Notes for class July 12

- Linguistics is the scientific study of language.
- Language is systematic - it follows rules.
- As linguists, we’re primarily interested in figuring out the knowledge that native speakers have of a language.

The big question:

**What does a speaker of English/Chinese/French/etc. know that enables him to speak and understand his language?**

- Everyone knows the rules of his/her native language.
- Example rules:
  - “Add ‘s’ to the end of a word to form the plural.”
  - “A simple English sentence has the order Subject-Verb-Object.”
  - “To form a question from a declarative, move the first auxiliary verb to the front of the sentence.”
- The following are not the kind of rules linguists are interested in:
  - “Don’t end a sentence with a preposition.”
  - “Don’t use double negation (e.g. ‘I ain’t seen nothing’ instead of ‘I haven’t seen anything.’)”

Linguists face the following problem:

**Speakers only know the rules of their language unconsciously.**

So, if we want to figure out what the rules are, we can’t just go ask a native speaker.

Branches of linguistics:

- Phonetics - the study of speech sounds.
- Phonology - the study of the rules governing sound changes.
- Morphology - the study of how words are built up out of their component parts (e.g. “un” + “lock” = “unlock”).
- Syntax - the study of how words go together to make sentences.
- Semantics - the study of meaning.
- Sociolinguistics - the study of language in a social context (e.g. differing speech patterns of different social groups, the relation between language and power, etc.)

There are many dialects of English. These differ from each other in their rules of phonology, morphology, syntax, etc. They also differ in their social status. Some dialects, such as “Standard American English”, are “prestige” or “high status” dialects, whereas others are “low status.” Typically, people associate the use of prestige dialects with high levels of education and/or high social status. However:
In linguistic terms, low status dialects are no better or worse than high status dialects. All dialects of English (or any other language) follow systematic rules. There are no speakers who “don’t follow any rules,” or dialects that don’t have any rules.