

READING COMPREHENSION 3

Read the text and answer the questions below.

Social variation

It is also evident, from even casual observation, that in any one place not all people speak alike, even if they were all born there. Differences of speech are correlated with one or more social factors which apply to the speaker concerned. These factors include age, sex, race, class background, education, occupation, and income. To take an example, Spanish participles in *-ado(s)* (and some other, similarly structured, words) reveal a range of pronunciations; the final segment of words like *cansado*, *pescado* may be pronounced in one or other of the following ways: [-áðo], [-áðo], [-áo], [-áu]. But the appearance of one or other of these variants is controlled (at least in part) by the sociological characteristics of the speaker. Thus, the variant [-áu] is much more frequent in working-class speech than in that of the middle classes; similarly, in certain studies of this phenomenon (Williams 1983b, 1987: 71), women of all classes are seen to be substantially more resistant to total deletion of the consonant than are men.

It follows from this brief account of social variation that such variation is multi-dimensional; there are many parameters which define the social 'space' within which the speaker is located, and his or her speech varies, in different ways, in accordance with each of these parameters.

However, sometimes a single individual does not use just a single variant from the range of those available in the community. Rather, each individual commands at least part of the range and selects a particular variant according to the circumstances (formal, informal, relaxed, etc.) in which he or she is speaking. And even in the same speech environment, a speaker may alternate between two or more variants.

1. Do all speakers who are/were born in the same place speak alike?
2. Explain what happens with the pronunciation of Spanish *-ado* endings.
3. Mention two parameters that may be useful to define social variants or varieties of speech.
4. Do individuals always stick to the same social variant or variety?

READING COMPREHENSION 4

Taking into account the definition of variable you are given below, try to explain in what sense Spanish *-ado* could be considered a social variable.

Variant or variety versus variable

All aspects of language (sounds, phonemes, morphemes, syntactic structures, lexemes, meanings, etc.) are subject to variation according to some parameters such as age, sex, race, class background, education, occupation, and income. A linguistic feature which displays variation according to one or other parameter is called a variable and is indicated by a symbol between parentheses. For example, the phoneme /x/ of Spanish, the *jota*, varies geographically in its articulation, being pronounced in some places as the velar fricative [x], in others as the glottal fricative [h], and in yet others with sounds intermediate between [x] and [h], or as the palatal fricative [ʃ]. We can therefore say that the variable (x) (or (h)) is realized (in different, specific places) as [x], [h], [h^x], [ʃ], etc.