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Complexity the Determinant of Hierarchical Language Variation

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J. K. Chambers, University of Toronto   Complexity in Linguistics, UWO

Standard or literary or educated dialects are universally more complex than vernacular varieties. Hierarchical complexity is self-evident in, say, Creole continua, but it holds in every society with any kind of social stratification.

Two tenets about standard dialects—
• The standard dialect differs from other dialects in the community by resisting certain natural tendencies in the grammar and phonology.
• The root of these dialectal differences is ideological, not linguistic
                                        —*Sociolinguistic Theory* (2003: 254)

> "The fact that certain processes recur in English varieties all over the world is incontrovertible. Perhaps it is because their recurrence is so commonplace that it has aroused much less curiosity than it deserves. It seems to me to be an uncanny fact, all the more mysterious because there is no plausible explanation for it in terms of contact or any other physical means of diffusion. If not diffusion, then these variable processes must arise spontaneously in their communities, and their communities girdle the globe. They might, then, provide a key to the mystery about the way in which language emerges from the language faculty which lies at the deepest reaches of the human inheritance. More practically, it seems to me that the study of these vernacular roots has implications for one of the ways in which we linguists— sociolinguists and others — might proceed in our research if it is to bring us closer to an understanding of that human inheritance."
> —"Sociolinguistics and the Language Faculty" (2006)

Some articles on Vernacular Roots

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