

# LNG 1100

Week 4

Language variation and language change

“A language is a dialect with an army and a navy.”

# Language variation

## *Languages vs dialects*

- The term “dialect” and “language” are socially and politically loaded.
- What is “standard” and “official” is socially constructed.
- “All languages are dialect - you speak both at the same time”
- The objective criterion - whether two varieties are **mutually intelligible** is not always applicable.
- Whether two varieties are dialects of the same language or two different languages are **socially, politically, and culturally determined**.
- Society has created different values for different varieties of language, labelling them as standard or non-standards. These are not linguistic labels; these are **social labels**.

# Language variation at different levels

- There is variation across people speaking the same language but live **in different countries** (US vs. Australia)
- People speaking the same language but live **in the same country** (Boston accent vs New York accent)
- And even people speaking English **in the same city**.

# Case Study 1



# Case study 2

- Zulu and Xhosa (spoken in South Africa)

Linguistically, Zulu and Xhosa have some similarities:

English	Zulu	Xhosa
Hello	Sawubona	Molo
Thank you	Ngiyabonga	Ndiyabulela
How are you	unjani	Unjani
I love you	Ngiyakuthanda wena	Ndiyakuthanda

- But they are considered *two different languages* (not dialects of the same language) for political and cultural reasons.

# Case study 3

- Mandarin and Cantonese
- Same on paper as they share the same characters, but their spoken forms are completely unintelligible.
- “Nothing” and “how are you”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e73btaVo868>

(00:50)

# Case study 4

- Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian
- From *The Atlantic*, [“What’s a language, anyway?”](#) by John McWhorter
- Note his observation when traveled in scandinavian countries:

“I’ve watched speakers of Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian conversing with each other, **each in their own native tongues**, as a cozy little trio over drinks. A Dane who moves to Sweden does not take Swedish lessons; she adjusts to a variation upon, and not an alternate to, her native speech. The speakers of these varieties of Scandinavian consider them distinct languages because they are spoken in distinct nations, and so be it. However, **there is nothing about Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian in themselves that classifies them as “languages;” especially on the page, they resemble each other closely enough to look more like dialects of one “language.”**



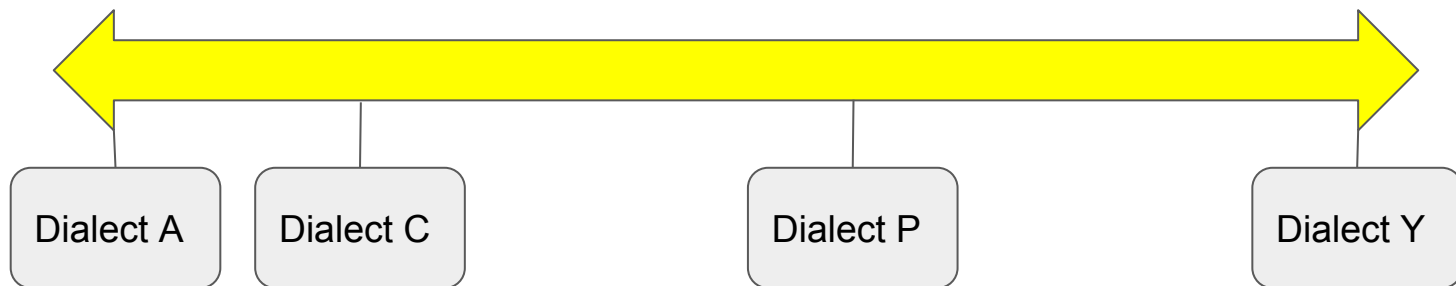
# Case study 5

- Arabic spoken in Morocco and in Jordan
- A Moroccan colloquial “Arabic” is as different from the colloquial “Arabic” of Jordan. In order to understand each other, a Moroccan and a Jordanian would have to communicate in Modern Standard Arabic, a version preserved roughly as it was when the Koran was written.



