

Dialects

first, a metaphor...

next, a review. Remember Negative Polarity Items?

I didn't see **anything**

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* I saw **anything**

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-What did you see?

- ***Anything**

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-What did you see?

- * **Anything**

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Dhen idhe **tipota**

(*Greek*)

not saw anything

'He/she didn't see anything'

* Idhe **tipota**

saw anything

'*He/she saw anything'

Now, there is another kind of system...**Negative Concord**

(Negative Polarity)

I didn't see **anything**

* I saw **anything**

-What did you see?

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(Negative Concord)

Komu ty rozpoviv?

who you told

Nikomu

'nobody'

(Ukrainian)

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Ja **nikomu ne** rozpovidala (*Ukrainian*)

I **nobody not** told

'I didn't tell **anybody**'

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who you told

Nikomu

'nobody'

Non ho visto **niente** (*Italian*)

not I.have seen nothing

'I didn't see **anything**'

Cosa hai visto?

what you.have seen

-**Niente**

'**Nothing**'

Why is it called "negative concord"?

Concord:

quest-**a** farfall-**a** bell-**a** (*Italian*)
this-FEM.SG butterfly-FEM.SG beautiful-FEM.SG
'this beautiful butterfly'

diin-**i** mutha-**n** barnga-**n** (*Lardil*)
this-ACC big-ACC rock-ACC
'this big rock (accusative)'

fjór-**ir** litl-**ir** snigl-**ar** (*Icelandic**)
four-NOM.MASC.PL little-NOM.MASC.PL snails-NOM.MASC.PL
'four little snails (nominative)'

*(*Icelandic data from Norris 2012)*

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"*concord*" → some property (like gender, case, or number) is realized morphologically in as many places as possible.

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Concord...

fjór-ir litl-ir snigl-ar (Icelandic)
four-NOM.MASC.PL little-NOM.MASC.PL snails-NOM.MASC.PL
'four little snails (nominative)'

...and "negative concord":

Non ho visto niente (Italian)
not I.have seen nothing
'I didn't see anything'

Now, we have talked about English Negative Polarity Items...

I didn't see anything

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I didn't see **anything**

...but there are varieties of English with Negative Concord!

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...but there are varieties of English with Negative Concord!

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both of these systems are well-attested cross-linguistically...

What counts as "English"?

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- %I used to walk to work, but **anymore**, I take the T.

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- Mary=merry=marry?

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- Mary=merry=marry? pen=pin?
- pop? soda? Coke?

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- "you, plural"
=you? y'all? you guys? y'unz? ...

What counts as "English"?

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- pop? soda? Coke?
- "you, plural"
=you? y'all? you guys? y'unz? ...

Ever heard a speaker of "English" that you had a hard time understanding?

<https://ygdp.yale.edu/>

<https://scotssyntaxatlas.ac.uk/>

So where should we draw the line? What counts as "English"?

(or "Japanese"? "German"? etc, etc.)

How do we know when two people speak "the same language"?

A popular linguist's response:
it's a meaningless question.

(or, at least, not a linguistic question)

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"Deciding whether BBC newsreaders and Lynchburg, VA radio evangelists speak different dialects of the same language or different languages in the same language family is on the level of deciding whether Greenland is a small continent or a large island"

--Charles Fillmore, UC Berkeley linguist

"A language is a dialect with an army and a navy"

--Max Weinreich

("a shprakh iz a dialekt mit an armey un a flot")

A popular linguist's response:
it's a meaningless question.

- Danish, Norwegian, Swedish
- Mandarin, Cantonese
- Portuguese, Spanish
- Serbo-Croatian >
 Serbian, Croatian

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i-language: a mental grammar of an individual.

e-language: a mythical object composed
of many *i-languages* connected by
some kind of mystic bond.

African American English (AAE)
African American Vernacular English
(AAVE)
“Ebonics” (Oakland School Board, 1996)

AAE

"...a language that has no right or wrong expressions, no consistent spellings or pronunciations and **no discernible rules.**"

--William Raspberry

"...the patois of America's meanest streets."

--George Will

AAE

- negative concord ("double negatives")

I ain't seen nothin

AAE

AAE

- negative concord ("double negatives")
- rich tense/aspect system:

They usually **be** tired when they come home.
They tired right now.

[*habitual*]

[*present*]

AAE

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[*present*]

compare Spanish:

Soy norteamericano

[*ser*]

I.am north.american

Estoy cansado

[*estar*]

I.am tired

AAE

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- rule-governed copula drop:

He is rich —————→ He rich

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He is rich —————→ He rich
I don't know how rich he is —————~~X~~→ ...how rich he (*sentence-final*)

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He ain't rich → ~~He~~ not rich (*negation*)

now consider the conditions on "standard English" contraction:

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(did anybody have a chance to look at the optional reading?)

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<https://ocw.mit.edu>

24.900 Introduction to Linguistics Spring 2022

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