

Dialect

A dialect is a variety of a language, spoken in one part of a country, which is different in some words, grammar, and/or pronunciation from other forms of the same language. A dialect is often associated with a particular accent. Sometimes, a dialect gains status and becomes the standard variety of a country.

The term 'dialect' is used in two distinct ways to refer to two different types of linguistic phenomena. One usage – the more common among linguists – refers to a variety of a language that is a characteristic of a particular group of the language's speakers. The term is applied most often to regional speech patterns. But a dialect may also be defined by other factors, such as social class. A dialect that is associated with a particular social class can be termed a sociolect, a dialect that is associated with a particular ethnic group can be termed as ethnolect, and a regional dialect may be termed a regiolect. According to this definition, any variety of a language constitutes 'a dialect', including any standard varieties.

The other usage refers to a language that is socially subordinated to a regional or national standard language, often historically cognate or related to the standard language, but not actually derived from it. In this sense, unlike in the first usage, the standard language would not itself be considered a 'dialect,' as it is the dominant language in a particular state or region, whether in terms of social or political status, official status, predominance or prevalence, or all of the above. The 'dialects' subordinate to the standard language are generally not variations of the standard language but rather separate, but often related, languages. For example, most of the various regional Romance languages of Italy, often colloquially referred to as Italian 'dialects,' are, in fact, not actually derived from modern standard Italian, but rather evolved from Vulgar Latin separately and individually from one another and independently of standard Italian. These various Latin-derived regional languages are therefore, in a linguistic sense, not truly 'dialects' of the standard Italian language. They are better defined as their own separate languages. Conversely, with the spread of standard Italian throughout Italy in the 20th century, various regional versions or varieties of standard Italian developed, generally as a mix of the national standard Italian with local regional languages and local accents. These variations on standard Italian, known as regional Italian, would more appropriately be called 'dialects' in accordance with the first linguistic definition of 'dialect'.