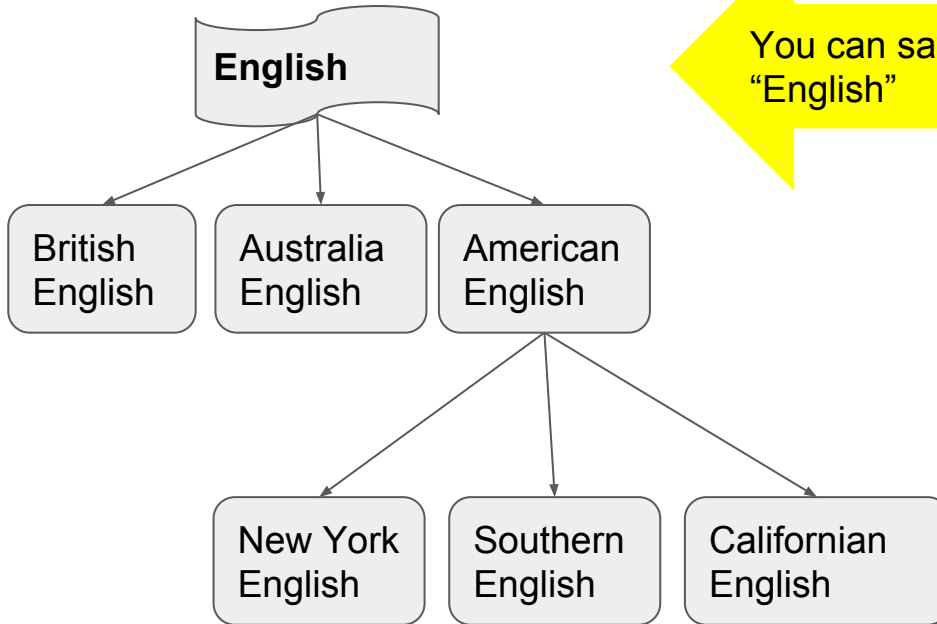
# Dialect continuum

- The further two dialects are from the continuum, the greater is the linguistic difference and the mutual unintelligibility between the two dialects.
- How would you put (1) Mandarin and Cantonese, (2) Moroccan Arabic and Jordanian Arabic, and (3) Mexican Spanish and Puerto Rican Spanish on the continuum?



# Languages vs. Dialects

- A language can also be seen a group of dialects. Linguistically, dialects are mutually intelligible while languages are not.
- “Language” is the standard sanctioned by the government and the media; dialects are the homelier versions of the standard that vary from region to region. Dialects are spoken by people who don’t run the country.
- A language has a written version and a literature; dialects do not.
- But there are many counter-examples: Dialects that are drastically different, and languages that are extremely similar → What are two dialects of the same language and what are two different languages are socially, politically, and culturally determined.
- Society has created different values for different varieties of language, labelling them as standard or non-standards. These are not linguistic labels; these are social labels.
- After all, all languages are dialects.



You can say you speak  
“English”

\*\*\*This is why “*ultimately, all languages are dialects. You speak both at the same time.*”

You are  
actually  
speaking  
this.

