



# Dialectology: An Introduction (Longman Linguistics Library)

*W. N. Francis*

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## **Dialectology: An Introduction (Longman Linguistics Library) W. N. Francis**

The study of DIALECTS, that is, of variant features within a language, their history, differences of form and meaning, interrelationships, distribution, and, more broadly, their spoken as distinct from their literary forms. The discipline recognizes all variations within the bounds of any given language; it classifies and interprets them according to historical origins, principles of development, characteristic features, areal distribution, and social correlates. The scientific study of dialects dates from the mid-19c, when philologists using data preserved in texts began to work out the historical or diachronic development of the Indo-European languages. Their interest was etymological and systematic. Scientific phonetics and the principle that sound change was not erratic but followed discoverable rules or laws, were a basic part of the growth of dialectology. Living dialects were seen to furnish a huge treasury of living data on phonology, lexicology, and other features of language that written texts could not furnish. The linguist's task was to gather, analyse, and interpret this living body of language. Dialectology is pursued through a number of methods; the American linguist W. Nelson Francis (*Dialectology*, 1983) describes the prevailing methods as traditional, structural, and generative.

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