Register Analysis
Registers we use

• Think of all of the reading, writing, listening, and speaking you have done in the past week.
Dialect, Genre, Style, and Register

• Dialect
  • Socially defined
  • Interpretation = social (class, age, gender, geography)

• Genre
  • Situationally defined
  • Interpretation = convention (speech, job interview, article)

• Style
  • Author/speaker defined
  • Interpretation = aesthetics

• Register
  • Situationally defined
  • Interpretation = function (with friends, with older people, with boss)
Why analyze text varieties?

a. Elementary and High School: learn to receive and produce the text varieties necessary to learn
b. University: learn the specialized register(s) of a particular profession
c. ESL/EFL: learn the specific registers necessary to succeed in purpose for learning English
d. ESP/EAP: learn the text varieties for academic or specific use
e. General: learn to handle new text varieties
Register—definition

a. “linguistic features tend to occur in a register because they are well-suited to the purposes and situational context of the register.”

a. In a register analysis, we analyze the:

   i. situational characteristics (who?, what?, where?, when?)

   i. linguistic characteristics (how many of feature x? how used?)

   i. functions (why?)
General vs. specific registers

- Speeches (sermons, political speeches, lectures)
- Academic writing
  - textbooks
  - research articles
    - sections of chemistry research articles
- No “right” level of analysis
- more variation within a general register
- Often, we cannot be specific about situational characteristics of general registers
Recognizing registers

• The labels we use for registers/genres reflect whether we recognize them as a distinct variety
  • ‘casual conversation among colleagues’ vs ‘telephone conversation’
  • Registers/genres are often only recognized by specific sub-cultures (affidavit, deposition, pleading)
  • Different cultures often recognize different registers/genres
Comparing registers

• Effective register analyses are always comparative
  • Intuitions about ‘normal’ behavior are not reliable
Describing the situation

- Methods for describing situational characteristics:
  - observation
  - expert informants
  - previous research
  - analysis of texts
Situational characteristics

- Situational characteristics
  - participants
    - addressors; addressees; on-lookers
  - relations among participants
    - Interactiveness, social roles, personal relationship, shared knowledge
  - channel
    - Mode, medium
  - production circumstances
    - Real time/planned/scripted/revised and edited
  - Setting
    - Time and place
  - communicative purposes
  - topic
Situational characteristics

• We do not always need to discuss all of these; just the ones that are particularly relevant.
  • e.g. conversation vs. email (channel)
  • conversation vs. sermons (interactiveness)

• Practice describing the situational characteristics of a register.
  • academic lecture vs. university textbooks
Activity

- How does the use of *don't* vs. *do not* vary across spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic registers?
  - (To search *don't* search for *do n't*)
  - Open Excel and put the per million results into it.
  - Follow these instructions to make bar chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Do not</th>
<th>Don't</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>spoken</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiction</td>
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<td>magazine</td>
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<td>newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>academic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Activity

- Now look at the frequencies of pronouns, determiners, have as an auxiliary, and prepositions in the same registers in COCA and make a bar graph.
  - (pron.ALL, det.ALL. verb.[HAVE], prep.ALL)
What are the most common verbs?
Results from Biber (1988)

Figure 5.3  Frequency of the most common lexical verbs in the LSWE Corpus (over 1,000 per million words)

say  get  go  know  think  see  make  come  take  want  give  mean
How do don't and do not vary by register?
Results from Biber (1988)

Figure 8.8
Proportional use of *not* as a contraction

- CONV
- FICT
- NEWS
- ACAD

- do+not
- modal+not
Passive vs. active in registers?
Results from Biber (1988)

Figure 6.5
Frequency of finite passive v. non-passive verbs across registers

- **CONV**: Passive verbs exceed non-passive verbs.
- **FICT**: Passive verbs are more frequent.
- **NEWS**: Non-passive verbs are more frequent.
- **ACAD**: Passive verbs are less frequent compared to non-passive verbs.
Results from Biber (1988)