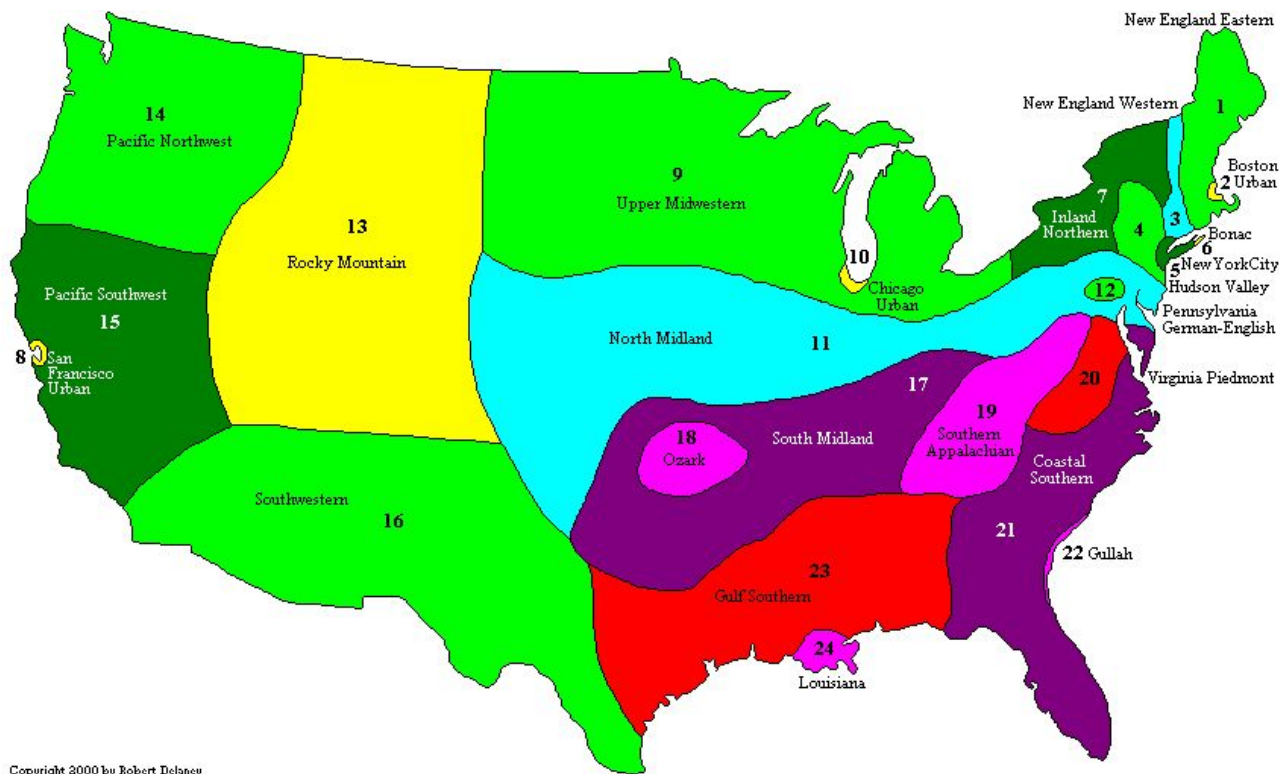
# Language variation

What are variables that shape the way we talk?

- Geography
- Social class
- Age
- Gender

Interspeaker variation

Intraspeaker variation



- ☐ New York City English
- ☐ New England English
- ☐ Midwest English
- ☐ Appalachian English
- ☐ Texan English
- ☐ Desert Dialect
- ☐ Hawaiian English
- ☐ African American Vernacular English
- ☐ Chicano English
- ☐ Jewish English

# Variation within the US - Dialects of American English

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HLYe31MBrg>

# Lippi-Green (1997) and Blommaert (2005)

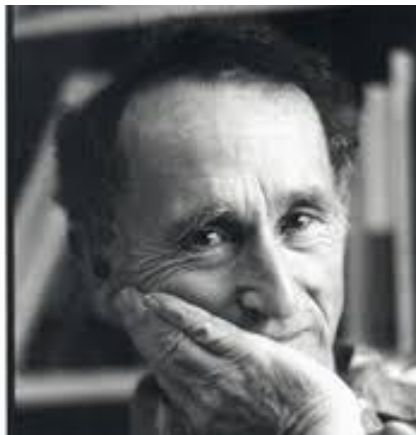
- The idea of “Standard American English” is a myth. A hypothetical standard language is spoken by someone who
  - Has no regional accent
  - Resides in the midwest or northeast (never in the South)
  - With more than average or superior education
  - Never sloppy in terms of pronunciation or grammar
  - Is easily understood

