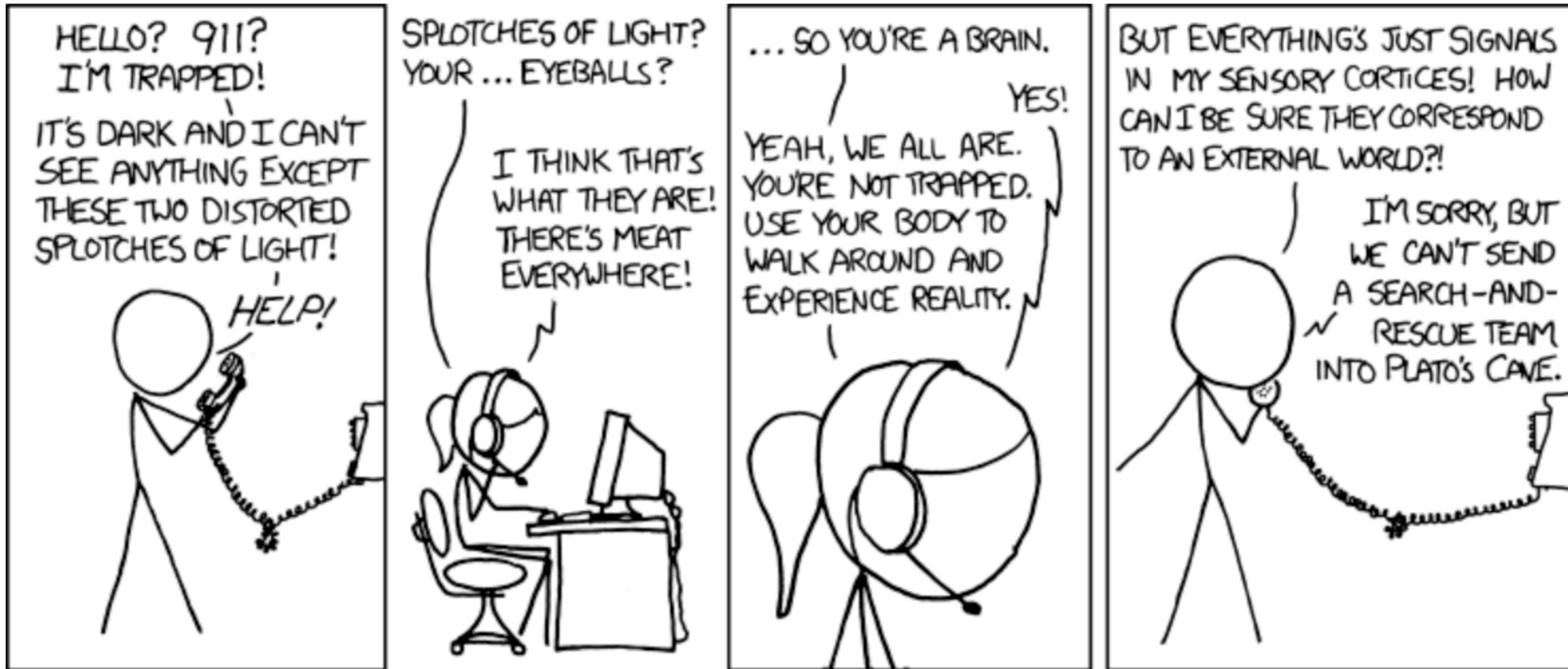
Word Crimes

Lauren Squires' response:

<http://languagelog.idc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=13521>

Prescriptive Standard English: The variety deemed standard by grammar books and other recognized language “authorities.”

Do you speak SAE?



Source: <http://xkcd.com/876/>

Do you speak SAE?

Formal Standard: applied primarily to written language and the most formal spoken language situations; objective standards prescribed by authorities, conservative about language forms

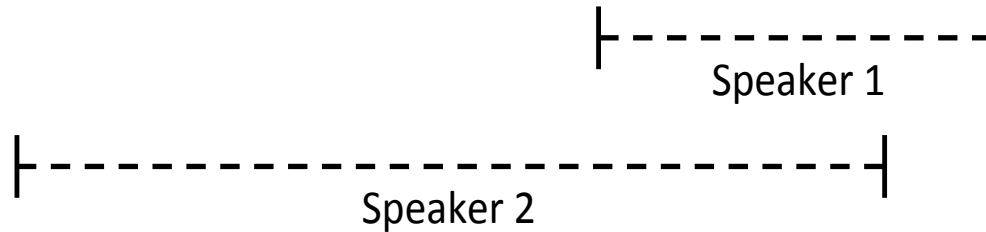
Informal Standard: applied to spoken language, determined by actual patterns of usage, listener judgment essential to determining socially acceptable norms; multiple norms of acceptability, incorporates regional and social considerations, defined negatively by avoidance of socially stigmatized structures

Vernacular: applied to spoken language; determined by usage pattern of speakers, listener judgment essential in determining social unacceptability; usually defined by the presence of a set of socially stigmatized linguistic structures.

Vernacularity Continuum

Informal Standard

Vernacular



Standard: the *absence* of socially disfavored structures

Vernacular: the *presence* of socially disfavored structures

Markedness

“MAE seems to be determined more by what it is *not* than by what it is.”

(W & S p. 13)

Markedness

unmarked

natural

normal

general

simple

inactive

more frequent

optimal

predictable

ubiquitous

marked

less natural

less normal

specialized

complex

active

less frequent

less optimal

unpredictable

parochial

(Hume 2011)

Linguistic Subordination

Principle of linguistic subordination:

speech of a socially subordinate group will be interpreted as linguistically inadequate by comparison with that of the socially dominant group.

(Lippi-Green 2012)

Why study dialects?