

# Dialect vs Register

**Table 3.1 Varieties in language**

Dialects ('dialectal varieties')	Registers ('diatypic varieties')
<p>Variety 'according to user' dialect is 'what you speak (habitually)'            i.e. determined by who you are geographically or socially (region &amp;/or social class of origin &amp;/or adoption)            dialect reflects social order in sense of social <i>structure</i> (types of social hierarchy)</p> <p>Hence in principle dialects are <i>saying the same thing differently</i>            So dialects tend to differ in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>phonetics</li> <li>phonology</li> <li>vocabulary</li> <li>grammar (to a certain extent)</li> </ul> <p>but not in semantics</p> <p>The extreme case of dialectal differentiation is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'anti-languages'</li> <li>'mother-in-law languages'</li> </ul> <p>Intermediate cases are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>subcultural varieties</li> <li>caste or social class</li> <li>provenance (rural/urban)</li> <li>generation (parents/children)</li> <li>age (old/young)</li> <li>sex (male/female)</li> </ul> <p>Note: Members of a community often hold strong attitudes towards its dialects, owing to the function of dialect in the expression and maintenance of social hierarchy. One dialect may acquire special status as symbolising the values of the community as a whole.</p>	<p>Variety 'according to use' register is 'what you are speaking (at the time)'            i.e. determined by what you are doing (nature of activity in which language is functioning)</p> <p>register reflects social order in sense of social <i>process</i> (types of social activity)</p> <p>Hence in principle registers are <i>saying different things</i>            So registers tend to differ in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>semantics</li> <li>and <i>therefore</i> in grammar &amp; vocabulary (as expression of meanings) but rarely in phonology (some require special voice qualities)</li> </ul> <p>The extreme case of register differentiation is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>restricted languages</li> <li>languages for special purposes</li> </ul> <p>Intermediate cases are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>occupational varieties</li> <li>technical (scientific, technological)</li> <li>institutional (e.g. doctor-patient)</li> <li>other contexts having special structures &amp; strategies (e.g. classroom)</li> </ul> <p>Note: Registers are the semantic configurations that are typically associated with particular social contexts (defined in terms of field, tenor, and mode). They may vary from 'action-oriented' (much action, little talk) to 'talk-oriented' (much talk, little action).</p>

**BUT** there is close interconnection between registers and dialects; so there is no very sharp line between the two. There is 'division of labour': different members have different social roles — so certain registers demand certain dialects (e.g. bureaucratic register: standard dialect), and on the other hand different social groups may tend to have different conceptions of the meanings that are exchanged in particular situations (Bernstein's 'codes').

From: Halliday, M A K & Hasan, R *Language, context, and text. Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective.* Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1985, 43.