***How is “the standard” created by society?***



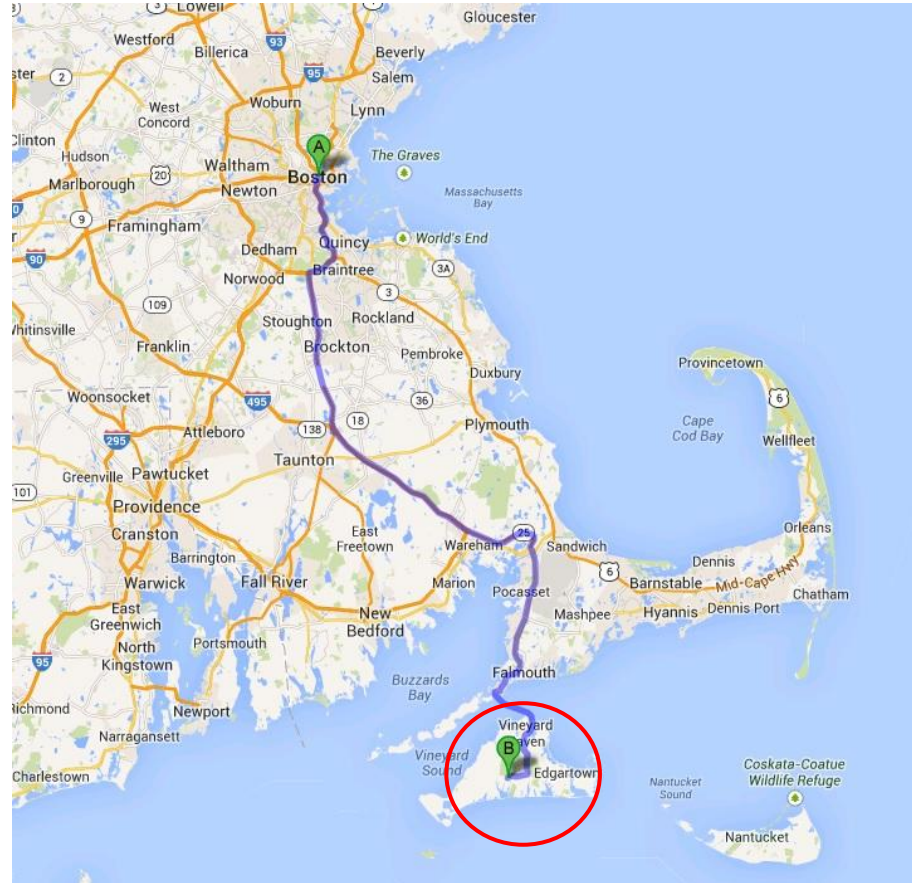
# William Labov

- William "Bill" Labov is an American linguist, widely regarded as the founder of the discipline of variationist sociolinguistics.
- His research interests include language change, language variation, narratives, African American Vernacular English (AAVE).
- He is an advocate of looking at language to understand privilege and power.



How are sociolinguistic studies done?

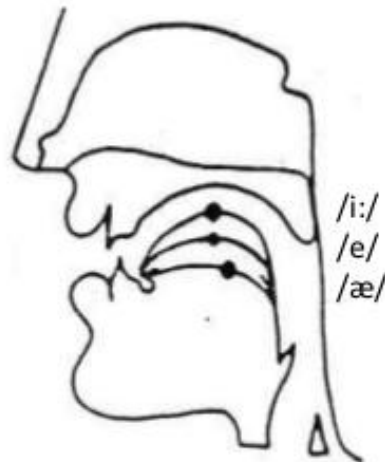
# Labov (1963) - Martha's vineyard



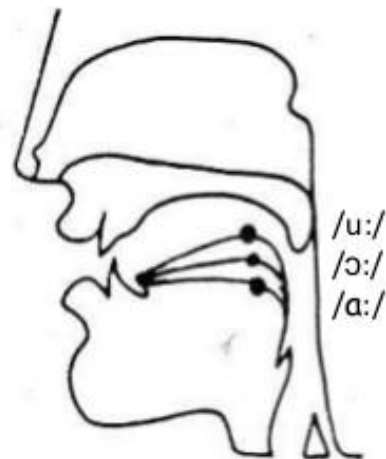
# Vowels

For example /ɜ:/ is front and /ɔ:/ is back, and /æ/ front, /ɑ:/ back. There are also vowels in between front and back, called **central**, namely /ɜ:/, /ə/, /ʌ/ as in /wɜ:d/, /fɔ:wəd/, /mʌd/ (*word, forward, mud*). /ɜ:/ for instance is between /e/ and /ɔ:/, as can be seen from /bed/, /bɜ:d, bɔ:d/, (*bed, bird, board*).

To give an accurate account of tongue position one has to combine height of the tongue and part of the tongue involved.

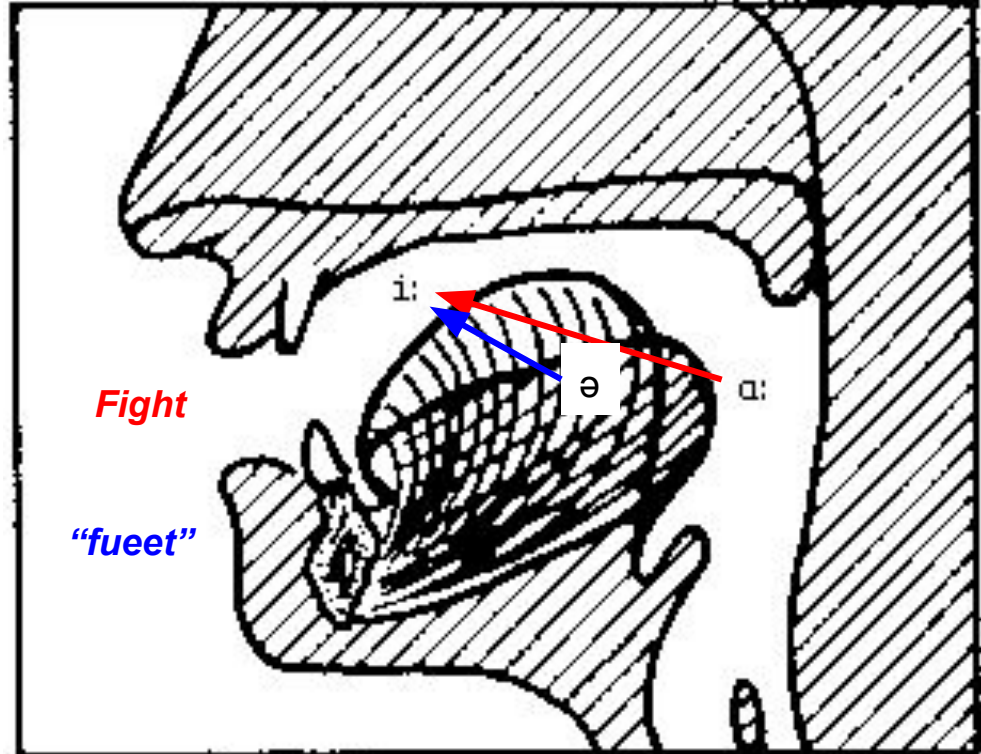
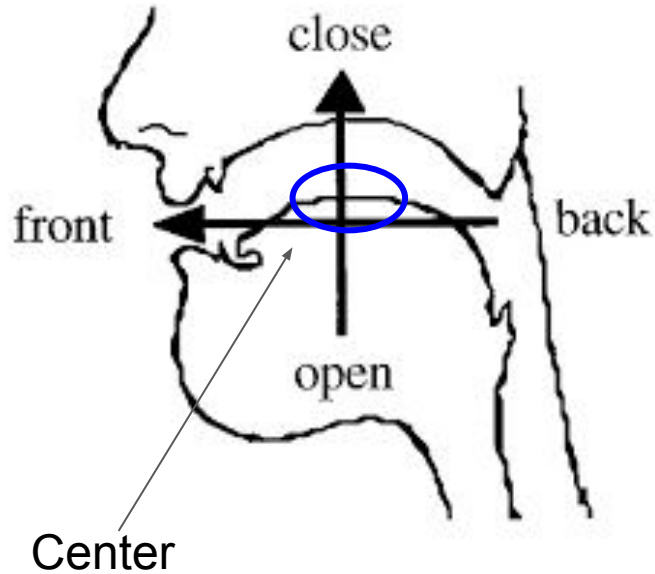


a) height position for front vowels



b) height position for back vowels

# Presentation of vowels and diphthongs



# Discussion

1. How do people in Martha's vineyard speak differently? Give examples.
  - a. The way they enunciate **diphthongs** is different. For example, fight and sky. Their diphthongs are **centralized**.
2. Do they always speak differently? What is the specific sound pattern?
  - a. This change occurs before consonants **/t/, /s/, /p/, or /f/**.
3. How is this speech pattern related to people's identity?
  - a. **This speech pattern was observed in people in their 30s and 40s, who lived in the rural areas, and who fished as a living. They were people who took pride in being from the island community.**

# An interview with Labov

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qHjHeNHF5A>

1. How many dialects are there in the US?
2. What dialects have a negative prestige?
3. Why do some people in the South actually do not have an accent?
4. Where is “the best” and “the worst” English spoken?

# Labov (1972) Social stratification of New York City

- Social stratification - society ranks people in a hierarchy
- Purpose: Is the pronunciation of /r/ random or also stratified? (Is there a pattern that mirrors social class?)

**Class**





- Methodology (addressing observer's paradox):

- Taped recorded interview?
- Casual conversation between friends?
- Observed language behavior in public?

- Data collection:

- Researcher:

"Excuse me, where are the \_\_\_\_\_?"

Salesperson:

"Fourth floor." (casual)

- Researcher:

"Excuse me?"

Salesperson:

"Fourth floor." (emphatic)



- Findings/Results:

Casual

Emphatic

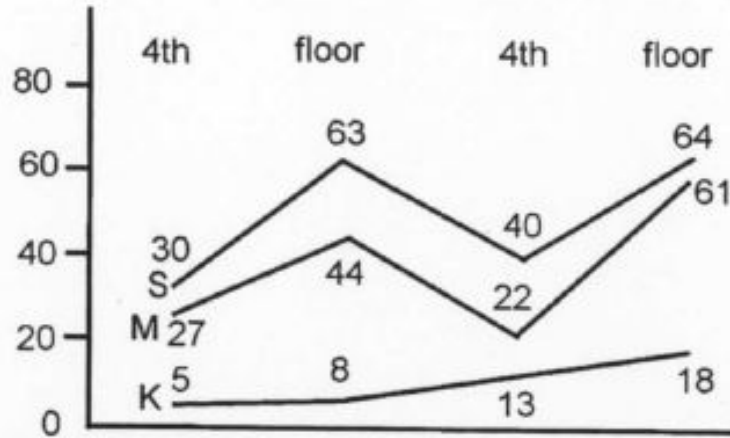


Figure 13.2: Percentage of all  $(r-1)$  by store for four positions (S = Saks, M = Macy's, K = Kleins)

- Conclusion: The stratification in the use of /r/ reflects stratification of social class.

# Labov (2007) - Northern Cities Vowel Shift

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoJ1-ZGb1w>

1. What are some of the northern cities discussed in the video?
2. What are examples of the change in vowel quality?

# Reflection and Discussion

1. Can you give examples of how people are discriminated because of the way they talk?
2. The case of Rachel Jeantel, the key witness in Trayvon Martin trial.



# What is David Cross doing here?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn-hLctqTY4>

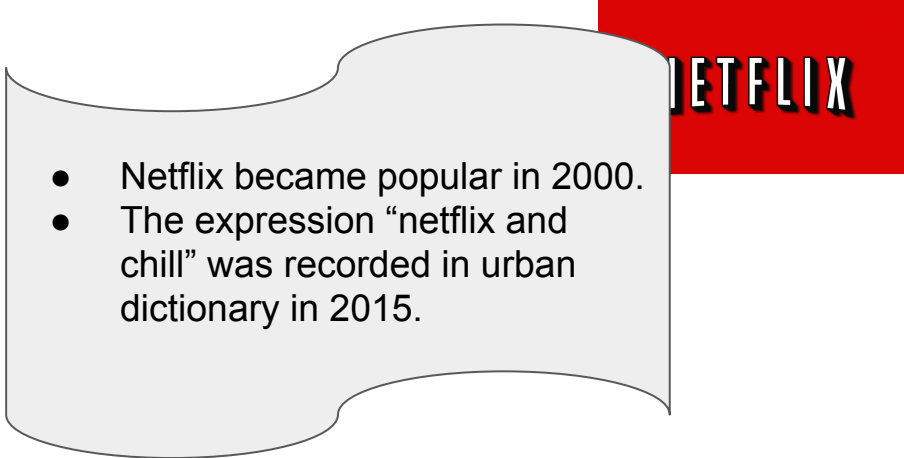
# Words in English

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-did-english-evolve-kate-gardoqui>

1. What are Anglo-Saxon words?
2. What are examples of words from other sources?
3. How are they related to culture and social class?

# Language change

- A quote from McWhorter (Ch. 8 in The 5-Minute Linguist)
- “If you see a camel in the clouds today and walk outside and see the camel tomorrow, then something’s very wrong. It’s the same way with languages - **every language is in the process of changing into a new one.**”
- Take a look at the following recent slangs or expressions. What do they mean?
  - *netflix and chill* (Obsolete)
  - *Chill*
  - *Sis*
  - *b\*tch*
  - *DM*
  - *Influencer*
  - *extra*

- 
- Netflix became popular in 2000.
  - The expression “netflix and chill” was recorded in urban dictionary in 2015.

# Why do language change?

1. Migration and isolation
2. Language contact
3. Social differentiation
4. Language learning



***Immigration***

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graph LR; A[2. Language contact] --> B[Immigration]
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# Language change - The case of Germany

- Germany has a large Turkish immigrant population. Now the size of immigration population is growing because of the influx of Syrian refugees.
- English - “Tomorrow I’m going to the movies.

- “Standard” German: *Morgen gehe ich ins Kino*

“tomorrow go I in the movies.”

- Inner-city immigrant kids: *Morgen ich geh Kino*

“tomorrow I go movies”

- Specialists call these new versions of old languages “multiethnolects,” a type of linguistic “streamlining.”
  - Note that multiethnolects are not a mixture of Turkish and German.

# Language change - New York Spanish speakers

- English: I eat fish
- Spanish: \_\_ Como pescado (no subject - Spanish is a pro-drop language)
- New York Spanish: Yo como pescado
- Spanish following English *syntax*

## *High* intensity vs *low* intensity contact

- High intensity contact - speakers of different languages have opportunities to interact with each other.
- What are cities with high intensity contact between
  - Spanish and English?
  - Chinese and English?

# Group Presentation (10% of your total grade)

- The purpose of the presentation is to (1) help you develop a more in-depth understanding of the sociolinguistic concepts, (2) encourage you to do research and connect different ideas with class readings, and (3) supplement my lecture, which in turn helps your class appreciate the concepts discussed in a different light.
- You need to prepare a **simple PowerPoint** and end your presentation with **2-3 discussion questions**. The presentation should be around 15 minutes long, followed by a 5-minute discussion. The point of the presentation is to inform your class of your research on a particular topic and to facilitate a discussion. Consider yourself my teaching assistant.
- You need to **email me (hlo@citytech.cuny.edu) or make an appointment with me** to discuss the materials and specific topic of your choice a week before your presentation date. You do not need to do any reading response on the date of your presentation, but it is important that you do the readings as you need to make a connection between your topic and ideas in the reading.